
9-1-2006

Meridians 7:1

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Recommended Citation

Giddings, Paula J., "Meridians 7:1" (2006). *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*. 28.
<https://scholarworks.smith.edu/meridians/28>

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PAULA J. GIDDINGS

Editor's Introduction

One theme that threads through this volume of *Meridians* is how globalization, made possible by advances in science and technology, can also affirm antimodern practices which have particularly affected women of color. Dispersals, disturbances, and porous borders have reified nationalisms that, in liberatory moments, raise political consciousness, but then too often settle with the thud of circumscribing tradition upon the bodies of women. A number of essays reflect the effort to counter the trend through activism and reconceptualize the role of women through the arts, memory, and the questioning of alleged remedial institutional practices and scholarship.

Sara Ahmed's "The Nonperformativity of Anti-racism" codifies how "the acts of speech" (which include visual images and writings as well as spoken words) provide identity, purpose, character, and even personality for an institution. In universities where diversity and antiracism are oft-stated goals, acts of speech construct liberal identities, but as the author reminds us, such claims are nonperformative and should not be confused with the body politic. Acts of speech are, then, poor measures of a university's commitment to act against institutional racism.

Karla FC Holloway's "'Cruel Enough to Stop the Blood,'" critiques the current trend of U.S. feminist scholarship which focuses on the status of "transnational bodies" while neglecting race politics at home. Holloway looks at what she calls "white racial disappearing," as it is articulated through the U.S. media's obsession with the disappearance of a number of white women and girls, and the displacing discourse around the transnational adoption of Asian children by white women.

The 2000 census marked the recognition of the emergent Latino/a population in the United States and the global market possibilities represented by this new group of consumers. But as dramatists Tanya Saracho and Coya Paz realized, commercialization served to consolidate rather than to diversify the

[*Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 2006, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. v–vii]
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representational roles of the “generic Latina” on the public stage as maids, nannies, and prostitutes. To rectify the trend, Saracho and Paz founded *Teatro Luna*: the first and only all-Latina theater ensemble in Chicago. In an interview conducted by Joanna L. Mitchell and Sobeira Latorre, the founders talk about the experience of establishing a theater ensemble where Latina women write, direct, act, and manage their own work; and the interactive creative process they have developed not only to nurture their talents but to build community as well.

As the current debates around immigration remind us, no community can survive without access to the kind of work that can improve one’s life chances. This issue’s “from the archives” features an interview from the Sophia Smith Collection’s Voices of Feminism Oral History Project with Linda Chavez-Thompson: a hero of the labor movement and the first woman and person of color to hold the office of executive vice president (the third-ranking officer) of the AFL-CIO. Before attaining the position, Chavez-Thompson, one of eight children born to first-generation parents from Mexico, worked in the cotton fields of Lubbock, Texas, at the age of ten and subsequently rose to represent all Hispanic workers within the city’s local of the International Laborers’ Union. In the interview, conducted by Kathleen Banks Nutter, Chavez-Thompson talks about her early life, the shaping of her political consciousness, and the challenges of union organizing in a global economy.

The exigencies of the era require frameworks of analysis that simultaneously critique external and internal developments that affect women’s lives. In her essay, “Gender, Sovereignty, and the Discourse of Rights in Native Women’s Activism,” Joanne Barker disrupts the dominant/marginal binary in analyzing the struggle against sexism in Canada’s Indian communities, which, by necessity, included both mobilizing against discriminatory laws by the broader society as well as intra-community gender practices where Indians were anything but marginal. A similar theme marks the eyewitness account of Elisabeth Armstrong, who visited northern India in the wake of the tsunami disaster in 2004. Writing about the politics of aid efforts in her “The Tsunami’s Windfall,” she notes how attendant charges of corruption by the donor society pathologizes recipients of color while ignoring how gendered and inequitable distribution practices within communities especially affect poor women’s lives. The double-edged notions of race, color, gender, and sexuality

politics are the subject of “From *Trigueñita* to Afro–Puerto Rican” by Maritza Quiñones Rivera. In this autobiographical essay, the author compares the racialization process in Puerto Rico—where the ideology of *mestizaje* assumes that there is no discrimination based on color—with that on the U.S. mainland, with its binary polarization around race identity.

How gender is imbricated into a sense of national belonging is one of the themes of “Size Matters” by Winnifred Brown-Glaude, who examines the public debates in Jamaica around the August 2003 unveiling of a national monument to commemorate the end of slavery on the island. The monument is in the form of a sculpture that depicts a man and a woman standing in a pool of water to symbolize the washing away of pain and suffering. The figures, standing at eleven and ten feet, respectively, are also nude; much of the controversy was ignited by the male figure’s generously endowed genitals. The debates, says the author, demonstrate not only the conflicting attitudes about public nudity and sexuality but also how gender is configured in the representation of a postcolonial state through the visual media in a public space.

No category of analysis better illuminates the transition from colonialism to neocolonialism than sexuality, according to Grace Kyungwon Hong, author of “‘A Shared Queerness’: Colonialism, Transnationalism, and Sexuality.” Hong makes the point through her reading of Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*, a novel that, with its fascination with the exuberant Caribbean flora and fauna, becomes a metaphor for how the logic of categorization in natural history—and nationalism—prefigures a deviant definition of women’s sexuality in general and “queerness” in particular through the notion of excess. The same fertile ground that nurtures the foliage also produces the male-dominated, nationalistic impulse to define and control women’s “excessive” sexuality. The contradiction, according to the author, compels us to find new ways to affiliate and find affinity with the culture.

Memory that inspires, mobilizes to action, and acknowledges those who broke the ground on which we stand is evoked in poet Nikky Finney’s personal essay “Inquisitor and Insurgent,” which she originally presented at Smith College under the auspices of *Meridians*. It is complemented wonderfully by the verse of Karen An-Hwei Lee, whose line in her poem “Caring for Another Woman” speaks of passing “the song through a dream of fused words.”

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