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Using *New York Times v. Sullivan* to Infuse Civil Rights History into Journalism Curricula

Katie Wood

The landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision *New York Times v. Sullivan* is a legacy of the civil rights movement that forever changed the way American law treats freedom of speech. But you wouldn't know much, if anything, about the strength of its civil rights heritage from the way the *Sullivan* case is presented in most journalism textbooks or law school casebooks. That to me is really a shame, because today's news media owe an enormous debt to the civil rights movement for advancing the First Amendment rights of the media.¹

Journalists benefit to this day from the constitutionally based actual-malice standard of fault that the Supreme Court established in 1964 in *New York Times v. Sullivan*. It is this important standard, not the background of the case, which is the focus of most textbook and casebook treatments of the decision. But as First Amendment scholars recognized in 1964, and has been discussed in subsequent analyses of the *Sullivan* decision, the excesses of Southern segregationists' use of libel lawsuits in their fights against the civil rights movement led the Supreme Court to apply the First Amendment to defamation, overturning common-law principles deeply ingrained over centuries of American tort law.² Because few journalism textbooks or law school casebooks explore this important heritage, Mass Communication Law instructors should supplement the materials to make clear the enormous debt that American journalists owe to the civil rights movement.

Libel as Strict Liability Tort

Prior to the *Sullivan* decision, libel law in Alabama and a majority of the states was one

of strict liability.³ That meant that if a defendant deliberately dispersed defamatory false information, the plaintiff could win even though the defendant had taken reasonable steps prior to publication to determine that the information was true.⁴ In addition, general damages were presumed from the publication of the statement and thus did not have to be alleged or proved.⁵ Furthermore, falsity was presumed from publication, which placed the burden of proving truth onto the plaintiff.⁶

Segregationists brought numerous libel suits under these plaintiff-friendly standards to silence news coverage of the civil rights movement. Although this back-story of the *Sullivan* case is untold in many journalism textbooks and law school casebooks, it is vividly detailed in *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning history of the role of the press in the civil rights movement, by Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, and in other books that specifically focus on this landmark case such as *Make No Law, The Sullivan Case and the First Amendment* by Anthony Lewis and *Suing the Press, Libel, The Media & Power* by Rodney Smolla.

At issue in the *Sullivan* case was an editorial advertisement that ran in the *New York Times*, which erroneously described various governmental acts to suppress civil rights demonstrations in Montgomery.⁷ For example, the advertisement stated inaccurately that police had ringed a college campus, when they had merely been deployed to the site.⁸ The ad said that a student dining hall had been padlocked in an effort to "starve" student protesters "into submission," although that had not occurred.⁹ The ad said that "Southern violators" answered Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "peaceful protests with intimidation and violence," adding that his home was bombed and that he had been arrested seven times for petty offenses.¹⁰ While the bombing had occurred, police were not implicated and in fact made efforts to capture those who were responsible.¹¹ The statement that Dr. King had been

arrested seven times as harassment for minor offenses was erroneous because he had only been arrested four times.¹²

These minor errors left the *New York Times* with no defense. Under Alabama law, once the plaintiff established the publication was “libelous per se,” that is that it damaged a person’s reputation or brought that person into public contempt, the only defense available was to show that the statements were true in all their particulars.¹³

As a result, Plaintiff L.B. Sullivan, a Montgomery City Commissioner, won a \$500,000 libel verdict against the *New York Times* and four black ministers who were listed, without their knowledge, as endorsers of the advertisement.¹⁴

Libel Suits as Segregationist Tool

Commissioner Sullivan was not the only official in Alabama to employ the lawsuit tactic. Tallies of the costs of the *Sullivan* suit and the libel verdicts in other civil rights cases vary. According to Rodney Smolla’s *Suing the Press*, there were 11 suits pending in Alabama seeking \$5.6 million against the *New York Times* by the time the Sullivan case made it to the U.S. Supreme Court.¹⁵ Even more disturbing to journalists, an Alabama grand jury had indicted a *New York Times* reporter on 42 counts of criminal libel.¹⁶ Five additional suits were pending against CBS News seeking \$1.7 million.¹⁷

And this wasn’t just a strategy in Alabama. According to *The Race Beat*, “By early 1964, public officials in three southern states had no fewer than seventeen libel lawsuits pending against newspapers, magazines and a television station, seeking total damages that exceeded \$288 million.”¹⁸

The Race Beat, in discussing the chilling effect of these verdicts, states:

Editors weighing whether to send their reporters to the South knew the risks. The lawyers’ fees alone would cripple most newspapers. And where would it end? If the yahoos picked off one of our reporters with a libel suit, an editor might wonder, would I send in another? And after that?¹⁹ Indeed, as a result of the law

suits, *The New York Times* banned Claude Sitton, their ace reporter on the civil rights beat, from going into the state of Alabama for two and a half years.²⁰

The toll of these verdicts was not just on the press. Don’t forget that four ministers who were named without their knowledge in the advertisement that was at issue in the *Sullivan* case—Ralph David Abernathy, S.S. Seay Sr., Fred L. Shuttlesworth and Joseph E. Lowery—also were sued and had judgments against them. Their cars were seized and auctioned off to help satisfy the judgment, before it was overturned, and Rev. Abernathy had a piece of real estate seized and sold.²¹

First Amendment Applied to Libel Law

When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on March 9, 1964, in the *Sullivan* case, it found that the strict-liability rule in place in Alabama and most other states violated the First Amendment.²² The court held that speech concerning public issues and officials should be free and uninhibited and that libel awards based on inadvertent errors would have a chilling effect on free speech.²³ This decision marked the first time that the court had ever acknowledged that defamatory speech deserved any constitutional protection.²⁴

The actual-malice standard adopted in *Sullivan* requires that libel plaintiffs who are public officials must show that the defendant disseminated defamatory material with knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard as to whether or not it was false.²⁵

When the U.S. Supreme Court issued this ruling, editors were ecstatic. And not just at *The New York Times*. Harry Ashmore, the editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*, said in a July 27, 1964 discussion of the decision, “I did dance in the street for various personal reasons when the decision came down.”²⁶

In that same discussion sponsored by the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Harry Kalven Jr., the respected First Amendment scholar from the University of Chicago Law School, recognized that the court

was simply “starting all over again with respect to the First Amendment. . . . This is the most fresh-air, remarkable performance just in terms of the kind of ideas used and the direction of them.”²⁷ And in the parlance of the 1960s, Kalven gave credit where credit was due:

I think one can argue quite seriously that we have an enormous debt at the moment to the NAACP and the Negro protest movement not because of developments of Negro rights, but because of developments of First Amendment rights. The court is trapped here by the phenomenon of the three [sic] Negro ministers and *The New York Times* as a friend and supporter in a situation that directly brings the civil rights issue into court as a political matter. They simply have to decide the case the way they did. The interesting thing is with that kind of realistic pressure on them that they went to such high and I think very good grounds in order to do it.²⁸

Civil Rights Legacy Missing From Most Texts

Many journalism textbooks and law school casebooks barely mention the larger context of *Sullivan’s* civil rights heritage, if at all. The textbook that was used when I took Journalism Law and Ethics as an undergraduate student at Georgia State University during the Winter quarter of 1977, *Law of Mass Communications, Freedom and Control of Print and Broadcast Media*, by Harold L. Nelson and Dwight L. Teeter Jr., focused only on the language of the advertisement, the errors it contained, the size of the verdict against the New York Times and the holding of the Supreme Court, its rationale, and the impact of the decision on libel law.²⁹ Although the textbook contained excerpts from Justice William Brennan’s majority opinion, it did not contain text from Justice Hugo Black’s concurring opinion that mentions the number of

verdicts against the media and points out that they were a “technique for harassing and punishing a free press.”³⁰

Although I worked as a journalist for 19 years and thus was keenly aware of the importance of the *Sullivan* case and its actual malice rule, I was unaware of the larger context of the decision until I took a course on the First Amendment during law school in 1996. The casebook used in that course, *The First Amendment, Cases-Comments-Questions*, by Steven H. Shiffrin and Jesse H. Choper, contained an excerpt from Justice Black’s concurring opinion referring to the use of libel laws to threaten the existence of the media and a footnote stating, “For background on the *New York Times* case, see Smolla, *Suing the Press* 26-52 (1986).”³¹

It just so happened that I had a copy of Professor Smolla’s book, which one of my mentors had let me borrow for the semester when he learned I was taking the First Amendment course. In addition, my professor for that course, Steven Friedland, who at the time was a visiting professor from Nova Southeastern University’s Shepard Broad Law Center, required us to write a journal discussing our thoughts on the topics covered in class. I read Chapter 2, “The Trials of Martin Luther King: *The New York Times* Case,” in Professor Smolla’s book, which amplifies the history hinted at in Justice Black’s concurring opinion, and wrote a journal entry expressing my surprise that somehow I had not previously learned of the larger context of the case.

A decade later I found myself reviewing those journal entries as I prepared to teach Mass Communications Law for the first time at my alma mater, Georgia State University College of Law. The casebook that I used for the Summer 2006 course, *Mass Media Law, Cases and Materials 7th ed.*, by Marc A. Franklin, David A. Anderson and Lyrissa Barnett Lidsky, like my old the First Amendment casebook, included the portion of Justice Black’s concurring opinion mentioning the chilling effect the multiple libel suits were having on the media in Alabama.³² Instead of

fleshing this issue out, the materials following the text of the case refer the reader to Anthony Lewis' book about the case, *Make No Law*, for "[t]he story of the Supreme Court's deliberation in the *Sullivan* case."³³ There also is a reference to a law journal containing "extensive later commentary on the case."³⁴

Actually, Anthony Lewis' book contains more than the story of the court's deliberation. He also includes a chapter on the use of libel law as a tool for silencing the media.³⁵ Accordingly, I used materials from that book as well as Professor Smolla's book to supplement the casebook for my law school class.

Just as I was wrapping up my teaching stint at GSU's College of Law, I learned that Clark Atlanta University was seeking adjunct professors to teach Mass Communication Law to Mass Media Arts majors. The textbook used is *Communications Law, Liberties, Restraints, and the Modern Media* by John D. Zelezny,³⁶ and, like the one I used as a journalism student 30 years ago, focuses on the erroneous information contained in the language of the advertisement, the size of the verdict against the *New York Times* and the holding of the Supreme Court, its rationale, and the impact of the decision on libel law.³⁷ The excerpt from the *Sullivan* case contained in the textbook is from Justice Brennan's majority opinion and there is no text from Justice Black's concurring opinion. Again, I supplemented the textbook material with information from the books written by Anthony Lewis and Professor Smolla.

As various textbook distributors held book fairs at Clark Atlanta University, I began to wonder how other communication law textbooks treat the history surrounding *New York Times v. Sullivan*. Accordingly, I obtained copies of four other media law textbooks and reviewed their treatments of the case and the depth of their presentations of its historic context. None explain the extent to which segregationists used libel suits as a tool to thwart news coverage of the civil rights movement and the chilling effect their successes in the trial courts of the South had on

the media. Nor do they mention the theory that the Supreme Court likely went further in its decision than it would have in an ordinary libel case because the justices were concerned that the media was being harassed and punished for their coverage of the civil rights movement.

Mass Media Law by Don R. Pember and Clay Calvert mentions that segregationist leaders hated the Northern media's coverage of the civil rights movement, but it does not discuss the widespread use of libel suits as a tool to stop the reporting; nor does it tell readers that there were additional judgments against the *New York Times* and other media outlets.³⁸ The authors do point out in a footnote that \$500,000 was "a staggering amount" in 1964.³⁹ Although the book contains an excerpt from the ad at issue in the case, there are no excerpts from Justice Brennan's opinion and there is no mention of Justice Black's concurring opinion.⁴⁰

The Law of Journalism & Mass Communication by Robert Trager, Joseph Russomanno and Susan Dente Ross also includes some historical context about the failure of many in the Southern media to cover the civil rights movement and the resentment of local officials for the reporting by national media such as the *New York Times*.⁴¹ The book merely tells readers that the *Sullivan* case resulted in a \$500,000 judgment against the *New York Times* without putting that award in any context, such as the total amounts of judgments against that newspaper and other media. Interestingly, the book contains an excerpt from Professor Kalven's analysis of the case which focuses mostly on seditious libel, but hints at the political context of the decision.⁴² The book also contains excerpts from the ad that was at issue,⁴³ Justice Brennan's biography⁴⁴ and the majority opinion.⁴⁵ There is no mention of Justice Black's concurring opinion.

Major Principles of Media Law by Wayne Overbeck in some respects gives a more extensive treatment of the *Sullivan* case than other textbooks because it uses the case

in its first chapter to illustrate how the legal system works.⁴⁶ The author mentions the antipathy of Southerners for the Northern media in explaining why the plaintiff chose to file the suit in the Alabama courts rather than the federal court.⁴⁷ The decision of the *New York Times*' editors to keep its reporter out of Alabama is explained in the context of the paper's efforts to prevent the plaintiff from obtaining service of the suit but with no follow-up discussion about the judgment in this case and others creating a chilling effect that kept *New York Times* reporters out of Alabama for a period of two and one-half years.⁴⁸ After explaining that the *New York Times* petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court for a writ of certiorari, the book states that some legal experts were amazed the court agreed to hear the case, but does not explain at this point why the grant of certiorari was astounding.⁴⁹ (A party seeking U.S. Supreme Court review of a lower court's decision must seek certiorari, a discretionary order requiring the lower court to produce a certified record of the case for review.⁵⁰ This action by the Supreme Court is referred to in abbreviated form as a grant of cert.)⁵¹ In Chapter 4, the book explains that the court had a long tradition of leaving libel law to the states, but broke with that custom in this case "because lawsuits such as this one were a serious threat to First Amendment freedoms."⁵² The book points out that other public officials in Montgomery filed suit against the *New York Times* and were seeking a total of \$3 million, but does not mention that other news organizations were being sued in Alabama and elsewhere in an effort to thwart coverage of the civil rights movement.⁵³ Although Justice Brennan's majority opinion is summarized and quoted from, the book makes no mention of Justice Black's opinion.⁵⁴

The Law of Public Communication by Kent R. Middleton and William E. Lee contains a reproduction of the ad at issue in the case and points out in that context that the *Sullivan* case is a product of the civil rights movement, but does not address the widespread use of libel law to shut down media

coverage of that movement.⁵⁵ The book does mention that other Montgomery officials had also sued the *New York Times* for a total of \$3 million, but does not put the information in the larger context of the many cases against other Northern media or in other Southern states.⁵⁶ It summarizes more of Justice Brennan's majority opinion than other textbooks, including information about the decision's analogy to the privilege public officials enjoy for libelous comments made in the course of official statements and the rejection of the plaintiff's argument that constitutional guarantees did not apply to the advertisement.⁵⁷ The book does not mention Justice Black's opinion.

Conclusion

Mass communication law textbooks and casebooks do a good job of stressing the revolutionary effect *New York Times v. Sullivan* had on the law of libel through the extension of First Amendment protections. Where they come up short is in putting this ground breaking decision into its larger context as an extension of the struggle for civil rights. Communication Law instructors should supplement these materials to make students aware that First Amendment rights the media now enjoy are a legacy of the civil rights movement to which today's journalists owe an enormous debt.

Notes

1. To paraphrase Prof. Harry Kalven Jr. from a July 27, 1964 discussion of the case sponsored by the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. CSDI program number 124; UCSB tape numbers A7684/R7, A7685/R7, which is available online at <http://www.library.ucsb.edu/speccoll/csdi/a7684.html> through the Department of Special Collections, Donald C. Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara. See also,

- Kalven, Harry Jr., *The Negro and the First Amendment*, Phoenix Books, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London (1965).
2. See Kalven, Id., Smolla, Rodney, *Suing the Press, Libel, The Media & Power*, Chapter 2 at 26-53, Oxford University Press, New York (1986), and Lewis, Anthony, *Make No Law, The Sullivan Case and the First Amendment*, Chapter 5 at 34-45, Random House, New York (1991).
 3. *New York Times v. Sullivan*, 376 U.S. 254, 262 (1964); 50 American Jurisprudence 2d, Libel & Slander §31.
 4. Sullivan at 267; 50 American Jurisprudence 2d, Libel & Slander §31.
 5. Sullivan at 262.
 6. Id.
 7. Sullivan at 256-59.
 8. Sullivan at 259.
 9. Sullivan at 258-59.
 10. Sullivan at 257-58.
 11. Sullivan at 259.
 12. Id.
 13. Sullivan at 267.
 14. Sullivan at 256.
 15. Smolla at 43-44. This amount is also referred to in Justice Black's concurring opinion, which is not typically included in excerpts from the case included in journalism texts.
 16. Roberts, Gene and Klibanoff, Hank, *The Race Beat*, Chapter 15 at 234, Alfred A. Knopf, New York (2006).
 17. Smolla at 44. This amount is also referred to in Justice Black's concurring opinion, which is not typically included in excerpts from the case included in journalism texts. Sullivan at 295 (Black, J. concurring).
 18. Roberts and Klibanoff at 357.
 19. Roberts and Klibanoff at 358.
 20. Roberts and Klibanoff at 235.
 21. Lewis at 162.
 22. Sullivan at 284-85.
 23. Sullivan at 270-272.
 24. Sullivan at 256.
 25. Sullivan at 279-80.
 26. From a July 27, 1964, discussion of the Sullivan case sponsored by the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. CSDI program number 124; UCSB tape numbers A7684/R7, A7685/R7, which is available online at <http://www.library.ucsb.edu/speccoll/csdi/a7684.html> through the Department of Special Collections, Donald C. Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara. The dance remark is also an apparent reference to the reaction of Alexander Meikeljohn, the free speech advocate whose ideas were adopted in the Sullivan decision. Meikeljohn told Professor Kalven that the case was "an occasion for dancing in the streets." Kalven, *The New York Times Case: A Note on 'The Central Meaning of the First Amendment,'* 1964 Sup. Ct. Rev. 191, 221 n. 125.
 27. Id.
 28. Id.
 29. Nelson, Harold L. and Teeter, Dwight L. Jr., *Law of Mass Communications, Freedom and Control of Print and Broadcast Media (2nd ed.)*, Chapter 4 at pp. 99-105, The Foundation Press, Inc., Mineola, N.Y. (1973). (Yes, this book is still on the shelf of my home library 30 years after I took the course.)
 30. Sullivan at 295 (Black, J. concurring).
 31. Shiffrin, Steven H. and Choper, Jesse H., *The First Amendment, Cases-Comments-Questions*, p. 71, fn. d, American Casebook Series, West Publishing Co., St. Paul, Minn (1991).
 32. Franklin, Marc A. , Anderson, and Lidsky, Lyriisa Barnett, *Mass Media Law, Cases and Materials (7th ed.)*, pp. 271-283, Foundation Press, New York, N.Y. (2005).
 33. Id. at p. 283.
 34. Id. (referring the reader to Special Issue: *New York Times v. Sullivan*

Forty Years Later: Retrospective, Perspective, Prospective, 9 Comm. L. & Pol'y No. 4 (Autumn 2004).

35. Lewis, Anthony, *Make No Law, The Sullivan Case and the First Amendment*, Chapter 5, "Silencing the Press," at 34-45, Random House, New York (1991).
36. Zelezny, John D., *Communications Law, Liberties, Restraints, and the Modern Media (4th ed.)*, Thompson-Wadsworth, Belmont, CA (1994).
37. *Id.* at 134-137.
38. Pember, Don R. and Calvert, Clay, *Mass Media Law*, pp. 194-97, McGraw Hill Higher Education, New York, N.Y. (2007).
39. *Id.* at 194.
40. *Id.* at 195-96.
41. Trager, Robert, Russomanno, Joseph and Ross, Susan Dente, *The Law of Journalism & Mass Communication*, pp. 115-19, McGraw Hill Higher Education, New York, N.Y. (2007).
42. *Id.* at 118.
43. *Id.* at 116.
44. *Id.* at 117.
45. *Id.* at 132-33.
46. Overbeck, Wayne, *Major Principles of Media Law*, pp. 21-27, Thomson Wadsworth, Belmont, CA (2007).
47. *Id.* at 21-22.
48. *Id.* at 22.
49. *Id.* at 26-27.
50. *Black's Law Dictionary (6th ed.)*, p.228, West Publishing Co., St. Paul, Minn. (1990).
51. Zelezny, *Glossary of Legal Terms*, at 509.
52. Overbeck at 138.
53. *Id.*
54. *Id.* at 138-39.
55. Middleton, Kent R. and Lee, William E., *The Law of Public Communication*, pp. 121-27, Pearson Education, Inc., Boston, Ma. (2007).
56. *Id.* at 122.
57. *Id.* at 124.



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SPORTS DIGITAL: How We Teach Sports Journalism in Light of the Shifting Playing Field

D. Orlando Ledbetter

The playing field in sports journalism is shifting.

The days of toting around those bulky cassette recorders or even the mini-cassette recorders are over. No longer will scribes have the luxury of holding back information with the hopes of having a bigger bang with their scoops.

How we gather, report and write on sports is evolving in this digital age.

Here's a practical example. When covering an incident at the Miami-Dade Airport that involved Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick and the confiscation of his trick bottle. I had to fly to Miami, interview attorneys and law enforcement officials, take pictures of evidence, and fax the documents back to the office.

A few years ago, that would have been the end of the operation. I would have hopped back on a plane to Atlanta and written the story for the next day editions of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

In the sports digital era, my pictures of the water bottle were immediately splashed on AJC.com along with a document from Vick's attorney. I wrote a story detailing what was in the evidence files with comments from the Florida law enforcement officials and local attorneys involved in similar cases.

I went to a retailer to fax the documents, took the pictures with a camera phone and sent them back to the office, went back to the airport and popped out the laptop and inserted the broadband card, wrote the story and sent the remote back to the office while at the gate waiting for my plane.

The fluidness of that day was absolutely something that would have been unheard of just a few years ago.

But the advances in technology, the

digital equipment and the ability to publish so quickly on the internet made it all possible.

In journalism classes today, it is not enough to just pound the Five Ws & H – Who, What, When, Where, Why & How – in the brains of our students. In addition to getting them to think critically and dig deeper for the truth, we must get them ready for a faster and more diverse pace that allows for alternative story forms.

The internet and the digital age newspapers lend themselves to different forms of getting the information and news out, whether it's a Q&A, a narrative or first person story, a diary format or blog on a certain subject.

This is just one view of how sports digital playing field is shifting.

Clifton Brown, an award-winning sports journalist for the *New York Times*, who covered the NFL, NBA and was the National Golf Writer for most of the Tiger Woods era, shares his views:

“Young journalists must be very aware that the digital age has dramatically changed our business. Newspapers, magazines, and television networks are constantly devoting more of their time, money, and people to their web sites. To become more marketable, I think young journalists should learn as much as they can about the web. They should learn how to design a web site. They should familiarize themselves with blogging. They should also realize that if they are hired by a newspaper, they will likely be asked to write stories for the paper's web site in addition to writing stories for the newspaper.”

“At the NCAA tournament (in March of 2007), I had to write a web site story immediately after each game, followed by a different, more in-depth version of the game story for the newspaper. I was also asked to contribute items for our NCAA tournament blog. I'm sure other sportswriters have encountered similar experiences. The increased emphasis on web reporting has made it even more important to have the ability to write accurately on deadline. I emphasize the word

accurately, because not everything that you read on web sites is accurate. However, the digital age has made sports journalism even more competitive. When a story breaks, most newspapers want to post it on their web site as quickly as possible. The days of sitting on a story until tomorrow's paper are over. If you break a story, you almost have to get it out on the web, because if you wait, somebody else may break it on their web site an hour later."

"I think today's sports journalism courses need to reflect this changing dynamic of our business. Students should read different sports web sites, and become familiar with the things that make some of them good and others not so good. Just as I advise young sports writers to learn Spanish, and to take courses in television, they should also learn everything they can about the web and digital reporting."

Gregory Moore, a veteran sports journalist, has been heavily involved with the internet and blending sports coverage for more than 12 years. He is the managing editor of the *San Antonio Informer*, an analyst on *Fox Sports Radio*, a syndicated columnist on *American Chronicle Online Magazine*, a contributing columnist to the *411 Sports Network* and a contributor on local, regional and national radio. He observes:

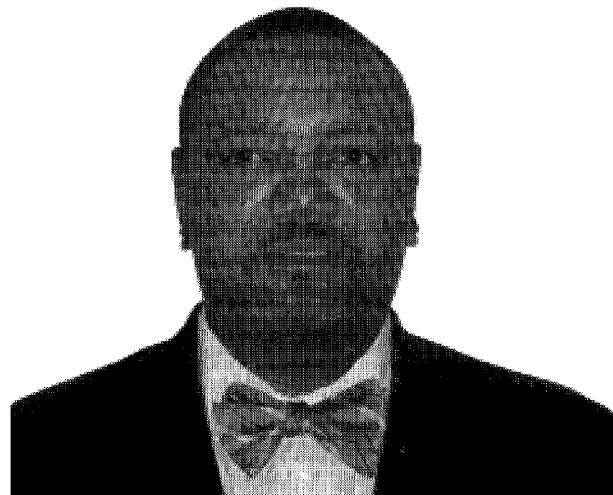
"One of the first things is not so much the critical thinking aspect but the ethics that is involved. The Internet has allowed just about anyone to become a 'journalist' per se but very few even understand the dynamics of such a task. It is easy to google whatever we need and claim it as research but unless you do your homework, use such search services as Lexis/Nexis and actually do the gumshoe work of contacting your sources, interviewing them as you build the story, and then 'vet' out any untruths so that your story is pristine, all you do is become a pundit; not a journalist."

"Those principles are especially necessary in the sports media world. With the advent of the sports 'fan' website on teams and players, many organizations are very wary of

Internet journalists. The challenge in teaching stems from being able to take mainstay, traditional approaches and then adapting them to the new age way of instantaneous journalism."

"Critical thinking processes like investigation and interview techniques are shortened for stories on the net. What used to take maybe days to develop on features is now condensed down into maybe 48 hours tops. Where visuals such as graphs, charts and other displays of telling the story took a few days to put together, that too is streamlined and condensed because the story has to be posted within the next five hours. And all of that has to be meshed with writings, video and audio references for a complete multimedia experience."

"As someone who has been caught up in that web of time constraints and such, yes it is indeed very challenging and is something a professor would have to truly get a grasp on for his/her students. If the wrong principles are taught, what ends up happening is a shoddy product that hurts the integrity that you try to build as an Internet journalist."



D. Orlando Ledbetter is a sports writer for The Atlanta Journal Constitution and teaches Mass Communications Law at Clark Atlanta University. He is author of "Ledbetter at Large: Uncensored and Off the Hook."

The Politics of Black Female Sexuality in Film & Television: The Effect on Media Studies Students

April D. Lundy

American racism is reflected in the motion picture portrayal of the Black woman. A cursory look at the image of the Black woman in films and popular television programming conjures a host of inhuman, demoralized, mythical and stereotypical characters pigeonholed by phrases that described her in terms of her sexuality, how she looked or the work that she does.

King (1973) contends that the status of the woman of an oppressed people has historically been a delicate and potentially strategic one for both the oppressors and the oppressed. African slave women had physical access to the personal environment of their oppressors (the whites). This status was demeaning and it placed them in an ambivalent position to submit to subversive activities working against the liberating interest of Black people. According to King, the suspicion, guilt and degradation generated by such a predicament gave birth to a legacy that uniquely burdens the Black female in her relationship with males in American society. This legacy is manifested today in the mythical, asexual and oversexed stereotypical images associated with Black women in television programming and film. These female racial stereotypes appear to be fundamental to the maintenance of the racially stratified order in America. The silver screen has consistently presented grossly distorted, patriarchal visions of the Black woman since its inception. From Griffith's (1915) *Birth of a Nation* onward, the character, morals and physical stature of Black women have been maligned by cinema (Gaines, 1990). However these stereotypes also function hegemonically in Black films as well as Black television programming, result-

ing in the recycling of these images and their implications of racial inferiority.

The purpose of this paper is to explicate the mythic, stereotypical images of the Black woman's sexuality in films and to examine how the political implications of these images function for the maintenance of power in the American political system, a system that is based on racial determinism. This approach will enable me to delineate how film and television programming has been utilized as a powerful apparatus for propaganda and the maintenance of the status quo by defining Black female sexuality in white terms. This paper traces the linkage from the historical subjugation of Black women and men during slavery through the Reconstruction Era and how this subjugation functioned to construct distorted identities of the Black female and male. It reveals how the distorted sexual identities of the Black female have functioned to support white male domination and demonstrate how these images have been reflected in classical and contemporary film and subsequently television programming. A secondary function of this paper is to reveal how students from a Media Studies course respond to these images, and their political implications after having been exposed to the historical and theoretical information presented in this paper.

Patriarchal Visions of the Black Woman

The two stereotyped images of the Black woman discussed in this paper are the asexual, nonfeminine mammy and the oversexed, depreciated sex object, also known as the mulatto. Historically, Black female sexuality has been pigeonholed between these two images. These stereotypes underline the racial caste system that is also examined. Examining these images that serve to control and influence agents like the cinematic apparatus of the American political system, illuminates the significance of the sexually exploited Black female stereotypes in the American order (King,

1973). The construction of the sexuality of Black women has its roots in the days of slavery. Looking at this construction over time reveals a pattern of patriarchal phases and female sexual adjustments that have no equivalent in the history of White women in the United States (Gaines, 1990). Under the dominance of the white slave master, Black women and men were equal by default. Allowing the Black man power over the Black woman would have threatened the power balance of the slave system, which was an economic system in which the power of the White man had to be maintained in order to keep the slaves from resisting and disrupting the economic structure in America. To maintain social control in the slave community “the man slave could not be the unquestioned superior within the ‘family’ or community for there was no such thing as the ‘family’ provided among the slaves” (Davis, 1971, p. 5). Among other atrocities, the white man’s appropriation of the slave woman’s body weakened the slave man and further undermined the community.

During Reconstruction, racial survival was characterized by accommodation. The Black family then modeled the household of the White bourgeois. Black women yielded to their men in deference to a tradition that promised respectability and safety (Gaines, 1990). It was then that the Black man “learned” to dominate by asserting his separateness from the Black woman. Again, the White male master had regulated him to equal status as the Black woman during slavery. However, in order to achieve this separation, he had to assume the role of the White male. Emulating the White male, the Black man would eventually assume the role of repudiating the Black woman in his quest for patriarchal equality with the White man in America.

The White man’s abuse of the Black woman during slavery was a symbolic blow to Black manhood. In particular, the sexual abuse was understood as rape only in the Black community. During Reconstruction, the increase in sexual violation of Black women fully

revealed its implications. The rape was a “message” to the Black man as a “reaction to the effort of the freedman to assume the role of patriarch, able to provide for and protect his family” (Hall, 1986, p.332). This effort would also ensure that the Black man would eventually demand his full rights and equality in America, which would upset the political economic structure that had been built on the backs of the slaves.

Political Implications of Mythical Images of the Black Woman

The word myth signifies a belief commonly held by a large group of people. These socially cued beliefs give events and actions a particular meaning. Most often myths are ill-founded beliefs that uncritically support and provide for the security and stability of those who hold wealth and status. This suggests that myths are utilized in establishing boundaries of power. In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels (1970) refer to these type of “erroneous and distorted” beliefs and ideas as “ideologies.” Their contention is that ideology is caused by the mode of production, or in other words the economic structure of society. Myths support every political system, although some are more dominant than others. King (1973) contends that myths associated with racial identity are predominant in the United States and that they give birth to a caste system. The caste system is synonymous with the traditional Marxist account of ideology serving purely as an economic cause. The caste system preserves the status and privileges of the “myth beneficiaries” and it is “designed to freeze various levels of status, opportunity and privilege in society (p. 13).

Philosopher Louis Althusser (1977) developed a theory of ideology in which he emphasized that the existence of ideology is embodied in the structures and institutions of society. According to this ideological approach, film has the ability to operate as an institution that is fully capable of disseminating be-

liefs and ideas that are “socially motivated.” Since in this view social structures are dependent on economic structures, the term ‘socially motivated’ relates ideology to economics (Cormack, 1992, p. 17). Althusser introduced the notion of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) in which the state or any reproduction of the dominant interest is maintained by covert force. This ideological dominance is “seen mostly in the institutions of religion, education, the parliamentary system, and the mass media” (p. 137). In accordance with this position, film and television programming are used to serve the function of reproducing distorted myths in the interest of the dominant class.

The political implications of the mythical images of the Black woman in film cannot be fully understood without noting the role that the racial caste system has played in maintaining the economic structure in America. According to King (1973):

In this connection, the racial caste system defines the role (i.e. social activities) of Black women as inferior to that of White women. This definition reflects the racist norms (i.e., customs) of America, and the Black female stereotypes are employed to help ensure mass conformity to these norms by all components of the caste system. Families, schools, churches, corporations (i.e., institutions) have all institutionalized these norms. Exceptions notwithstanding, they have historically been, and still are, organized along racial lines with Black institutions subordinate to White, with Black roles subordinate to White ones, or in another sense, with White on top of Black. (p.14)

To upset the equilibrium of the socio-economic structure (i.e., ideas, customs, institutions, or social activities) would substantially threaten the entire American political system.

In America white males have generally

constituted the ruling class or dominant ideology within the upper and lower castes. The caste order that they control and serve has generated a variety of images and symbols depicting members of the lower caste, both male and female, as inferiors and undesirables, who, of course, are harmless as long as they stay in their place. The metaphorical language (such as myths and images) used by the ruling class function to simplify and give meaning to otherwise complex observations and experiences. A result of these signifying practices is that the metaphors, images, and myths, false though they may be, become central in determining political values, perceptions and attitude (Edelman, 1971). Cinema has been utilized as a powerful tool and weapon for disseminating such metaphorical language.

Cinematic Constructions of Black Female Sexuality

Cinema originated as an experiment only to analyze movement. For the purpose of this discussion, the word “cinema” is synonymous with film and filmmaking. The way things happened seems to call for a reversal of the historical order of causality, which goes from the economic infrastructure to the ideological superstructure (Bazin, 1979). However, the technical capabilities of film lead early filmmakers to use film as a method of political control over the masses.

The power of cinema to psychologically transmute and disseminate powerful and complicated messages is explained by Baudry (1970). His notion is that the cinema functioned as an apparatus, and so he introduced the theory of the cinematic apparatus in which the power of film, as a dream-like process, derives its power from the fact that the spectator participates in the production of the gratification, pleasure and unity derived from watching the film. Baudry contends that film functions in much the same way those institutions such as the State and the Church do. These institutions, according to Marxism,

were created in favor of the dominant ideology. I would also argue that the cinematic apparatus theory also operates not only on the level of spectatorship, but also on the level of creation and production of films and television programming as well. Filmmakers, television writers and executives, having once themselves been spectators of these mediums, most likely have been influenced by and internalized racist ideologies. This implies that they have internalized racist ideologies only to propagate them by reproducing stereotypical images, thereby reinforcing white supremacy.

Metz (1973) was the first semiotician to apply semiotic theory (examines how meaning is created within sign systems) to cinema. As a signifying practice, film formulates a filmic language. Saussure (1974), the father of semiotic theory, argues that signs are arbitrary in nature and that a sign is purely a relational entity. So to understand any type of language and to define and identify signs; we must examine the system of relations and distinctions that create them. Therefore the examination of the sexual images of Black women in film demonstrates how these stereotypes function as signs in the metaphorical language of cinema and how the implications of these messages serve to maintain the American political system.

Against the background of racial casting in America, projection of negative images of Black females become inevitable (King, 1973). Black female sexual myths and stereotypes support caste restrictions “especially those against intermarriage between members of the upper and lower castes,” while simultaneously permitting the “imposition of inter caste sexual terror by male members of the upper caste” (p. 15). To reiterate, the stereotyped images most frequently portrayed of the Black woman in film are those of the over-sexed, depreciated sex object and the asexual mammy. If the Black woman is not being presented this way, she is virtually not presented at all. Collectively, these images and the “invisible orientation” are calculated to deprive

Black women of their womanhood, self-respect and social status and hereby to dissuade any contemplation by members of the white male ruling class of marriage with females of the lower caste (King, 1973). However, these derogatory images continue to imply that white males are permitted to use their positions of power to satisfy their lusts with Black females, without jeopardizing their status or violating white ethics that support their power.

Stereotyped Depictions of Black Female Sexuality

One of the most prevalent sexual images of Black female characters in classical and contemporary Black and white cinema is that of the asexual mammy. Mammy made her debut in Lubin’s (1914) comedy *Coon Town Suffragettes*, and it portrayed a group of bossy mammy washerwomen who organize a militant movement to keep their “good-for-nothing” husbands at home. The militancy of the washerwomen served as a primer for the mammy role Hattie McDaniel was to perfect in the 1930s.

The stereotype of the mammy is an image that was born out of slave plantation lore. It was concretized in American literature and has been popularized in such films as Griffith’s (1915) *Birth of A Nation*, Fleming’s (1939) *Gone With the Wind*, and Sirk’s (1959) *Imitation of Life*. *Gone With the Wind* is a perfect example of how film is reflective of social myths and stereotypes. The mammy character in this classic film is aptly called Mammy.

Critics of popular culture assert that the mammy image satisfies a need in the white psyche to believe that their loyal, devoted “servant” not only recognizes and accepts the superiority of the whites but also supports the maintenance of such hierarchy (Diawara, 1993). When the physical and emotional makeup of mammy is examined it is clear that she is the antithesis of American conceptions of womanhood (Jewell, 1993). Like the “faithful soul” in *Birth of A Nation*, the Mammy is

usually a large, dark, de-sexed, smiling, joyous, earthbound, jolly creature, often good natured, cantankerous and devoted to the care and protection of her white family— even to the neglect of her own family (Diawara, 1993). Mammies are not depicted to have a sexual nature. They are portrayed as physically unattractive, all inklings of sexuality are erased, and she has no life outside of the home that she likes and works.

The nonfeminist image features Black women as tough, hard-working domestics who assume the role of matriarch in the home, but somehow always manage to know their place and remain appropriately submissive in the White world (King, 1973). For the purpose of this discussion, the nonfeminist, mammy and matriarch images are synonymous. The matriarch concept places the Black woman as the dominant figure in the Black family. This concept deviates from the American tradition in which the dominant figure in the household is the Patriarch. This deviation suggests the psychological castration of the Black male. Logical conclusions generated by this myth tend to imply that the Black woman is responsible for the creation of the socioeconomic institutions that have been structured to deny equality to all Black people.

The image of the depreciated Black sex object also serves a political function. More than the mammy image, it excludes Black females as potential marital partners of white males, according to King (1973). On a deeper, more political level, the depreciated sex image of the Black female in film and television programming appears to have been created with the intention of protecting and dissuading white males from momentary passion and compassion that may result from his sexual contact with her. This type of contact has the possibility of conjuring humane feelings that can sometimes lead to marriage, which in turn leads to partnership, legal obligations, respect and responsibilities. King furthers that marriage between members of the ruling class and those whom they oppress, inevitably undermines the rationale for the basis of oppression,

whether the oppressive determinant be race, religion, culture or some other such factor.

Black Female Sexuality in Black Independent Film

Early independent Black filmmakers managed to portray a more multidimensional Black woman; however they continued to objectify Black female sexuality. Some of these portrayals of the Black woman as a depreciated sex object occurred in Starkman's (1928) *Scar of Shame* and Micheaux's (1925) *Body and Soul*. Such films were written, directed, produced and distributed by Blacks in what is now known as the Separate Cinema. Perhaps due to the abundance of Black male writers, producers and directors and little or no Black female filmmakers, the image of Black female sexuality as the oversexed, depreciated sex object was transmuted into Black independent film. It could also be argued that this predicament is the result of the Black man's repressed resistance to the regulation of their social status to the equivalent of that of the Black female during slavery and Reconstruction. Meanwhile, Hollywood produced Black films that continued to portray the oversexed Black woman in films such as Harmon's (1959) *Anna Lucasta* and Douglas's (1970) *They Call Me MISTER Tibbs*. Contemporary portrayals of Black female sexuality have not parted from tradition.

Black Female Sexuality in Television Programming

Television programming has continued the legacy of propagating demoralized representations of Black female sexuality. It operates in much the same manner as that of Baudry's notion of the cinematic apparatus in which the power of television is derived from the viewer's identification with and gratification of the content and characters. Television, like cinema, functions in much the same way as the institutions of the State and the Church, and like these institutions, television programming is

very often created in favor of the dominant ideology for the purpose of capitalism. Television today operates, more than ever, as one of the most influential institutions ever with its programming based on the interests and ideologies of the corporations that finance the production and broadcast of television content.

The 21st century has ushered in new television genres and formats that give rise to even more graphic demoralized images of Black female sexuality. The advent of music videos and reality serials has further pigeonholed and maligned representations of Black female sexuality. This point is further expressed by the responses of a group of Black students from a Media Studies course that I taught in the fall of 2006.

Media Studies Student Responses

After having been exposed for the first time to the film *Birth of a Nation*, and some of the historical and theoretical perspectives covered in this paper, most of these students confessed a cultural awakening. Student reactions were, however, galvanized between two disparate extremes.

On one side, there were those students who seemed to be unaffected by this historical information and its implications. They did not think that there was any significance in “dredging” up the past (i.e., slavery). These particular students did not consider themselves affected by the sexually explicit and degrading images of young Black women in rap and hip-hop music videos and popular reality serials such as Cronin’s (2006) *Flavor of Love* and its sequel, *I Love New York*. Their opinion was that television programming and films were solely sources of entertainment. For them, negative depictions of Black female sexuality were not to be taken seriously. Moreover, they felt that the Black female subjects and characters in demoralizing media are deserving of these types of degrading representations if they allow themselves to be objectified in that manner. They felt that Black

female characters that were sexually exploited in music videos possessed agency. They expressed that these Black female actors or “video hos” were exhibitionists and liked to be sexually explicit. The majority of students who expressed this perspective were Black male students. One Black male student confessed to being desensitized towards Black women because of these images. He expressed that he preferred to date White women over Black women because they were more accommodating to his needs, especially his financial needs.

Conversely, many of the Black female students were able to identify the recycling of historically demoralizing stereotypes of Black female sexuality mostly in popular television programming. Several of these young women expressed that the re-inscription of these images was even more pronounced in popular television and that most of these images were hegemonic constructions. They stated that many of these images begin in the mind of the Black male music producers or the Black male filmmakers and that the images created in the minds of these males tend to be even more degrading than the historic representations of Black female sexuality. They expressed that they began looking at music videos and reality shows differently after being exposed to the historical information presented in this paper, and they became more aware of the political implications that accompany the images that depicted Black female sexuality. These students were able to add to the growing list of inhuman and objectifying phrases often used to characterize Black female sexuality. The more contemporary phrases include: dime piece, chocolate, deelishis, something and bootz. Most of these phrases were created by Rap icon, Flavor Flav of the hit television series *Flavor of Love* to identify his potential mate.

One Black female student took offense to the entire discussion of the negative portrayals of Black female sexuality. Moreover, she expressed that the mere suggestion that her enjoyment of these images could suggest

internalized racism felt like a personal attack on her character. Subsequently, she was resistant to the course readings and eventually she dropped the class. Another Black female student, who stood apart from the others, expressed great difficulty in “seeing” how explicit sexual portrayals of Black females could be viewed negatively. Her opinion was that if you had “it” that there should be no problem flaunting it. She suggested that those who had a problem with Black female sexuality being exploited were probably just jealous. This student made an example of herself, revealing that she received an abundance of attention from men and that other Black women were jealous of her because of her interracial physical features. This student struggled throughout the semester to assimilate the historical content and to identify with the other Black women in the class.

The lack of interest and knowledge of the historical civil rights struggles and injustices of Black people in America appears to have caused this younger generation of Black students to become desensitized to the devastating effects of the oppression of Blacks. It is this “void” that serves as one of the most important and detrimental root causes of the recycling and acceptance of degrading and demoralizing Black images, particularly Black female sexual imagery. It was not until these students could trace the historical cause and effect of racial determinism and its implications, and how media mirrors these implications, that they could begin to see how Black female sexual imagery functions strategically to serve the maintenance of the status quo. Moreover, these images become a catalyst to devastating self-identity and self-worth issues among young Black women.

Discussion

There also appears to be a psychological disconnectedness between the Black male and female students. The Black male students seem to have internalized the historical repudiation of the Black woman, making them in-

different to the issue of the sexual imagery of Black females.

As a producer of media, I am acutely aware of the lack of knowledge that the average viewer has about just “who” controls media content and programming. There is a huge misconception among most of these students that the artist, performers, and rappers actually control the creation, content and dissemination of media. Moreover, these students are not aware that most music videos and reality programming is not conceived by the Black artists, but by White male media writers, directors and executives. After being exposed to these facts, the students expressed “seeing” these types of programs with different eyes. Throughout the semester they became more critical of the way Black female sexuality, as well as other Black imagery, is portrayed. Overall, these media students were able to begin to see a desperate need for change after they were equipped with historical knowledge to understand the political implications of the portrayals of Black female sexuality in film and television programming. This may be a key to affecting a shift in the recycling of these images, as well as all oppressive and exploitive imagery of Black people.

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“Hip-Hop Is a Tool, Not a Circus!”

Rabiyah Karim-Kincey

The title of this article was coined by an up-and-coming performance poet, vocalist, and rare to find these days, female emcee/rapper, Stacy Epps. As I listened while Epps delivered a “freestyle,” or impromptu piece on a local Atlanta radio station, it hit me...Eureka! That is exactly it! Research done over the years suggests Hip-Hop music is certainly rhetorical. Hip-Hop scholars debate on everything from its politics to its semantics. Some call it divine; others call it evil. But whatever “It” is, “It” is a tool, and any tool in the wrong hands can easily become a weapon. The three-ring circus of materialism, debauchery and misogyny paraded in this mainstream form of fraudulent Hip-Hop music has quickly turned into a weapon of mass destruction, lulling the spirits, hearts, and intellects of a generation into a deep state of aware unconsciousness, “eyes wide shut.”

Hip-Hop music embodies, exudes and spews from its very pores the Afrikan¹ principle of NOMMO, the power of the Word when spoken. Nommo Principle is a West Afrikan concept referencing the “Power of the Spoken Word.” The word “Nommo” derives from the Dogon peoples of Mali, West Afrika. Nommo was/is a deity of the Dogon pantheon who represents the magical power of the word or speaking.

According to Nommo Principle, what you say becomes so. Therefore, once you open your mouth and allow your thoughts to break forth into the physical realm or atmosphere as words, those words have power to change, create, and even destroy, discrediting the old adage, “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Words can most certainly hurt, just as they can heal. It is the responsibility of the speaker to choose and use the power of words wisely.

Among the immense number of Hip-Hop artists today are word virtuosos.

Wordsmiths, too numerous to count, harness the “Nommo” power of the spoken word to speak an infinite number of possibilities into existence. How many of them know and realize this power? Not many, unfortunately.

Truly skilled Hip-Hop artists or rappers are more affectionately known as Emcees (M.C. – Masters of Ceremonies). Legendary Hip-Hop emcee, Rakim, said it best: “but to me M.C. means move the crowd.”² This statement implies some sort of responsibility, an obligation to get people from one place to another. The question is where or what is that place? Currently, the clowns, the bizarre sights, and the spectacle seen on BET (Black Entertainment Television), MTV (Music Television) and many other places suggest we have been brought, or spoken, into a circus of sorts. Whether an artist consciously or unconsciously chooses to speak wisdom, or foolishness, either way we see his/her ability to move the crowd. The Nommo Principle – power of the spoken word - has no respect of person.

Let’s consider then, what if we use these words to move and mobilize, much like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Kwame Toure used their words to do in the days of yesteryear? Or even, much like what we saw happening in the late 80s-early 90s when the lyrical messages in the large majority of Hip-Hop music were persuading urban young people to embrace their cultural identity on a scale that had not been witnessed since almost two decades before in the early 70s. If these types of messages were consistently and constantly going out over our Internet, radio and television waves in the same way the negative messages are being distributed currently, what type of impact would this have on our society right now? From past experience, it would be massive.

Growing up in Compton, California, I knew persons who were considered “thugs” and hard-core, Chuck All-Stars wearing, red-kerchief donning gang bangers. During the late 80s - early 90s, I saw some of these same individuals now taking on Islamic or Afrikan names, studying Islam and Afrikan history,

wearing Afrika medallions, and sporting Malcolm X t-shirts or better yet, dashikis. Undeniably, it was Hip-Hop music that was encouraging this behavior. What was being said through Hip-Hop that was able to move so many young people to this renewed sense of consciousness and awareness? Simply, words! Words that suggested pride, knowledge of self, and a reverence for ancestry; and we were just that, proud, diligently searching to find who we were, and in reverence of where and from whom we came. Nommo Principle.

Speaking of where and from whom we came, no discussion on the topic of Hip-Hop should proceed without some clarification, and we would be remiss not to take this opportunity to provide that clarity. Hip-Hop is a culture, meaning a way of life, composed of four core elements. These elements are: the deejay, the emcee, break-dance (or boy/girl), and graffiti. Hip-Hop music consists of the deejay and the emcee. There is a distinction that needs to be made between what is considered true Hip-Hop “culture” music, and what is being mistakenly called Hip-Hop (or rap) music. Hip-Hop “culture” music adheres to a certain expectation of artistry, morality, consciousness, skill, and integrity. This is not to say that all Hip-Hop “culture” music is one-hundred percent positive or is somehow consistently “preachy,” but rather that it stays consistent with one of Hip-Hop’s founding fathers, Afrika Bambaataa’s, idea of Hip-Hop as a culture for young people that expressed peace, unity and having fun. What we are seeing and hearing today in mainstream media IS NOT TRUE HIP-HOP! It is a fraud. However, because so many believe it to be Hip-Hop, and because it and its participants are unjustly representing as Hip-Hop, unfortunately for now we have no other recourse but to address it as “so-called” Hip-Hop. This imposter is who or what is perpetuating this “circus” on unsuspecting ears and minds.

While the criticism is harsh, this is not a prognosis of doom and gloom. Hip-Hop is in a rather unique and important place in time. If carefully attended to during this critical

time, it can be moved once again toward the forefront of a persuasive movement much like what occurred during the Black Power and Pan Afrikan movements of the past. This movement has serious implications - politically, economically, culturally, intellectually and mentally. Unlike back in the day, with today’s media and technology advances people don’t have (or won’t take the time) to go hear someone speak, but they will listen to a CD or download music to their iPod. This is where the persuasive rhetorical power of Hip-Hop is most useful. The key now is to bring it from beneath the surface to the mainstream.

In simplest terms, rhetoric can be described as the art of persuasion. Rhetorical communication is often defined as the process of a source stimulating a source-selected meaning in the mind of a receiver by means of verbal and non-verbal messages. It is a mutual process, a reciprocal relationship, entailing the importance of the audience/listener/receiver. During the rhetorical process that takes place within the discourse in Hip-Hop situations its “Nommo” or persuasive strength can be used as a tool to educate, enlighten, and empower.

Hip-Hop music is a rhetorical tool, as it possesses significant rhetorical properties. Hip-Hop music’s history and place in the culture of Hip-Hop gives clear evidence to its lineage in the Afrikan oral tradition, which has provided longstanding case studies for Afrikan Diasporic rhetoric.

So how can we call Hip-Hop rhetoric or rhetorical? The same way we would call anything else rhetorical; we’d put it through a process of evaluation. Should the sample in question meet the criteria established, then the sample is legitimized as rhetorical.

As traditional and conventional methods for rhetorical evaluation and analysis have proven inadequate in evaluating Afrikan-centered discourses such as Hip-Hop, more appropriate and inclusive Africentric models exist by which the rhetorical analyst can better assess rhetorical properties of Afrikan-centered address. Two such Africentric models

for rhetorical analysis are Molefi K. Asante's (Arthur L. Smith)³ "Nature of the Black Audience," taken from *Rhetoric of Black Revolution* (1969), and Cecil Blake's 1997 article "Afrocentric Tokens: Afrocentric Methodology in Rhetorical Analysis."

In Asante's *Rhetoric of Black Revolution* he gives a treatise on the "Nature of the Black Audience," explaining that there are five characteristics most common to Afrikan peoples/audiences in rhetorical situations: (1) usually the rhetor can determine the effect of his/her message, based on the audible and visible responses from the audience; (2) once an audience warms up to a speaker, usually he/she can get them to be more receptive to his/her ideas; (3) if an audience is moved enough, they may repeat a key expression from the rhetor's address; (4) enthusiastic affirmations of a speaker's ideas from a sizable amount of audience members usually help to persuade skeptics; and (5) responsiveness tends to quickly develop into a highly emotional, sometimes frantic display. Should an evaluator/analyzer find these components present in an exchange of discourse amongst people of color, the evaluator can call this exchange a "rhetorical situation."

Equipped now with Asante's method for analyzing the "nature" of the audience, one now has the task finding a method best suited for understanding the scope of the "message" presented in Hip-Hop music. In his 1997 "Afrocentric Tokens: Afrocentric Methodology in Rhetorical Analysis" article, Cecil Blake describes six "tokens" that "provide and enhance the rhetorical tools that the analyst has in hand to conduct rhetorical criticism of African American public address on issues relating to race, rights, and politics" (p.2). According to Blake, the rhetorical analyst will tend to find these recurrent themes, tokens in the rhetorical renderings of persons of the Afrikan Diaspora. The tokens are: providential design, redemptive suffering, vindication of the Afrikan past, apotheosis of Afrikan virtue, race pride, and nationalism.

Through "providential design," the

rhetor implies that the suffering of the Afrikan race is part of God's design to prepare us for the saving of humanity. Via use of the token "redemptive suffering," the rhetor suggests that our misfortunes are due to our own ignorance, neglect, and indifference; therefore, "the Afrikan race has the moral responsibility to act with confidence, and to demonstrate self-respect, self-pride, and identity in order to redeem their good faith" (Blake, p. 10). "Vindication of the Afrikan past" implies that Afrikan-Americans should acknowledge and embrace their Afrikan ancestry. Using "apotheosis of Afrikan virtue," the rhetor attempts to prove and emphasize the superior position of the Afrikan race in the hierarchy of all other human races. Through "race pride" an emphasis is made toward racial purity through self-help and self-respect. With "nationalism" the rhetor will refer to how we as Afrikans born in America should define ourselves – American or Afrikan. Blake points out that all of these tokens may not apply; and therefore it is not necessary for discourse to include all of them.

Many Hip-Hop performances and recorded pieces mirror or display the very properties of which Asante and Blake speak. Even those who do not (and choose not to) exemplify Blake's tokens still have that natural "Africentric" ability to which Asante refers "to move the crowd," even if it is in a negative, demoralizing, integrity-void way. Ultimately, persuasion is persuasion, whether it leads one to do good or bad.

So what then does all of this mean for the field of academia? Further considering the persuasive "Nommo" power of Hip-Hop, although not actually calling it rhetoric, is what Hicks-Harper and Harper (1999) address in their analysis of Hip-Hop's influence within youth popular culture. This analysis looks at the benefits of using Hip-Hop music to promote substance abuse awareness and prevention. The purpose of this treatise is to equip health practitioners, educators, civic leaders, and parents with the "real deal" on the attitudes, world-views, behaviors, and the like, of

American young people, as expressed through youth popular culture – in this case, Hip-Hop. Hicks-Harper and Harper note:

When considering the huge, broad youth audience that Hip-Hop appeals to, rap messages are a powerful and captivating art form that has the ability to make young people conscious of the nature, conditions, and kinds of national and international problems that exist. (p. 28)

This statement clearly suggests the persuasive-rhetorical-power of Hip-Hop music. Hicks-Harper and Harper make specific references to research done on adolescent alcohol drinking in which they note findings that both music young people listen to, as well as rappers/artists themselves, has an indirect effect on drinking habits and practices of youth.

Venturing to give a testimonial to the above sentiment, here is an illustration. As a teenager in the early 90s, I was exposed to a particular commercial advertisement on my favorite radio station at the time, KDAY. The advertisement was for St. Ides malt liquor and featured rapper/now actor, Ice Cube, who happened to be one of my favorite rappers at the time. The intense appeal of the music, coupled with Ice Cube's skill with words and rhythmic rhyme scheme, persuaded me ashamedly and unfortunately to become a consumer of St. Ides malt liquor (for only a brief time of course). That commercial was like nothing I'd ever heard. I was amazed, I was enthused, and I was excited...about malt liquor? Hip-Hop had been used to sell me, a middle-class teen-aged girl, malt liquor!

As if my testimonial, or rather confession, isn't enough, to support their argument, Hicks-Harper and Harper point out that Hip-Hop culture and its music are used to "communicate a myriad of messages;" young people are being targeted as a profitable market and what better means to attract them than through Hip-Hop. Companies such as Sprite,

Nike and McDonald's have spent exorbitant amounts of money in advertising, utilizing the mass appeal of Hip-Hop music. If corporate companies such as these can use Hip-Hop through sometimes-unethical means to get the attention of America's youth, why can't the potentially influential strength of Hip-Hop - its Nommo power - be used to encourage healthy lifestyles and overall well-being of young people?

Hicks-Harper and Harper were on point with this study and it is interesting to see how this article written eight years ago is actually even more relevant today. Cars, cell phones, clothing, fast food, and even Sesame Street's Elmo are marketed now using Hip-Hop. It's no longer just about soft drinks and tennis shoes. It's about Hip-Hop music's use as a tool, a mechanism to reach the masses. If corporations can bombard our subconscious with their products using Hip-Hop music, why can't we educate using Hip-Hop?

Several implications exist with the use of Hip-Hop music as a rhetorical mechanism. However, two sets of implications stand as most significant in the arena of academia. Hip-Hop music as a rhetorical tool has implications for the field of rhetoric itself; and for the instructor of rhetoric as a discipline, specifically with regard to its use in classroom settings as a reference agent, a familiarity builder, and a critical analysis development.

Implications for the field of rhetoric suggest that Hip-Hop music provides an additional outlet to expand the scope of rhetoric, its evaluation, and analysis. With Hip-Hop music's addition to the existing body of rhetorical genres, the student and teacher of rhetoric are provided with yet another avenue to explore, and resource from which to draw. Because of Hip-Hop's documenting advantage, the field of rhetoric can look to Hip-Hop for easier means of studying and assessing Afrikan-American and Diasporic rhetorical samples. Also, as a result of Hip-Hop's widespread and diverse appeal, any study thereof should require exposure to Africentric thoughts, methodologies, and ideas.

For the instructor of rhetorical disciplines, Hip-Hop can serve as a vital tool in the classroom. The point of reference for most of today's students is Hip-Hop. Whereas Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Jesse Jackson, or John F. Kennedy were points of reference for past generations, many of the today student's exposure to these examples is limited. Several of my own students indicated to me that outside of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech, they had never heard any speeches by any of the aforementioned individuals. To remedy this issue, in my Fundamentals of Speech course, Hip-Hop music has been implemented as an aid in helping students better understand rhetorical concepts such as the Communication Process of messenger, receiver, sender, feedback, et cetera, as well as to convey ideas of delivery style and message content. For example, when students were asked to compare and contrast the delivery and message-writing styles of Dr. King and Malcolm X, needless to say, the conversation was brief. However, when these same students were asked to compare and contrast the same of Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls (Notorious B.I.G.), they were immediately able to register these ideas and even apply them in the process of identifying and developing their own rhetorical styles.

Hip-Hop in the rhetorical or public address classroom also initializes and provides the novice public speaking student with a certain level of comfort and familiarity. Most people have a natural uneasiness or fear when it comes to the idea of public speaking. On the first day of class, a Hip-Hop piece is played for my students and a discussion follows. Once students see (or rather hear) that public speaking and Hip-Hop music are interrelated they are far more comfortable and receptive to tackling the idea of studying rhetoric or public speaking.

Last, Hip-Hop in the rhetorical classroom better equips students to become more critically aware of traditional rhetorical renderings and that of mainstream mediated Hip-Hop. As their rhetorical eyes and ears are

strengthened by understanding how to analyze the more easily relatable Hip-Hop, they are also equipped to be critical thinkers, listeners, and analyzers when exposed to traditional rhetorical renderings. This is probably the most important implication of all. As they are educated about and critical of the messages being presented to them through mainstream media outlets they are better aware of and able to decipher the benefit or detriment of these messages to themselves and their communities. With this insight they gain from the public speaking course, and they can actively choose to accept or reject the messages being conveyed through media and "so-called" Hip-Hop music, again, with an understanding that what is being presented as Hip-Hop music is actually a fraudulent imitation of true Hip-Hop culture music.

As students, soon to become young professionals and intellectuals, see Hip-Hop music's vitality in their own academic and person growth as skilled communicators, they will be more prone to make vigilant requests for its integrity to be upheld, and subsequently oppose its abuse in mainstream media. With this in mind, the hope is that they will demand change, we hope, when they recognize any violations. This comes as an aid to all of us, as they will serve as sentinels, so to speak, for society at large – for those whose eyes and ears still remain "wide shut."

Asante suggested in the fourth component of his "Nature of the Black Audience" that enthusiastic affirmations of a speaker's ideas from a sizable number of audience members usually help to persuade skeptics. As these young Talented Tenth percenters become convinced and enthusiastic about consciousness in Hip-Hop music and its purpose as a tool, they may help to persuade the other 90 % that it is time for the circus to leave town. It has absolutely been here long enough, and we can no longer stand the stench.

I love Hip-Hop, I live Hip-Hop, I teach Hip-Hop. I've witnessed first-hand its ability to "Move the Crowd" into a collective soul. Not just an emotional frenzy, but a mobilizing

force, an actual movement of enlightenment of who we are, what we want, and where our place should be in the world. The “Nommo” power of the spoken word inherent in Hip-Hop all but yells that we must use Hip-Hop for the “tool” that it is, rather than the sordid “circus” it has come to portray.

Thank you, Stacy Epps, for such an “on-time” quote!

Notes

1. I have chosen to use Afrikan with a “k” instead of African with a “c” in order to comply with the international phonetics system in which “k” is used to represent the sound “k” as pronounced in the aforementioned word.
2. Lyrics from “Eric B. for President,” Eric B. and Rakim (1988).
3. Arthur L. Smith had not yet changed his name to Molefi K. Asante at the time of first publication.

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Attractiveness of Speech Communication as a College Major

Niaz A. Khan

A 1999 survey, conducted by the Career Center of the San Jose State University, found that 100 % of the students who had majored in speech communication were employed in full-time positions in fields related to their majors (Career Center [San Jose State University], n. d.). The *Princeton Review's* (n. d.) web site states, "A major in communications studies/speech communication and rhetoric makes for solid pre-professional training." Aristotle, considered the father of rhetoric, and the ancient Greeks understood that and advocated the use of public speaking as the most powerful tool of persuasion—useful in governance and the individual achievements of citizens. Even though Aristotle's proclamations have shaped the discourse of today's communication, the power of oratory was recognized even earlier than that in ancient Egypt (Khan, 2006). The study of speech communication is deeply rooted in liberal arts with emphases in communication and analyses that are indispensable in most occupations (Khan, 2006). In fact, as a major, speech has the capability of preparing students for careers that cut across a number of occupations. Consequently, the attractiveness of speech communication as a major is widely known among educators and business professionals.

Overcoming Communication Apprehension

A majority of people suffer from communication apprehension. In some surveys, along with the fear of death, fear of public speaking vies for first place (Gottlieb, n. d). Even the most experienced politicians, actors, teachers—those who engage in public speaking for their living—also suffer from fear of speaking in public. Some degree of anxiety is actually good for delivering a top-notch speech. Thus, the dynamics of communication apprehension

can be better understood through the study of speech communication. Ways to manage communication apprehension are also a part of the program of study in speech.

Strategies

Since communication apprehension figures so prominently in most people, students of speech are taught about various strategies that are employed to overcome communication anxiety. Students of speech also learn that all strategies do not work for everybody: The trick is to choose only one or some of them through the trial and error method. The major approaches they are taught in combating nervousness include:

1. Knowing the environment in which a person speaks;
2. Knowing the audience through audience analysis;
3. Learning to relax by deep breathing, wiggling the toes, and squeezing and letting go the arms of a chair or the sides of a table;
4. Visualizing making a successful speech;
5. Concentrating on the message and thinking of the fear;
6. Gaining experience by speaking at every opportunity and joining organizations such as the Toastmaster's; and
7. Evaluating the presentation for its strengths and weaknesses.

Benefits of Speech Communication

The benefits of speech communication become apparent soon to those who study it. First, speech communication is a subject that promotes critical thinking which is the ability to make informed judgments on the bases of available evidence. Critical thinking manifests in the understanding of how messages are encoded and decoded in the communication process, supported with evidence gathered

through experience and research, and combined with logic and reasoning. Second, the power of speech communication permits discourse in civic forums. In order to have their voices heard, citizens express their concerns about issues that concern them such as the construction of a garbage dump near their housing subdivision. Third, a solid foundation in rhetoric, is source of empowerment, which is apparent in the ability to attain goals in personal and professional lives. Finally, those schooled in speech appear very appealing to employers for their communication skills. According to a list published by National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE] (2007), the first of the top 10 qualities employers seek in college graduates is communication skills (oral and written).

Careers in Speech Communication

A major in speech communication is a great way of entering the professional world. Career counselors recommend speech communication as a major to students because the course of study enables them to become competent speakers, listeners and critical thinkers (Khan, 2006). Upon earning a degree in speech, students have a choice of many careers. A number of the positions are directly related to communications. However, the flexibility of the major makes students equally attractive in other occupations.

Business

In business and industry, there is a widespread belief that graduates in speech communication make successful employees. A national study points out that communication skills are responsible for an employee to get a job, succeed in it, and be promoted (Winsor, Curtis, and Stephens, 1997). Speech courses that prepare majors for careers in business include: interpersonal communication, business and professional speaking, persuasion, group communication, organizational communication, interviewing, and listening. Positions for

which speech majors qualify include: labor relations, consultant, manager, researcher, business communication specialist, in-house publications specialist, public relations writer, documents and procedures analyst, employment recruiter, trainer, corporate buyer, merchandiser, negotiator, credit lending banker, sales planner and public information officer (Khan, 2006).

Law

Speech communication is an excellent major for those entering law school. As a career, law is fundamentally concerned about communication. The National Communication Association (n. d. b) in its web site, *Pathways to Careers*, states:

It [communication] involves establishing meaning and community through language. With a field so steeped in verbal and nonverbal skill requirements, a background in communication can serve as an effective beginning to a career in law. Communication training, or a degree in communication, can be useful for admission to law schools, as well as providing skills for use after law school. It is also valuable to paralegals and legal secretaries.

Speech courses helpful for preparing entrance into law school include: public speaking, argumentation and debate, communication law, persuasion, small group communication, conflict management, listening, acting, and others. Law career paths available to speech majors include that of paralegal, mediator and attorney-at-law.

Education

The necessity of teachers to have a solid background in speech communication cannot be understated. Good teachers should be great communicators no matter what subject they teach. Speech courses

helpful in careers in education include: public speaking, communication theory, communication research methods, intercultural communication, small group communication, persuasion, listening, argumentation and debate and linguistics. Majors in speech can get into a variety of positions in education such as teacher, researcher, public relations specialist and college admissions officer.

Media

Working in the media requires great communication skills—the ability to speak and write well and get along well with others—essential skills offered in the study of speech communication. The courses in speech that will enable students to work in the media include: public speaking, business and professional communication, interpersonal communication, organizational communication, listening, interviewing, persuasion, visual communication, nonverbal communication and communication research methods. Speech communication majors can qualify for jobs in writing, editing, copywriting, public relations, script writing, publishing, producing, managing, directing, media business management, research, media sales, anchorperson, reporter, radio personality, television personality, film/tape librarian, sales, traffic, announcer, disc jockey, casting director, account executive, floor manager, talk show host, publicity manager, press agent, lobbyist, corporate public affairs specialist, development officer, fund raiser, membership recruiter, sales manager, media planner, creative director, audience analyst, news writer and public opinion researcher.

Government and Politics

Speech communication majors are prized in government and politics for their ability to communicate persuasively and in an organized manner with consumers, constituents, and others within and across cultures. Speech

communication courses that prepare students for careers in government and politics include: public speaking, interpersonal communication, political communication, communication theory, communication research methods, organizational communication, argumentation and debate, rhetorical theory and criticism, political communication, persuasion, media, listening, performance studies, and acting. Careers that speech majors can enter in government and politics include: public information, campaigns, programming, legislative advising, research, elected offices, lobbying and conflict resolution.

Healthcare

The importance of precise communication, especially in health care, truly becomes a lifeline. Listening and attending are the two most essential elements in the health-care field. A background in speech communication will allow for competent dealings between health-care providers and patients, and amongst healthcare providers in order to diagnose diseases, prevent the spread of illnesses, and impart health education. In the 21st century, communication to improve the public's health will be of fundamental importance. Courses in speech communication that come in handy for health-care careers include: public speaking, health communication, interpersonal communication, family communication, interviewing, business and professional communication, research methods, small group communication, conflict resolution, listening, nonverbal communication and persuasion. Positions in health and communication include: administrator, grants writer, public relations, health educator, publications editor, school health-care administrator, hospital director of communication, clinic public relations director, health communication analyst, research analyst, medical training supervisor, communications manager for federal health agencies, health personnel educator, medical center publications editor, hospice manager, drug rehabilitationist, health-care counselor, activi-

ties director, marketing director and health facility fund-raiser (Khan, 2006; National Communication Association [NCA], b.).

International Affairs

Good communication is critical in carrying out the discourse of international relations, diplomacy, and global economy. Courses in speech communication that are helpful in careers in international affairs include: public speaking, intercultural communication, international communication, nonverbal communication, interpersonal communication, communication theory, language and social interaction, political communication and conflict resolution and negotiation. Positions for speech communication majors in international relations include: broadcaster, foreign correspondent, translator, foreign tour coordinator, diplomat, foreign relations officer and host/hostess for foreign dignitaries (National Association of Communication [NCA], b).

Performing Arts

Students who want to be successful in the theatre take courses in acting and performing arts. However, in the performing arts, acting is not the sole career. There are a number of other career paths available, and a good background in speech communication can lead students in that direction. Courses that can be useful for careers in the performing arts include: public communication, nonverbal communication, and oral communication. Besides acting, other careers available include: scriptwriter, producer, director, arts administrator, performing arts educator, costume designer, scenic designer, theatre critic, makeup artist, stage manager, model and casting director (National Association of Communication [NCA], b).

Salaries of Speech Communication Majors

Speech communication majors, according to the San Jose State University Career Center, earn an average annual salary of \$36,372.

Sample monthly salaries of professionals with speech backgrounds, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics [U.S. Department of Labor] (2005) include:

Public relations specialist: \$4,256

Sales representative: \$4,510

Human resources specialist: \$2,816

Radio and television broadcaster: \$3,529

Radio and television announcer: \$2,800

Editor: \$4,312

Speech teacher: \$4,073

Famous Speech Majors

From American presidents to broadcasters, many famous people have studied or received degrees in speech communication. President John Quincy Adams taught rhetoric at Harvard University, and President Lyndon Johnson taught public speaking at Southwest Texas State University. Current U.S. Senator Evan Bayh from Indiana studied debating at Indiana University; former presidential candidate and ex-Congressman Richard Gephardt of Missouri received a degree in speech from Northwestern University; and State Attorney General Christine Gregoire of the state of Washington has a speech communication degree. Among broadcasters, Ted Koppel, former host of ABC's *Nightline*, and current commentator for NPR (National Public Radio) and host of documentaries on Discovery cable channel is one of many who majored in speech communication (National Communication Association [NCA], n. d.a)

Discussion

Being deeply rooted in liberal arts, speech communication provides an education that is also very practical. Speech plays the most crucial role of forming relationships, communicating across cultures, working in teams, and fulfilling the goals of organizations. Without speech, formation of human bonds would be

impossible. As a result, the major plays a vital role in the successful continuation of human civilization through the transmission of culture.

Speech communication prepares students on a number of levels by stressing oral communication as well as writing. First, through the study of interpersonal communication, speech communication teaches the intricacies of how relationships are formed. Second, a background in the communication of small groups—made up of three to ten people—allows people to understand the driving force of teamwork in social and professional settings. Third, the role of rhetoric and oratory is the art of influencing the thought and conduct of an audience in the public setting. Finally, organizational communication is the area of speech communication, which Shockley-Zalabak (2006) defines as a, “Process through which organizations are created and in turn create and shape events” (p.16).

In the job market communication is becoming a byword. As a result, speech majors are finding themselves in demand because of their ability to read, write, and speak well and, of course, understand human communication. Speech graduates are, thus, finding jobs in fields as diverse as health care, business, and international relations. Not only that, two of them even became the president of the United States.

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Two Elders in the Field: The Legacy of Journalism Pioneers Thomas C. Fleming and Samuel Yette

Deidre McDonald

Thomas C. Fleming and Samuel Yette pursued journalism as a lifelong passion. They share many similar qualities—from growing up in humble surroundings, determination to be self-actualized, insatiable curiosity, a love of history, a commitment to social justice and the gift of being wordsmiths. They were a continent away from each other as they reported tirelessly on the state of Black America.

Thomas C. Fleming is considered to be the oldest and longest serving African American journalist in the United States. Through his voluminous number of editorials and commentaries we can learn about his life as well as have a virtual panorama of issues and people that had an impact on culture in Northern California as well as nationally. Fleming calculates that over the span of his career, he wrote 2,000-3,000 words a week, or about seven million words in print. He turned 99 in November 2005, and in December of that same year he penned his last column.

Fleming was born in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1907 and lived in Harlem for a short time before relocating to Chico, California, when he was twelve. In high school he wrote a few humorous columns for the newspaper. After graduating he worked for six years as a bellhop and a cook for the Southern Railroad. He helped to support his sister and mother, who worked as a domestic.

One of Fleming's favorite hang-outs was a black-owned newsstand. He frequently read the *Messenger*, edited by Chandler Owen and A. Phillip Randolph. By this time, Randolph was the founding president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The publication described itself as "the only radical Negro magazine in America." Resistance to the union would lead to its demise in 1928.

Fleming also read *The Crisis*, the NAACP's monthly, as well as the Urban League's *Opportunity*, *The Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender*. He wrote that "the *Defender's* news section was filled with fiery editorials denouncing discrimination and segregation, plus lynchings and other forms of brutality."¹ He also read *The Nation*, *The New Republic* and *Harpers*. Studying these publications was essentially how he received his journalism education. He was attracted to the serious presentation of social problems. These publications changed his views about society. He noted that the *Chicago Defender's* watchdog editorial policy of waging a battle for equality of opportunity was in the tradition of the activism of the Black press. These editorials and articles helped him find his own voice.²

He was encouraged to go back to school by the widow of the editor of the *Pacific Outlook*, one of the few Black weekly newspapers published in San Francisco. He began political science courses at Chico State when he was 24. In 1932 the tuition was \$10 a semester plus \$2 for student fees. At the height of the Depression it was still too steep for him, so after three semesters he returned to the Bay area.

In the early 30s Fleming began working as an unpaid writer for *The Spokesman*, a progressive paper in San Francisco. They called it the little People's World after the *Communist Daily*. The paper supported a general strike which shut down the waterfronts all over the west coast. One night their offices were vandalized by a vigilante group and the paper folded soon after.

Fleming had a brief stint working for the WPA's Federal Writer's Project, then worked briefly as a columnist for the *Oakland Tribune*. At that time he was the only Black journalist to work for a daily newspaper on the West Coast. He also had a radio show, "Negroes in the News." In the 40s he sought a job in the mainstream media. The editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle* claimed "we don't have enough money to pay you."³ Fleming

responded, "I just want the same pay as the other reporters." He only inquired one time. Twenty years later, in 1962 the *San Francisco Examiner* became the first daily paper in the Bay area to hire a Black reporter, Ben Williams, who had worked earlier with Fleming. He went on to become the first Black television reporter in the Bay area.

Fleming's big break came in 1944 when he was hired as founding editor for *The Reporter*, at that time the only Black paper in San Francisco. There was a massive migration of Blacks to the Bay area to work in the wartime shipyards, but there were no Black policemen, firemen or teachers.

Fleming recalls that the paper was accepted right away by the Black community because the daily press ignored their existence. His columns addressed Jim Crow hiring practices and seemed to attract the attention of the draft board. Although he was the sole supporter of his by then invalid mother, and two years over the draft age of 35, his deferments were cancelled. He served in the Army for seven months.

Fleming returned as the editor of *The Reporter*. The newer *Sun* newspaper changed hands thanks to being won in a poker game. The two merged to become the *Sun-Reporter*. Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, Fleming's longtime friend, was editor and publisher. Dr. Goodlett was a child psychologist and pediatrician. Under their leadership the newspaper actively took stands fighting for civil rights, fair employment, housing laws and world peace. Their community room was a stop-over for Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Dick Gregory, the Black Panthers and prominent local political figures. It was a training ground for many emerging journalists. Goodlett positioned the paper to be on the forefront of many issues. He was an integral part of delegations to conferences in Sweden, Russia, East Berlin and Ghana; he formulated a world disarmament plan and spoke out against the war in Viet Nam and urged his friend Martin Luther King to do the same. Goodlett actively opposed nuclear weapons. Fleming recalled that

Goodlett launched a “steady assault on racism, whatever form it took and became known as a solver of social problems.”⁴

The *San Francisco Sun Reporter* is still in print and is one of the longest running African American newspapers in the country. Throughout the 53 years that Fleming spent writing for the paper, he produced hundreds of columns. A series of eight columns, titled *Reflections of Black History*, provided a personal glimpse of major notables from Duke Ellington and Thurgood Marshall to Paul Robeson and Langston Hughes. This syndicated column is posted on the Internet and was sent to more than 200 African American papers nationwide under the auspices of the National Newspaper Publishers Association. Fleming’s columns were often critical of the American government and its policies. In his simple, direct style he continued to give his opinion regarding the state of Black America.

When Fleming was 90, he self-published his first book, a collection of stories from his boyhood in Florida and Harlem. In 1997, Fleming retired as Executive Editor of the *Sun-Reporter*. He still wrote editorials and a weekly column for the paper from his home. The Honorable Barbara Lee of California recognized Thomas C. Fleming on the House floor as an icon in the history of African American journalism.

Although he claims no regrets about spending his entire career with the Black press, he felt he had no choice. When asked if things are different now, he still recognized the pervasiveness of racism, poverty and joblessness. He has said that the role of the Black press was to attain first class citizenship and be a watchdog for injustices.

* * *

When Samuel Yette was asked to describe his writing style, he said he wrote “the way I feel it and see it. I do a lot of research and I don’t say anything I cannot prove to a reasonable person.” He adds that he has not been successfully challenged on anything that he has offered as fact.⁵ His focus for the past 50 years has been on the survival and well-

being of African American people.

Born in the segregated south in Harriman, Tennessee, during the Depression, Yette was the youngest of 12 children. His family valued education so much that at the age of 12 or 13 each would leave home—going to another city or state living with any family that would allow them to work and go to school. Yette graduated from Tennessee State University with a degree in English and then served in the Air Force during the Korean War. He completed the Master’s program in Journalism and Government at Indiana University. Despite bigotry on campus he wrote for the school paper. He returned to Tennessee to teach. In the mid-fifties he worked as sports writer for the *Chattanooga Times*, then as a radio sportscaster.

One of his earliest assignments was when he was teamed with photographer Gordon Parks as a special correspondent for a four-part series on civil rights that appeared in *Life Magazine*. This was such a memorable assignment that the late Gordon Parks devoted a chapter to it in his memoir *From a Hungry Heart*, and they both recount it in the video *Half Past Autumn*.

They were to do a story that showed the day-to-day plight of Black people in rural Alabama. With the consent of a struggling sharecropper, Willie Causey, and his wife, they stayed with them for a week, sleeping at night on their porch. Parks and Yette just barely escaped with their lives and the Causey’s were run off of their land. Yette knew that their *Life* escort was actually an informant for the Citizens Council, which shared the same beliefs as the KKK. It was a story that gave Yette an appreciation for the power of photography. As his career evolved he would not only write but shoot pictures as well.

Yette went on to be a reporter for the *Afro-American* newspapers in Baltimore and Washington, DC. For two years he was Associate Editor of *Ebony*. He became the first Black reporter for the *Dayton Journal Herald* in 1962. During that time his assignments included the Montgomery bus boycott and the

1963 March on Washington. In fact, Yette has stated that he and other Black journalists saw no difference between themselves and civil rights activists. They considered themselves on the front end of the movement. Soon after, he had a stint as the Peace Corps' press liaison for Executive Director Sargent Shriver's visit to Africa in 1963. He was then appointed as Special Assistant for Civil Rights to the Director of the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity.

In 1968 he returned to his first love when he became the first Black Washington correspondent for *Newsweek*. He covered urban violence and the civil rights movement. But at the same time, unbeknownst to his editors and even close friends, he gathered research and wrote *The Choice: The Issue of Black Survival in America*. He saw a relationship between the Viet Nam war, the War on Poverty and African American survival. He found that officials in high places were laying the groundwork for a final solution to the race issue in this country. The implications of documents, agencies and actions were laid out and pointed to genocide in the making. He called attention to the strengthening of the executive branch that took place under Richard Nixon. He sounded the alarm regarding wiretapping, no knock searches and detention camps that were supported by the administration. It was an explosive expose that won awards but also cost him his job. It was the focus of a six-year court battle with the magazine. *The Choice* is recognized as a classic of political literature, and it has been used in college classrooms throughout the country.

Sam Yette went on to use his camera in China and the Soviet Union, and accompanied the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to Lebanon in 1979 to meet with Yassar Arafat. He taught journalism at Howard University, calling that his greatest triumph. He has written commentaries for many newspapers and magazines. He founded Cottage Books, his own publishing company, with the goal of making top quality books and his own posters. Now he is in con-

trol of the rights for *The Choice*, which is in its 14th edition.

In columns Yette takes stands for affirmative action, strict separation of church and state, and self-reliance. He has written against abortion, the linking of genes and violence, as well as prayer in public schools. Since 2005 he has been teaching at Knoxville College, in Knoxville Tennessee, as a writer in residence.

Yette is asked to speak quite often. In 2001 in a speech at the University of Maryland he spoke about the "Talented Tenth One Century Later." As he detailed the similarities between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois he said "my wish is to have it emphatically declared that the controllers of this society did not intend for either of these men to succeed."⁶ This could have been said about both Thomas C. Fleming and Samuel Yette. They came from poor economic conditions that would challenge anyone. They learned their craft by any means necessary—whether through self-education or a formal education in discriminating schools. At times during their careers, they were threatened but they never turned back. They know the history of their forefathers and know that it gives meaning to the present. They come from a tradition in which an African American journalist is an activist, willing to be on the forefront. By example, they influence other journalists by sheer writing day in and day out.

Yette said that he was concerned "about the survival of my people...simply whether we love each other enough to develop a survival strategy."⁷ Both long time journalists Fleming and Yette demonstrated through the length and breadth of their careers an unwavering commitment to their profession and their people.

Notes

1. Quoted in "*The Free Press: Speaking Truth to Power, Reflections on Black History*." "The Black Press in the 1920's", part 16, January 7, 1998. This

was one entry in a lengthy series of syndicated historical reflections by Thomas C. Fleming.

2. From another entry in the above series, *Reflections on Black History*, "Black Communists In the 1930's." Available at [www.pww.org/past-weeks-1999/Black%](http://www.pww.org/past-weeks-1999/Black%20)
3. From "The Black Press in the 1920's."
4. Fleming's recollection of Goodlett's role as a pioneer Black journalist is recounted in *Reflections on Black History*, part 77, "Carlton B. Goodlett, Champion of the People," June 14, 1999.
5. Sherry Stone, "You aint' heard nothing 'Yette': Featuring a spicy new columnist," *The Philadelphia Tribune*, July 18, 1995, p. 8.
6. This excerpt from a lecture titled "The Talented Tenth One Century Later" was obtained from *The Retriever-News*, November 21, 2001. Available at www.zoominfo.com/directory/Yette
7. An internet entry quotes Yette regarding a column he wrote on the 100th anniversary of the Atlanta Compromise. Available at www.dcbmaa.org/whatsnew/announcements/em20030214.htm



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Re-examining the Legacy of Joel Chandler Harris

During the February 2007 conference “Communication and Social Change: Advancing Civil and Human Rights through Media and Communication Arts” hosted by the Center for Excellence in Communication Arts here at Clark Atlanta University, scholars, journalists, students and community members gathered for an engaging discussion about the legacy of Joel Chandler Harris’ literary and journalistic writings. In re-examining Harris’ legacy, the dialogue presented a unique opportunity to share updated and innovative perspectives of Harris’ literary and journalistic writings, and to cultivate the burgeoning interest in African-American folklore and storytelling and contemporary forms of artistic expression. Three of the session presenters, Lain Shakespeare, executive director of Wren’s Nest museum, Herbert Eichelberger, Associate Professor of Mass Media Arts, Clark Atlanta University, and Cheryl Renee Gooch, Associate Professor of Mass Media Arts, Clark Atlanta University, expound further here on the enduring impact and relevance of Harris’ writing, both to community-building efforts and media scholarship.

The Legacy of Joel Chandler Harris through the Eyes of a Twenty-Four Year-Old

Lain Shakespeare

My perspective of Joel Chandler Harris is pretty unique. You see, Joel Chandler Harris is my great-great-great grandfather. We call him Uncle Joe for short.

In addition, I happen to be the executive director of Harris’ home, the Wren’s Nest. The Wren’s Nest is Atlanta’s oldest house museum and, before I arrived, was something of a neglected old-school cultural institution.

Upon accepting the job, I didn’t know much about Harris, except for the Br’er Rabbit stories I grew up listening to and the few short stories of his that I read in my African American literature class in college. Nearly a full year later, I’ve immersed myself in Harris, the African American oral tradition, and the controversy that entwines both. Perhaps my “unique perspective” sounds more like “biased perspective,” but I like to think I’ve kept a clear head.

Just last week I was reading a book in our office: *The Natural History of Make-Believe* by John Goldthwaite.¹ The author devotes several dozen pages to Harris and Br’er Rabbit. Near the beginning he says:

Harris’s genius had been to recognize virtue in men and story and to succumb to it. What he rescued of the oral tradition he reproduced faithfully; not one of the tales is whitewashed with whimsy or bathos or cheap effects (a fate that would catch up with them, however, in Walt Disney’s *Song of the South*). Harris retold them according to the best tellings he had heard, from men he had troubled himself to know since boyhood. (p. 255)

Goldthwaite continues his praise of Harris for many pages beyond this one, and more or less credits him with revolutionizing children’s literature. Of Harris’ first publication of Br’er Rabbit stories, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*, Goldthwaite says: “It is irrefutably the central event in the making of modern children’s story” (p. 256).

Aside from passionate visitors at the Wren’s Nest and articles from the early 20th century, this is the first total, formal approbation of Harris and his works I’ve read. Most who venture to compliment Harris do so with skepticism or hesitation. Even those hesitant compliments are relatively few and far between. Usually, I encounter Harris detractors who tend to focus on a few key points. Their most frequently cited complaints are:

1. Harris used the slur “tar baby” in his most famous story.
2. *Song of the South* is a racist film.
3. Harris used the highly racist and stereotypical Uncle Remus to tell the stories in racist and stereotypical dialect.
4. Joel Chandler Harris stole the Br’er Rabbit stories from Blacks.

These four complaints are widespread and have more or less sunk Joel Chandler Harris in the eyes of the average (and above-average) American.

The downfall of the Harris legacy has been remarkably precipitous. Between 1880 and 1950, Harris was one of the most beloved authors in the United States and abroad. In the wake of the Civil Rights movement, however, Harris has become a name few people recognize. Don’t even think of asking anyone under the age of 40 if they know who he is. There are more than a few reasons for the fall, but I believe the heart of the matter is complaint number one—the tar baby.

In “The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story,” Br’er Rabbit encounters a small creature made of tar along the side of the road. Br’er Rabbit believes that the creature is alive, says hello, but does not receive an answer. Br’er Rabbit repeats his greeting, and the tar baby doesn’t say anything. Eventually, Br’er Rabbit loses his cool, punches and kicks the tar baby, and gets stuck in the mess.

As it turns out, the tar baby is a trap contrived by Br’er Fox, the on-again off-again sworn enemy of Br’er Rabbit. Only by reverse psychology does Br’er Rabbit escape, outwitting the Fox who throws Br’er Rabbit right back where he came from: the ostensibly prickly Briar Patch. As a metaphor for a children’s story, the tar baby is just about perfect. It’s a sticky situation that only becomes stickier when Br’er Rabbit acts with force instead of using his head. The only way to become unstuck, the only way to gain control is through his wits.

Many critics, myself included, make the connection between Br’er Rabbit and African

Americans struggling to survive slavery and, after, Reconstruction. After all, the tar baby story was one told on plantations by slaves, obviously continually oppressed and with little hope of permanent escape. There’s little question as to who their protagonist represents.

More highfalutin critics take this assumption several steps forward. Br’er Rabbit represents Blacks, yes, but the tar baby represents a mirror image of Br’er Rabbit. He’s a Civil War era reflection of the Narcissus myth. The difference is, where Narcissus falls in love with his reflection, Br’er Rabbit is disgusted by the inability of the tar baby to adhere to social mores. Both get what’s coming to them, but Br’er Rabbit keeps his wits about him long enough to escape, and live to battle Br’er Fox for another day. This is all pretty rich for a children’s story! Yet many modern-day detractors simply see this: the term “tar baby” is Black and diminutive, so the implication must be disparaging.

I’m sure someone somewhere has even called a Black person a “tar baby.” At least, that’s what it says when I look it up in the dictionary. I certainly don’t want to imply that racial slurs are permissible in the least, but I am concerned about where we draw the line between confused convenience and racially charged epithet. The fact that Harris is often condemned because someone might have borrowed a phrase for ill many years later is a little disturbing. Even more disturbing is that Harris himself borrowed the phrase from Black storytellers. The resulting negative connotation seems remarkably and ironically unwarranted.

This particular confusion reminds me of *Song of the South*, complaint number two. The film is controversial, to say the least, and provides fodder for those who prefer revisionist history. Disney produced the adaptation of some of Joel Chandler Harris’ stories in 1946. One writer quit working on the script, contending that the presentation was disrespectful to Blacks. James Baskett, the actor who played Uncle Remus, was not allowed to stay in the same hotel as the white cast during the

film's opening ceremonies in Atlanta. Disney has not released the film on video or DVD in the United States, and pulled the film internationally in 2001.

At the Wren's Nest we display exactly two pieces of *Song of the South* memorabilia: a newspaper article from 1946 detailing the release and a Japanese Laserdisc version of the film. Many visitors are confused about which came first, the stories (released in 1880) or the film (released in 1946). Usually, I answer their question by asking them another: "Have you heard of Pearl Harbor?" And of course they have. "What about Pearl Harbor starring Ben Affleck?" They've heard of this too. One is reality, the other is the film version, and I don't think the comparison is too far-fetched.

While the film is grounded in the stories written by Joel Chandler Harris, the tone, presentation, and racial implications of the film are largely irrelevant to Harris' work. They are the work of Disney. Goldthwaite implies that *Song of the South* is rather "white-washed with whimsy or bathos or cheap effects" (p. 256), and I'd agree with him on all points but the last (though I did have to look up the word "bathos").

As for complaints two and three, these are a little less Black and white, and deserving of much more in depth observation than I can offer here. Regarding complaint number three, the fact that Joel Chandler Harris employed Uncle Remus as a narrator is totally true. That Uncle Remus is an inherently racist and stereotypical creation is not. While the protagonist of the Br'er Rabbit stories is indeed Br'er Rabbit, he is often a kind of anti-hero—the trickster who doesn't always do the right thing. Uncle Remus, however, is the real protagonist of the stories. His wit and wisdom are clearly revered by the writer. If the uplifting depiction of Uncle Remus, the wisest character in the stories, is somehow racist, perhaps I'm missing the point. Look no further than the very first story: "Uncle Remus Initiates the Little Boy." A high school student recently pointed out to me that the word

"initiates" is the most important word in that sentence; Uncle Remus has some knowledge to instill, and the process is a serious endeavor. While I'm no expert, the idea that a Black character had something (or everything) to teach a white character in the 1880s is, in fact, revolutionary.

Finally, the fourth complaint—that Joel Chandler Harris stole the stories from Blacks—is probably the most "true" of the lot. That said, it's still pretty far from it. Harris heard the Br'er Rabbit stories from Blacks, wrote the stories down, and became an international sensation almost overnight as a result. He even made the stories his own, stylistically speaking. At the same time, however, Harris devoted himself to researching and recording the speech of the storytellers around him. The different characters in his tales—Uncle Remus and Daddy Jack, for example—speak wildly different dialects that have been painstakingly distinguished and respected. Harris never claimed to have written these stories, and he continually gave props to the storytellers who told the stories best that influenced his writing, and that shaped his life growing up on a plantation. Really, it's not so different from a contemporary hip-hop artist sampling Marvin Gaye or Al Green out of respect and admiration in the spirit of entertainment.

Of course, there's much more to consider. My comments are by no means exhaustive, and I don't pretend to have all the answers. I just happen to be one of the few people under the age of 40 who has had the privilege to read Harris and judge for myself. I encourage you to do the same.

Note

1. Goldthwaite, J. (1996). *The natural history of make-believe: A guide to the principal works of Britain, Europe, and America*. New York: Oxford University Press.



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Reflections on a Tale of Uncle Remus: Can Uncle Remus Be Seen as More Than a Whimsical Storyteller?

Herbert L. Eichelberger

Thinking back to a time some fifty years ago, the main character in the Walt Disney classic *Song of the South* (1946) occupies a special place in Hollywood lore. It is one of the earliest uses of the mixture of live action characters and animation. It also struck a sensitive nerve of displeasure, a cringe factor thing, if you will. Its uneasy presence lay beneath the Technicolor images that danced across the screen.

The greatest point of displeasure for many Blacks is use of the Tar Baby image, which some may see as a metaphor for the Black race. In Joel Chandler Harris' print it may work, however, on the Hollywood screen it's a different story. Uncle Remus, as character, is the basis of this reflective thought.

What was *Song of the South* really about? Was it really about Zip-Piddy-Du-Dah or was its intent to convey deeper meaning? Far be it from me to posit an interpretation that is not there, but linger with that notion for a moment.

From a perspective not privy to the social changes that would come some decades ahead, Uncle Remus represents a character of unique circumstances. He was, in retrospect, a teacher, a witty and sagely character who projected a deep sense of security. He was, in fact, the purveyor of great wisdom to all with whom he made contact.

The story opens with the family in route to grandma's house. The family consisted of mom, dad and a young son. They are traveling to grandma's for a reason not revealed to the audience; however, a cloud of potential disfunctionality lingers within the carriage. It is somewhat apparent that the child is caught in the middle of a situation involving mom and dad. Shortly after arrival at grandma's, the

father is anxious to make a quick exit back to town. This action disturbs the young son to the point where he attempts to run away if he cannot be with his dad. And further, dad is dead set on not staying with mom and him at grandma's.

In a desperate attempt to be with his father, the little boy runs away. As fate would have it, he runs right to where Uncle Remus is spinning one of his Br'er Rabbit tales. While with Uncle Remus, he is given some good counsel on life and the order of things manifested through acts and misbehaviors of Br'er Rabbit. The child, in the secure hands of Uncle Remus, is fetched home to mom and grandma. It is, however, at this juncture where factions of a present-day audience may well view actions as potential flashpoints for racial discontent. It is here where the good and kindly Uncle Remus is chided by the white mom as if he (Uncle Remus) had something to do with the little boy's actions (running away) and is not the little boy's savior.

Uncle Remus speaks to the point in a matter of fact response: *The boy needs his father to be here with him.* This could be considered as speaking out of turn for the time in a historical context. But grandma amens Remus' assertion with a wink and a nod. As to say: *Your point, Uncle Remus, is well-taken. However, your move is much too forward for the times.*

When Remus asks the grandma, "Are you mad at me?" she assures him that she is not. He seems less marginalized.

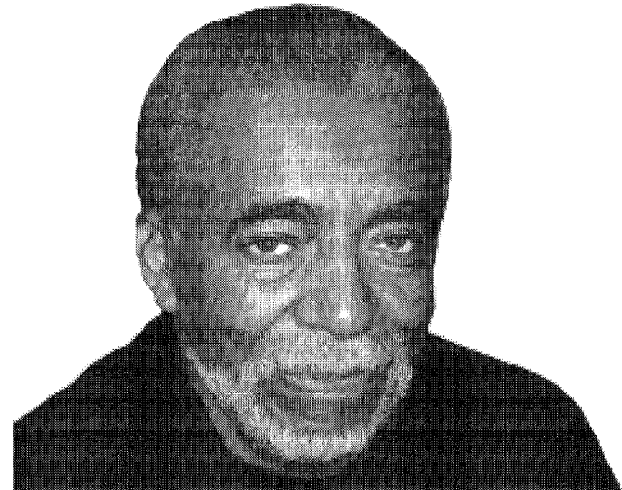
Let us not forget that the time frame is the mid-forties. Joel Chandler Harris is dealing with sensitive stuff. Admittedly, this is a point in isolation but it is significant and salient to a discussion of how during this early period, at least on the Hollywood screen, people of different races sought to deal with, and, in

some instances begin breaking down the many barriers that served to thwart communication.

Although the film displayed, for example, the use of dialect with respect to the black characters, the form and repair of cloth-

ing worn by the children and subtle atmospherics, these were the circumstances of a Hollywood film industry attempting to bring to life the 1880s from the written vision of one of this nation's finest writers. The only other alternative was not to make the film.

The larger question for which I ponder is: Should Uncle Remus forever remain locked in the mold of kindly ole storyteller extolling the carefree and often arrogance attitude of a Br'er Rabbit attempting and in most cases outfoxing Br'er Fox? Or, on the other hand, is his character to be seen as a metaphor for a much broader, deeper specter of conscious inquiry?



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Mowing Down Prejudices That Rattle in the Wind: Joel Chandler Harris' Antiracist Agenda

Cheryl Renee Gooch

During an initial visit to Wren's Nest, I observed something rather remarkable: four color sketches of Black children reading and learning to spell hang on the master bedroom wall. Joel Chandler Harris commissioned these sketches during the 1880s and placed them on the wall facing his bed into which he retired every night. Upon seeing this, I had an epiphany: my interpretation of Harris' legacy was limited and warranted further exploration. These endearing images of unmistakably Black children convey something about Harris' belief in the power of the written word--be it literature or journalism--to transform and liberate minds, Black minds included.

A fascinating aspect of this study of Harris' work is the revelation that the themes and interpretations of his famed Uncle Remus stories were not always considered controversial. In fact, Black educators and scholars associated with the Atlanta University Center¹ once endorsed the stories as American literature masterpieces. James Weldon Johnson (1922), the renowned writer and promoter of African-American arts (also an 1894 graduate of Atlanta University), said that the "Uncle Remus stories constitute the greatest body of folklore that America has produced," while Stella Brewer Brookes (1950), who taught English at Clark College for 45 years, lauded Harris for his insights into Black folklore and language.

Equally revealing is that as early as 1878 Harris espoused a New South editorial ideology with which he attempted to redress racial prejudice. In a well-known and frequently cited editorial, Harris wrote:

An editor must have a purpose.... I shudder when I think of the opportu-

nities the editors in Georgia are allowing to slip by... never was a time when an editor with a purpose could accomplish more for his state and country than just as present. What a legacy for one's conscience to know that one has been instrumental in mowing down the old prejudices that rattle in the wind like weeds. ²

Harris never supported integration, held some of the racial prejudices of his day, and yet advocated racial justice for Blacks when other white editors did not. During his tenure as associate editor and lead editorial writer at the *Atlanta Constitution* (from 1876 to 1900) he wrote and contributed to editorials that denounced racism, condemned lynching as barbaric, advocated voting rights and economic and educational advancement for Blacks. In particular, Harris had an enduring view of education as the primary means of uplifting formerly enslaved people and their children (Gooch, 2007).

During the period following the Civil War and through the 1890s, the majority white press (both southern and northern) debated, among other things, the implications of educating Blacks. At the same time, historically Black universities evolved and promoted the importance of higher education and social research in uplifting the race. Harris took a keen interest in the teaching and scholarly advances occurring at Atlanta University, which from 1897 sponsored a series of studies under the direction of sociologist W.E. B. DuBois that addressed issues affecting almost every aspect of Black life (including morality, urbanization, business, college education, church, and crime). Increasingly, DuBois was regarded as a respected authority on the race issue (commonly referred to as the "Negro Problem"), and Harris often cited DuBois' work in *Atlanta Constitution* editorials.

Similarly, *The Bulletin of Atlanta University*, a publication that contained commentaries on political and social issues, reprinted numerous Harris editorials citing the

University's work in uplifting the Black race. Of particular note are the *Bulletin* reprints of the *Atlanta Constitution's* February 14, 1894 editorial heralding Atlanta University's excellent "teachers, pupils and their progress" in solving the problem of colored education ("Boston and Atlanta"), and the *Constitution's* January 1898 editorial referring to the informative nature of DuBois' studies of Negro life and how such inquiries provide the best opportunities for understanding the conditions under which Negroes live ("A Study of Negro Life in the South").

Following his retirement from the *Atlanta Constitution* in 1900, Harris' commentaries on the Negro condition, particularly education, increasingly were sought for inclusion in nationally distributed publications. In 1901 he wrote an article for the *New York Journal* titled "How Education Will Solve the So-called Negro Problem" in which he challenged a commonly asserted view that it was useless to try to educate Blacks beyond their limited capacity. He noted:

It has been said that the negro race is not yet in a position to be benefited by higher education...it by no means follows that all the work that has been done in that direction has been thrown away.... It would be unjust to the negro race to make comparisons, but it is fair to say that a good deal of the higher education that is bestowed on the white race is worse than thrown away, if we are to view the matter from a purely practical and commercial point of view. You hear little or nothing at all from those who believe in education for its own sake. They have been crowded to the wall, and whatever their hopes and beliefs may be, they sing very small. (Harris, 1918, p. 501)

On many points, Harris' views coincided with those of well-known progressive advocates of higher education for Blacks. Note for example that in his concluding remarks for

the Atlanta University-sponsored *College-Bred Negro* study published in 1900, DuBois stated that industrial training and liberal arts education were "supplementary and mutually helpful in the great end of solving the Negro problem" (p. 114), and that "thrift and skill among the masses" as well as "thought and culture among the leaders" provided for overall educational development," as "the object of all true education is not to make men carpenters—but to make carpenters men" (p. 114). Atlanta University chaplain and later president Edward Ware in the January 1903 *Bulletin of Atlanta University* referenced Joel Chandler Harris' advocacy of education for Blacks in response to more pessimistic views on the issue. Ware wrote:

I wish to call attention to what Mr. Joel Chandler Harris of the *Atlanta Constitution* has said with reference to education of negroes: 'the solace they will be able to receive there from and the service they will be able to perform for their kind will more than repay the leakages and losses...' (p. 3)

Ware, a white man, agreed with Harris that educated, Christian Black men and women such as those enrolled at Atlanta University were "needed by their kind to fulfill the service of wise and conservative leadership" (p. 3). In a 1904 *Saturday Evening Post* article, Harris again aggressively countered the view that Blacks were incapable of assimilating knowledge acquired through formal education. He argued that while slow, the educational process would inevitably bear fruit.

Uncle Remus Magazine (established in 1906) is another example of Harris' journalistic efforts to undermine racism. He and his son Julian, who would advocate social justice throughout most of his journalism career, outlined an editorial philosophy that purported to be "broadly and patriotically American, and genuinely representative of the best thought of the whole country...." (Harris, 1918, p. 524). The magazine, they asserted, would:

... have nothing to do with the provinciality so prevalent in the North, the East, the South, and the West--the provinciality that stands for ignorance and blind prejudice that represents narrow views and an unhappy congestion of ideas. Neighbor-knowledge is perhaps more important in some respects than most of the knowledge imparted in the school.... (Harris, p. 525)

The year 2006 marked the 60th anniversary of Walt Disney's release of *Song of the South*, once a hit movie but now shrouded in controversy attributable, in part, to its outmoded portrayals of Black-White relationships. Yet, the resurgence of journalistic and scholarly interest in Harris' work affords an opportunity to re-examine his legacy³ and the records of his thoughts on improving race relations.

Notes

1. The Atlanta University is the largest consortium of private, historically Black institutions in the country, and consists of Clark Atlanta University, which was formed in 1988 by the consolidation of two historically Black institutions (Atlanta University and Clark College), Spelman College, Morehouse College, Morris Brown College, and the Interdenominational Theological Center.
2. Harris' editorial "An Editor Must Have a Purpose" appeared in the *Sunday Gazette* on October 5, 1878. The un-numbered clipping is contained in the Joel Chandler Harris papers housed in the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Library at Emory University.
3. See Auchmutey, J. In search of uncle remus. *Atlanta-Journal Constitution*. Retrieved May 30, 2007, from <http://www.accessatlanta.com/arts/con->

[tent/movies/stories/2006/11/08/1112ARRemus.html](http://www.accessatlanta.com/arts/con-tent/movies/stories/2006/11/08/1112ARRemus.html). See also Brasch, W. M. (2000). *Brer rabbit, uncle remus, and the 'cornfield journalist': The tale of Joel Chandler Harris*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, which presents an engaging study of Harris' journalism. See also Gooch, C.R. (2007). *Solving the Negro Problem: Social Commentary in the Journalistic Writings of Joel Chandler Harris. Communication and Social Change, 1*, 55-70, which points to Harris' consistent efforts to present balanced discussions of race relations in general, and in particular, the value of education and voting rights for Blacks.

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