Emancipation's Daughters

Published by Duke University Press

Emancipation's Daughters: Reimagining Black Femininity and the National Body.

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While my first book focused on the role of the U.S. South in nationalizing ideologies of black masculinity, this project builds on it by looking at the role of the region in nationalizing models of black femininity. Cathy N. Davidson encouraged this book’s potential from its early stages of development. I am also thankful to the scholars Houston A. Baker Jr.; his wife, Charlotte Pierce-Baker; and Valerie Smith for encouraging this study from the very beginning.

I appreciate the enthusiasm and feedback I received from colleagues and students when I presented an early version of my chapter on Condoleezza Rice at the University of California, Davis, in the English Department’s Scholar’s Symposium in 2008. At UC Davis, I especially want to thank Patricia A. Turner (now at UCLA), Clarence Major, and Clarence Walker. I also shared aspects of this project when I was hosted at UC Riverside’s Center for Ideas and Society in 2008 by the late scholar Emory Elliott, and as an invited speaker at the conference on the hemispheric South at UC Santa Barbara in 2011, which was coordinated by Carl Gutiérrez-Jones and the late Clyde Woods.

This study continued to move forward in new and exciting directions once I joined the faculty at Cornell University in the Africana Studies and Research Center in 2008. I appreciate Salah M. Hassan’s and Grant Farred’s reading of my early work on Michelle Obama. Robert L. Harris’s historical insights, along with his work as the national historian of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and contributions in the development of the Martin Luther King Jr. national memorial in the capital, added important perspective. I have valued and learned from dialogues with James Turner, Locksley Edmondson, Anne Adams, and Beverly Blackshear as veteran Africana colleagues. Moreover, I am thankful for dialogues with Margaret Washington, N’Dri Assie-Lumumba, and Carole Boyce-Davies on black feminism and womanism. Travis Lars Gosa passed along a rich ensemble of hip-hop songs dedicated to Michelle Obama. Furthermore, I have also valued Judith Byfield, Noliwe Rooks, Gerard Aching, Oneka LaBennett, C. Riley Snorton, Olufemi Taiwo, Siba Grovogui, Kevin Gaines, Adeolu Ademoyo, and Happiness Bulugu as colleagues in Africana. I extend my sincere thanks for the administrative staff support provided by
Treva Levine, Renee Milligan, and Donna Pinnisi. I have appreciated the support, collegiality, and insights of Kenneth McClane on campus in the African American literature field, along with those of Margo Crawford, Dagmawi Woubshet, Mukoma Wa Ngugi, Naminata Diabate, Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon, Eric Cheyfitz, Shirley Samuels, and George Hutchinson. I am thankful for dialogues on this project with colleagues in the brilliant Mellon Diversity Group in 2016–17, especially Debra Castillo, Ella Diaz, Bobby Smith, Sara Warner, Anna Bartel, Gerald Torres, and Ed Baptist. I have also valued insights from Carol Kammen, Ken Glover, Russell Rickford, and Adrienne Clay. In 2017, it was an honor to share work from the conclusion of this study in the Rabinor Lecture in American Studies. I also benefited from the opportunity to dialogue with Lauren Berlant about this project when she was a scholar in Cornell’s School for Criticism and Theory in 2012.

On the journey to this book’s completion, I conducted research in the archives of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke University, along with archival materials and institutions related to Rosa Parks and Mary McLeod Bethune. At Cornell, this project has been enabled by access to resources at the Cornell Law School, the Olin Library, and the John Henrik Clarke Library in the asrc, as well as the support of Eric Acree, Sharon Powers, and Saah Nue Quigee. I thank my undergraduate and graduate students for dialogues in the classroom and beyond. I appreciate the work of Marshall Smith, Kristen Wright, and Lauren Siegel as research assistants for this project. I extend my deepest thanks to Courtney Berger at Duke University Press, a dream editor, as well as my anonymous reviewers.

On February 4, 2013, I was honored to be the invited speaker for Rosa Parks’s gala one hundredth birthday celebration at Troy University’s Rosa Parks Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, on the program with Mayor Todd Strange and other officials, and to be invited by postmaster Donald Snipes to participate in the city’s historic unveiling of a postage stamp in her honor. I also gave extended versions of this talk, “Rosa Parks @100,” at Cornell and Georgia State universities, with the latter coordinated by Gina Caison, who put together a rich seminar for me with Akinyele Umoja. In 2012, I was delighted to be an invited speaker in the English Department at the University of Pittsburgh in the lecture series New Directions in African American Literature and Culture, coordinated by William Scott. In 2014, I was hosted in the Critical Speaker Series in the English Department at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, which was coordinated by David Baker. I drew on this book in my talk
in the Arts and Humanities Colloquium at Colgate University as the 2019–20 Olive B. O’Connor Visiting Distinguished Chair in English and appreciate the feedback and intellectual support that I received during my semester there. I have also presented sections from this book at conferences and professional meetings. I thank GerShun Avilez for his generous feedback, along with Honorée Jeffers, Géraldine Chouard, Anne Crémieux, Steven Thrasher, Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, Rebecca Wanzo, Anna Everett, Koritha Mitchell, Daryl Scott, Tara White, Cecily Jones, and Suzette Spencer.

On the home front, I am tremendously grateful for the support and insights provided by Georgette Norman, founding director of the Rosa Parks Museum in Montgomery, as I have developed this project, including access to exhibitions and archives at the museum. This aspect of my project, as a Montgomery native, feels particularly close to home. That civil rights heroine Rosa Parks and my great-aunt Johnnie Rebecca Carr, a longtime leader of the Montgomery Improvement Association, were best friends is background that has inspired me deeply as I have researched Mrs. Parks. Similarly, I am thankful for the support that my research on the civil rights movement received from the late actor Nick Latour, the son of E. D. Nixon. I am grateful to a dear family friend, the late Alma Burton Johnson, for sharing resources with me related to Nick and his father—her uncle. Mary Frances Whitt, who was mentored in the Youth Council led by Rosa Parks and sponsored by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), also shared reflections, archival resources, and insights that I have valued in developing this project. I am thankful and feel blessed to have Rev. Robert Graetz and his wife, Jeannie Graetz, as my family’s neighbors in Montgomery. I also thank Mathew Knowles, another fellow Alabamian, for his support of my Beyoncé Nation course at Cornell and encouragement of my research in Beyoncé studies.

Florida has been my grandmother Emma Lou Jenkins Richardson’s second home, and it was beyond wonderful to discover that she and my grandfather Joe Richardson are both listed in the state’s 1945 census. I enjoyed her memories and vivid stories about working with the National Youth Administration as a young woman, later in the navy yard in Pensacola, Florida, during World War II, as my grandfather worked in construction building barracks, and then moving on to Daytona Beach, Florida, where he helped to build beachfront homes. That she describes having seen figures like Mary McLeod Bethune in person during their time there, as well as First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, brought the history related to these figures to life for me and inspired me to learn more about it.
I deeply appreciate my conversation with Elaine Smith on Mary McLeod Bethune. Similarly, meeting Bettye Collier-Thomas, who served as the founding executive director of the Bethune Museum and Archives, national historic site, from 1977 to 1989 and worked tirelessly within the National Council of Negro Women, inspired me as I began work on this project. My essay “Monumentalizing Mary McLeod Bethune and Rosa Parks in the Post–Civil Rights Era,” which draws on both chapters 1 and 2 of this book, is featured in *Phillis: The Journal for Research on African American Women*, the landmark 2013 special issue co-edited by Darlene Clark Hine and Paula Giddings.

David Leverenz offered an encouraging response to an early chapter. Jon Smith read two early chapters of this study. Deborah Barker and Kathryn McKee offered helpful feedback on an early essay. I am thankful for the long-standing support I received from my professors at Spelman, including Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Donna Akiba Sullivan Harper, Gloria Wade-Gayles, A. J. Billingslea, Christine Wick Sizemore, Anne Warner, and June Aldridge. I am also thankful to Karla FC Holloway, Wahneema Lubiano, Richard Powell, C. T. Woods-Powell, Shireen Lewis, and the late Kenny J. Williams. I cherish my longtime friendships with Efua Paul and Denise Ross. I had major surgery in July 2018, on this book’s path to completion; I applaud my primary care physician, Lloyd Darlow; hematologist, Timothy Bael; and surgeon, Michael Randell; along with the medical staff at Emory St. Joseph’s Hospital in Atlanta, for providing such excellent care. I deeply appreciate the spiritual guidance of Rev. Janice Cooper as well as at St. Andrew’s Methodist Church in Sacramento, California; Calvary Baptist Church in Ithaca, New York; and Maggie Street Missionary Baptist Church and Resurrection Catholic Church in Montgomery.

Finally, my family has provided continuing support and encouragement as I have completed this study. I have deeply appreciated the support of my uncle Joseph Richardson; my aunt Pamela R. Garrett; her husband, the Reverend Michael Garrett; my cousins—Keri Smith; Megan Smith-O’Neil; her husband, Patrick O’Neil; Norman Every and Kyrie Joseph Every; and Lamar Landon and Sharon Frazier, along with our extended family. My mother, Joanne Richardson, has cheered on this book from day one and enthusiastically welcomed the various chapter drafts as they have emerged. My grandmother Emma Lou Jenkins Richardson, whose regular requests for updates helped to keep me focused, encouraged me continually to keep moving toward the finish line and was a veritable coach as I worked on this book. I savored the soft and sweet soundtrack she provided with her beautiful singing voice many
days as I worked on the manuscript during my visits home to Montgomery. I have dearly missed her. Regardless of where I have ever lived and traveled, my family gives me the greatest reminders in my life of words that the national heroine of Munchkinland famously immortalized on the cinematic screen in 1939: “There’s no place like home.”