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Whiteness and Feminism: Deja Vu Discourses- Whats Next ?

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WHITENESS AND FEMINISM

Déjà Vu Discourses, What's Next?

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INTRODUCTION

THIS CHAPTER CRITICALLY EXAMINES, and offers viable alternative philosophical and experiential discourse concerning, the traditionally accepted and familiar feminist discourses offered by many "white" women/feminists.[1] Within the confines of this chapter, I will address the problem of whiteness in feminism in a very specific manner: acknowledgment of the "known" and populist version of feminism; the presentation of womanist discourse from the framework of "otherness"; and, the introduction of a *third* womanist/feminist voice grounded in the discourse of transformation.

As I contemplated examining the problem of whiteness in feminism, I was presented with multiple déjà vu discourses in both theory and praxis from white women/feminists and African-American women/womanists. By definition, déjà vu discourses are communicative structures characterized by repetition, stasis and marginalization. The continuation of these déjà vu discourses suggests a legitimation of such discourses, when, in reality, this continuation is not legitimate. This form of déjà vu introduces martinalization as a problematic consequential subtext of these discourses. I examined the ideologies of these multiple déjà vu discourses from a philosophical and historical perspective in two essays: "Racism and Sexism: Twenty-First-Century Challenges for Feminists" and "Transforming Feminist Theory and Practice: Beyond the Politics of Commonalities and Differences to an Inclusive Multicul-

tural Feminist Framework."[2] The same discourses about theory and praxis that white women/feminists expressed during the birth of the twenty-first century, the 1960s, and the 1800s are prevalent today. Likewise, the responding discourses by African-American women/womanists are also the same today as they were in the past. The philosophical and historical analysis I provide addresses standpoints by white feminists about the "whiteness" that binds them in a shared racial identity and racism. It is a racial binding that is often denied by white feminists, but African-American womanist critic bell hooks reminds us that to deny that it exists is comparable to sexist men denying their sexism.[3] The familiar discourses of racism I presented in 1995 and 1998 were déjà vu discourses before 1995 and after 1998.

What's Next? What remains is a *third* womanist/feminist futuristic voice that goes beyond the déjà vu discourses in theory and praxis from both white women/feminists and African-American women/ womanists to an alternate discourse grounded in transformation. This alternate discourse from a *third* womanist/feminist voice considers three positions underlining the ideologies of déjà vu discourses that have persisted to date. These positions are as follows: (1) white women/feminists who are uninformed about "race matters" and other multiple, legitimate differences; (2) white women/feminists who are educated but choose to ignore legitimate alternative discourses; (3) educated white women/feminists who have begun to understand "Other" discourses as valid and African-American women/ womanists who are actively reevaluating their own discourses. I contend these positions are linked to two problems: the message has gone unheard; and, second, when it has been heard, too often it has been misappropriated and subverted. The *third* womanist/feminist voice grounded in the discourse of transformation offers a framework that acknowledges points of intersection when the familiarity of the white woman's discourse crosses over into that of the African-American woman's world—the link truly being gender. Yet, the framework also recognizes overwhelming points that keep women of both races mired within their own destinies. For despite the similarities between the discourses, there are unique and significant differences.

The beginning of this journey to *What's Next?* involves, first, an understanding of the construction of "whiteness." Second, there must be an acknowledgment of the history of feminism, namely white women's feminism. Third, there must be an acknowledgment of the framework of *Otherness* by African-American womanists. Finally, we must consider a framework that positions women as potential agents for engaging transformative behavior.

CONCEPTUALIZING AND CONTEXTUALIZING WHITENESS

Historical and philosophical analyses of whiteness help explain the inequities of our society, the unconstitutional acts of our government, and people's immoral behavior—all of which prevent the realization of a more just world. "Whiteness," according to Ruth Frankenberg, is a social construction, and it may be defined as a set of:

> locations, discourses, and material relations. . . . [These] locations are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and moreover are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination. Naming 'whiteness' displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance.[4]

Frankenberg's analysis of whiteness is supported by others such as George Yancy, who holds that whiteness claims an epistemological and ontological position of absolute authority and superiority. Yancy argues that whiteness represents the universal standard of authority, truth, and absolute power, placing itself at the center, while marginalizing Others, resulting in white privilege and multiple atrocities of racism, elitism, powerlessness, and invisibility for Others:

> Whiteness creates a binary relationship of self-Other, subject-object, dominator-dominated, center-margin, universal-particular, etc. Whiteness arranges these binary terms hierarchically, where the former term is normatively superior to the latter. As the presumed sovereign voice, treating itself as hypernormative and unmarked, whiteness conceals its status as raciated, located and positioned.[5]

Accordingly, whiteness is a position of privilege that assumes the role of a sovereign voice along with the narcissistic and psychological power of whiteness.[6] Often the concept of privilege is a given, with the speaker operating as subject and assigning the role of object to the listener without asking the latter's permission. In the following pages, this assumed position of privilege is often indicative of white women/ feminists' discourse as they attempt to dialogue with Others of their gender.

"Whiteness" also represents race, though whites seldom refer to themselves in racial terms. Part of the reasoning for this social oddity lies within the concept of race itself. Race, like whiteness, can be characterized as a social construction from the minds of America's forefathers. For Frankenberg, "it is a [privileged]'standpoint,' a place from which white people look at themselves, at others, and at society."[7] Because whiteness and race have moved from the mind-set of the inventors, moving from theory to praxis, they have become social

realities. In the words of Frankenberg, race and whiteness "refer to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed."[8] This definition of race as a social construction reveals for Frankenberg links between race, whiteness, and their relation to power and the processes of struggle, as well as the evolution of cultural definition.[9]

Whiteness and *race* are "real." Like gender, they help shape an individual's sense of self, experiences, and life chances, and they have lasting, real, tangible, and complex effects. Race privilege is manifested through social organization in ways that result in residential, social, and educational segregation.[10] Moreton-Robinson notes that when white women are not racialized, "race privilege remains uninterrogated as a source of oppression and inequality."[11] The links between *feminism* and *race* must be interrogated before true transformative dialogue between white women/feminists and African-American women/womanists can occur.

FEMINISM AND RACISM

Upon close examination of whiteness, race and white women, one can clearly see a linkage among histories, social processes and *racism.* To consider racism by white women/feminists in this chapter is very déjà vu for me. In my 1995 analysis of feminism and racism, I provided historical evidence from the 1800s through the early 1900s of racism by white women, white feminists. When Sojourner Truth rose to speak at the Second National Women's Suffrage Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1852, white feminists screamed, "Don't let her speak!" Sojourner Truth's retorted, with her famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech. In reference to the same incident, Yancy notes: "Truth's question raises the dialectics of recognition. Her questions critiqued the white ideological framework that would deny her true womanhood because of her Blackness. Her questioning, in short, is not one of self-doubt, but functions as a demand placed upon white women to critique their own standpoint."[12] Ironically, while there was overwhelming racism by white women suffragists and fear of being embarrassed by Sojourner Truth, I contend that it was the content of her speech and the vigor with which she delivered it that gave historical significance to the convention.[13]

Another account of white women/feminists' shared racial identity and racism can be found in Belle Kearney's 1903 statement representing the National American Women's Suffrage Association's response to the Fifteenth Amendment granting African-American men the right to vote. She stated, "Just as surely as the North will be forced to turn to the South for the nation's salvation, just so surely will the South be

compelled to look to its Anglo-Saxon women as the medium through which to retain the supremacy of the white race over the African."[14] This statement emphatically expresses white women's value of their whiteness.

Implicit in Kearney's statement was a refusal to consider African-American women as belonging to a larger group of women within society; her emphasis on race precluded the possibility of considering African-American women as a group separate and distinct from African American men. Indeed, during this time, white women's suffrage groups were concerned with social equality only for white women, not all women; these white women had abandoned their alliances with African Americans over the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870. It was these white women's designation of their "whiteness" as essential that led them to form the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) or the General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1890 and at the same time prompted African-American women to form the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Of significance is the inclusive position of NACW versus the exclusive position of NAWSA. The motto for NACW was "Lifting as We Climb," and its mission statement declared that the organization "is led and directed by women for the good of women and men, for the benefit of *all* humanity."[15]

The same allegiance to whiteness by white suffragists was demonstrated by white women abolitionists. bell hooks contends that while white women abolitionists in the 1830s fought against slavery, racism was not an issue for them; they valued the power of their white privilege too much to support ending the racial hierarchy.[16] Similar histories of racism by white women/feminists are documented by other African-American women/womanists such as Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Pauline Terrelong Stone, and Angela Davis. Terborg-Penn states that racism is an essentialistic stance for white women.[17] Similarly, Stone reminds us:

> Racism is so ingrained in American culture, and so entrenched among white women, . . . many Black women have tended to see all whites regardless of sex, as sharing the same objective interest and clearly the behavior of many white women vis-à-vis Blacks has helped to validate this reaction.[18]

Davis asserts that our focus of concern in the 1990s is the same as the concerns that black women faced in the three distinct waves of the women's movement—the 1840s, the 1960s, and the 1980s—namely, the invisibility of black women in theory and praxis.[19]

Frankenberg notes:

> [R]acism was and is something that shapes white women's lives, rather than something that people of color have to live and deal with in a way

> that bears no relationship or relevance to the lives of white people. . . . [W]e tend to view it as an issue that people of color face and have to struggle with, but not as an issue that generally involves or implicates us. . . . Racism can, in short, be conceived as something external to us rather than as a system that shapes our daily experiences and sense of self.[20]

She argues further that because white women have a standpoint forged on dominance and race privilege, they have no recognition of the effects of racism on their lives or on the shaping of our society.[21]

I can recall my own encounters with racism from white women/feminists as if they had occurred yesterday. Once, Angela Davis delivered a provocative speech at the institution where I was teaching, and a philosophy professor there made plans to have Davis, other guest speakers, and faculty at his home. Aside from Angela Davis, I was the only African American among the group. The host professor commented that there was not enough space to accommodate me. One of the white feminists challenged him on not having enough space for one more person and vigorously expressed her disbelief and disgust, stating that if there was not enough space for me, then she would not join them. She related that she had recently obtained tenure, and with nothing to lose, she was committed to standing up to this kind of racism. But another white feminist said that she was going to join the group because she needed to converse/network with a couple of important [white male] philosophers. Later at this same conference, I tried to raise a question regarding her presentation, but was not recognized by her. I attempted to follow up with her after her presentation, only to be ignored again.

There is definitely an interrelatedness among the concepts and reality of whiteness, race, and racism for white women/feminists. In their analyses of these linkages, as well as analyses by others, it is evident that *race difference* between African-American women and white women has been substantially underappreciated and therein lies part of the déjà vu discourses.

THEORIZING RACE DIFFERENCE

There is no denying that *race* is an indicator of *difference.* Often race, one of the first indicators for determining a person's identity, is the initial illustrator of difference. Janet Elsea asserts:

> The way we process information about each other when meeting one another for the first time focuses on what we can see: Our differences. We

see: Color of skin, gender, age, appearance, facial expressions, eye contact, movement, personal space and touch. Social scientists disagree on the precise sequence of this processing, but agree otherwise.[22]

Similar to the analyses of white women/feminists from perspectives of déjà vu, analyses of race *difference* by African American women/womanists in terms of placing exclusive emphasis upon racial difference also resonate déjà vu. In my analysis of differences for African-American women, I discussed the dilemmas of racism and sexism for African American women.[23] Historically, many African-American women have denied sexism or made it secondary to racism, claiming racism destroys African-American men, women, and children and prevents the formation of economically and socially stable communities.[24] It has been evidenced that the position of African-American women has changed since the late 1960s. And like white women's false claims that sexism is more fundamental and oppressive than racism, so too have African-American women's claims regarding the prominence of racism in their lives has proven to be false as well.[25]

Several African-American feminists have pointed out connections between racism and sexism. Deborah K. King explains racism and sexism as phenomena of a "both/or" orientation in which African American women simultaneously belong and do not belong to a group.[26] African-American women are at the tail end for Shirley Chisholm.[27] Their problems are not addressed by the black movement or the women's movement. bell hooks points out that in the discourse about African-American people, sexism militates against acknowledging the interests of African-American women, and in the discourse about women, racism militates against recognizing African-American women's interests.[28]

Racism and sexism represent different forms of oppression for African-American women. We share the psychological structures of racism with African-American men, while we share sexism with other women. Patricia Hill Collins reminds us that there are ways in which African-American women are not part of either of these groups.[29] Moreover, beyond race and sex, many other differences must be contended with: class, culture, gender, religion, age, and ethnicity. Our differences have varying points of intersection, depending on the given circumstances. On some days, it may be our race and religion that are at issue, while on others it is our class and gender.

There remains a huge gap between African-American women's and white women's day-to-day lives. The freedom from domesticity and the road to professional growth remain significantly different for

African-American and white women. Indeed, Elsa Brown maintains that white women's lives are largely the result of the lives African-American women live, because they are the caregivers and housekeepers for white women.[30] Similarly, there are far fewer professional opportunities for us than there are for white women. Contrary to the notion that being both African American and female strengthens one's position, the reality is that too often the two militate against each other.

While white feminists readily recognize the domination of sexism, they tend not to see the domination of racism or the interconnections between sexism and racism that African-American feminists must negotiate. African-American womanists and white feminists have different experiences of domination, subjugation, devaluation, and dismissal. Being a mother and a homemaker, Davis explains, does not have the same meaning for African-American women who experience racism that it does for white women who do not experience racism.[31] Similarly, for white feminists to compare white women's oppression under sexism to African-American women's position in slavery, or to construct analogies between the women's movement and the civil rights movement are unacceptable forms of appropriation of African-American women's experiences. Elizabeth V. Spelman explains that there are some experiences that one can have and that others cannot.[32] Unacceptable appropriation of another's experience disrespects the other person's situation and overlooks the differences in options available to people.

To be sure, some white women/feminists have heard and adhered to the message from African-American women/womanists. Frankenberg points out that in the 1980s white feminists could no longer ignore[33] the critique of their racism by women of color. "When confronted, white feminists had a limited repertoire of responses: confusion over accusations of racism; guilt over racism; anger over repeated criticism; dismissal; stasis."[34] For Frankenberg, racism was and remains all too relevant to the course of every white woman's life. It is not something that is defined by externals; rather, it is indigenous to the fabric of American culture.

Moreton-Robinson points out that during the mid-1980s there was a transition in the thinking and writing by white feminists about what constitutes difference. And in the 1990s, analyses of women of color, lesbians, and black feminists revealed theoretical limitations to the traditional gender/sex difference and the need for feminism "to develop critical theories which are inclusive of differences and reflexive."[35] She concludes from her critique of several leading white feminists' theories of a more inclusive position on difference that each one is inadequate.

While problematic theoretically, I contend that each of them presents a principle which becomes meaningful when reconstructed in the *third* womanist/feminist voice of transformation that I offer in this chapter. It is not their principle that is problematic. Rather, much work is needed in the theoretical discourse explaining the given principles and elaboration on transforming them into praxis. The principles themselves represent a substantial core of fundamental norms to be acknowledged and embellished in order to begin the journey of the *third* womanist/feminist voice of transformation.

In this regard, much might be gained from a number of theories critiqued by Moreton-Robinson: Iris Young's idea of a "democratic pluralism based on multiple differences which are not fixed"; Sandra Harding's idea of white women learning from the insights of marginalized women; Marilyn Frye's idea of recognizing the necessity for differences; Shane Phelan's idea of recognizing our multiple identities and locations in power, recognizing differences and our shared communities, and valuing both relationality and individuality; Elaine Jeffreys' idea that differences should not be ordered hierarchically or my own similar idea that we avoid an Olympics of oppression; and Anna Yeatman's idea of multiple and interlocking oppressions.[36] All of the aforementioned feminist theories have some degree of validity. One need not accept binary opposition in locating answers. This kind of conceptualization is the focus of feminist pedagogical paradigms.

There are several important white feminists, publically acknowledged, who have heard and adhered to the message from African American women/womanists. For example, Catherine Stimpson examines the comparison of white women's situation to that of blacks, pointing out the habit of white people not only to define the black experience and make it their own, but to do so in a way that leaves their own views unexamined: "The analogy evades, in the rhetorical haze, the harsh fact of white women's racism."[37] Margaret Simons concludes from her analysis of several works by white feminists that little attention is given to racism and the oppression of minority women.[38] And she noted that when white feminists produce works that do not render minority women invisible, other white feminists seldom accept their insights.

Simons explains that too frequently white feminists provide analogies that undermine significant dissimilarities among themselves and African-American feminists. It is the frequent habit of white feminists to deemphasize women's differences in order to emphasize the shared experiences of sexism. Adrienne Rich writes

that many white feminists view the world through a tunnel vision that claims white women's experiences as the absolute center of the world.[39] She has termed this tendency *white solipsism*: "[T]o think, image and speak as if whiteness described the world . . . a tunnel-vision which simply does not see nonwhite experience or existences as precious or significant"[40] Elizabeth V. Spelman writes that white feminists posture their experiences as essentialistic and the universal model for all women's experiences.[41] Marilyn Frye sees this as white women's practice of "whiteliness" that is an ingrained way of being in the world.[42]

Some white feminists have offered personal accounts of having *heard* the message that African-American women/womanists try to convey. Ruth Frankenberg's valuable work on the social construction of whiteness and the impact of race in shaping white women's lives marked a turning point for her. She notes that her work, and analyses such as the Combahee River Collective, points to the structural subordination of women of color and explains to well-meaning white feminists that they are part of the problem of racism resulting in

> an inventory of meanings of racism, of racist behaviors began, de facto, to accumulate in [her] consciousness. . . . I learned by proximity what it means to navigate through a largely hostile terrain, to deal with institutions that do not operate by one's own logic nor in one's interests, and to need those institutions to function in one's favor if one is to survive, let alone to achieve. I realized for almost the first time in my life the gulf of experience and meaning between individuals differentially positioned in relation to systems of domination, and the profundity of cultural difference.[43]

Lucius Outlaw interprets another white feminist's personal experience of having *heard* the message. While discussing the history of Philosophy Born of Struggle, the African American Philosophical Association, at the Fourth Annual Alain Locke Conference, Outlaw shared the scenario of Sandra Harding's attendance at the early Philosophy Born of Struggle conferences. He contends that it was her interaction with members of the association that enabled Harding to effectively theorize and engage in standpoint theory.[44] Indeed, my own encounters with Harding and familiarity with her work lead me to the same conclusion of her engaging in the journey of the *third* womanist/feminist voice of transformative discourse. There are similarly personal accounts of other white feminists such as Margaret A. Simons, Linda Bell, and others to be encountered.

TRANSFORMING DÉJÀ VU THEORY AND PRAXIS

Transforming white women/feminists' and African-American women/womanists' multiple déjà vu discourses of theory and praxis involves examining the limited discourses presented by them. Let us begin with *those white women/feminists who have heard and adhered to the message from African-American women/womanists.* How did they accept their own discourses, while recognizing those of African-American women/womanists? How did these white women/feminists resist racism and other multiple injustices of whiteness—elitism, powerlessness, and invisibility? How are they different from those white women/feminists who have not heard the message, and thereby have not adhered to it or those who have heard and refused to adhere?

The beginning of this journey to *What's Next?* a *third* womanist/feminist voice is grounded in a framework of transformative discourse. Frankenburg's study of white women's whiteness and "race matters" discusses those whose limited contacts/interactions with African-American women have prevented them from recognizing and understanding the impact of their white privilege and their perpetuation of those social problems. Such women can change, she says, once they are educated.[45] Once *educated,* their naivete dissipates, and they become inclusive, self-liberated, and more globally conscious, beginning the journey to become agents of resistance to the reproduction of racism and other social constructs of white privilege.

In contrast, there are others who remain unchanged. For Anthony Appiah, these women lack cognizant capacity.[46] The element of choice is not available for these white women. The condition of these women is recognized and accepted by the *third* womanist/feminist voice of transformation, and their incapacity for dialogue does not significantly hinder the proposed transformative framework of discourse. Nevertheless, the experiences of historical movements—African-American slavery, the Holocaust, and women's suffrage—which are replete with individuals who have lacked cognizant capacity prove that social ills can be eradicated through transformative discourse.

There are other white women/feminists who recognize and understand the reality of whiteness and "race matters," but choose to be subversive, discriminatory, and provincial and are driven by binary constraints of Western hierarchy that are contrary to a shared sense of power. They maintain a historical/hierarchical sense of power that many of their white male counterparts have assumed. They cloak in the name of better womanhood, while appropriating the mind-set of the white male hierarchy and choosing not to transcend their exclusive domains that prohibit

dialogue with others, especially women of color, who are actively engaged in the womanist/feminist struggle. For them, education is a valid transformative tool, but they choose to be disingenuous and deny it.

What can we say about the white women/feminists, the *educated*, who have *heard the message and adhered to it?* They express an authenticity of consciousness, commitment, and courage to "do the right thing." They have, according to Martín Alcoff,[47] an awakened white consciousness and willingness to make significant sacrifices to journey beyond white privilege. They are grounded in feminist ontology, the importance of standpoint theory, and the purpose of feminist pedagogy. Moreton-Robinson reminds us that feminist ontology argues that women theorize from their own standpoints.[48] Personal experience is viewed as an essential component of the learning and teaching process for feminist pedagogy. The consideration of personal reference for feminist pedagogy is to suggest different notions of how to view knowledge and how to teach it.

Akin to understanding that there are distinct ways of knowing is the idea of true collaborative exchange. The goal of this framework of "feminist process" is a democratization of the collaborators to the end of realizing a more egalitarian society that improves the quality of life for all people. If there is not a true transformation of a personal epistemological claim into a radical form of praxis, then no real progress will be made; the situation becomes one more instance of déjà vu in which there is empty theory and no praxis.

Frankenberg relates the same position regarding feminist pedagogy. She explains: "Theorizing 'from experience' rested on several key epistemological claims, staples of feminist 'common sense.' The first of these was a critique of 'objectivity' or 'distance' as the best stances from which to generate knowledge. For feminists argued there is a link between where one stands in society and what one perceives." This epistemological stance also claimed that the oppressed person's clarity of vision is more comprehensive, providing insight into the minds of the oppressor/privileged and a more extensive knowledge of the entire society.[49] Still further, for Frankenberg, it is the work mostly by African-American feminists that transformed feminists' analyses, pointing out white-centeredness and false universalizing claims by many white feminists. She states that "the racial specificity of white women's lives limit feminist analysis and strategy in relation to issues such as the family and reproductive rights and intersection in women's lives of gender, sexuality, race and class as well as visions and concepts of multiracial coalition work."[50]

Lucius Outlaw reminds us that *race* is here to stay.[51] He explains that race as a social construction is a reality and the way that Western society, and in particular, America, has dealt with *race has been the problem.* With that understanding, I will approach the problem differently—accepting *race* in a positive way. In *A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism,*[52] Becky Thompson also agrees. Like Outlaw, she believes that part of a viable solution is not the ignoring of race but the recognition of race, as an integral part of one's personal epistemology.

Similarly, Alain Locke, from the standpoint of a metaphorical feminism, in the provocative and informative text, *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond* also uses the paradigms of values and education as vehicles for transformation of our mind-set about *race.*[53] Although he presents several levels of approach, most pertinent is his continual reference to reedification of value systems and education as primary texts for societal renewal. And it is from recognition of this foundational knowledge that we can shape another method of constructing a pedagogy essential for reconstruction of institutions, such as education, culture, and societal history.

In short, this means not taking a position of color blindness because there is a false consciousness in such a stance. Race is real. If race is eradicated, then I cannot fully tell my story, because the recipient would see my version only as it replicates hers. The listener would still be telling her story, not mine. In the spirit of the "cooperating imagination," a concept associated traditionally with Keatsian poetry[54] but equally relevant to philosophy, personal epistemology will not overshadow the larger humanistic message that transcends gender, race, and class. Historically, a deconstruction of humanism has meant a removal, consciously and /or subconsciously, of references to nonwhiteness and a positioning of "whiteness" as the essential trope of that which is "human." (This kind of thought involves hierarchy, binary opposition, and exclusion.) This designation of race, which is a social construct, as a sign of universal humanism is inappropriate. What I propose by way of the *third* womanist/feminist voice is a new interpretation of the term in which race and other legitimate differences are defined as part of a comprehensive humanity, which recognizes commonalities and simultaneously acknowledges our differences.

Liberating discourse must involve a comprehensive rendering of the truth. Each raconteur must be allowed to tell her story and construct her world along lines other than those of binary opposition. Society will then reflect an inclusiveness of all people, leading to a truer picture of reality in which blackness, whiteness, womanism, feminism,

and our other multiple selves, generated by gender, sex, class, religion, and so on, will maintain their respective identities, while not overshadowing the larger world to which they contribute.

In order for society to be transformed under the auspices of reformed white women/feminists' discourse, it is necessary to acknowledge the sign of *race* as a positive force that embellishes rather than diminishes the feminist/womanist's experience. The histories of the social construction of race have perpetuated negative and inferior discourses about race difference. *More theorizing* is needed which emphasizes the value of *difference* rather than maintaining the devaluing of difference and/or the deemphasis of difference in favor of universality and essentialism where the latter result is racism. Audre Lorde maintained, "It is not [the] differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences."[55] We can consider each other's standpoints without devaluing our own or another's. Elsa Barkley Brown asserts: "[A]ll people can learn to center in another experience, validate it, and judge it by its own standards without need of comparison or need to adopt that framework as their own. Thus, one has no need to 'decenter' anyone in order to center someone else; one has only to constantly, appropriately, 'pivot the center.'"[56] There is space for everyone. Valuing differences requires us to interact with one another, understanding one another's traditions, values, race, gender, culture, class, shared ideas, and the like. While we recognize our shared ideas, we must appropriately acknowledge and learn from our differences.[57]

More praxis, interaction, and *contact* between white feminists and African-American women/womanists are needed. Margaret A. Simons notes: "[E]fforts on a theoretical level are not sufficient. We must extend our efforts to a personal and practical level as well. . . . As feminists, we must. . . . confront racism . . . , as well as sexism, on both a personal and theoretical level."[58] Patricia Hill Collins argues that our choices to confront racism and sexism are related to our ethics of personal accountability. She asserts: "[P]eople are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims. . . . [It is] essential for individuals to have personal positions on issues and assume full responsibility for arguing their validity. . . . [It involves] utilizing emotion, ethics, and reason as interconnected, essential components in assessing knowledge claims."[59] Moreton-Robinson explains that white feminists' social lives are restricted to being with women of their own race. They experience limited sociality with *other women,* thereby perpetuating their "disparity in experience, knowledge and meaning between women who are 'Other' and white feminists in relation to systems of domination and the depth of differences." Their unexamined white race privilege

prevents them from examining their sociality or their knowledge.[60] White feminists would do well to recall and to reengage their discourses and personal experiences of whiteness and feminism. In doing so, "white feminist academics" may begin to transcend the historical invisibility of whiteness. In particular, Moreton-Robinson's "white feminist academics" could engage in the journey of the *third* womanist/feminist voice of transformative discourse. Moreton-Robinson's scenario of "white feminist academics" could be turned upside down in the words of Sojourner Truth. She explains:

> "Race" as "Other" and "racism" are important politics of white feminist academics as an intellectual engagement. However, their anti-racist practice is reduced to teaching within a limited paradigm, which has little impact on their standpoints both outside, and within the university context. They all used skin colour and physical features as a marker of difference in thinking and talking on race and cultural difference. [Only nonwhites] were the categories of "Others" that were spoken about by feminists in their discussions on race and pedagogy. [T]hey did not interrogate whiteness in their teaching on "race." By not naming and interrogating whiteness in their pedagogy "race" remained extrinsic and extraneous for feminist and their students. Its relevance as a "difference" was reserved for those positioned as "Other." Whiteness was centered but invisible in their pedagogy.[61]

The conclusion of Moreton-Robinson's scenario is that white feminists' discourse and their mere theoretical engagement with white race privilege is inadequate for them to know about their privilege, to deal with it by writing about it and thereby moving beyond it. By choice, white race privilege remains invisible in the work of white feminists along with the influences of patriarchal whiteness on their work in the academy. Accordingly, "[c]ultural differences are erased within the academy because the cultural values and beliefs of racialised 'Others' are subordinated to those of the institution." These white feminists fail to recognize how their thinking, knowing, and writing mirror those of their white male counterparts. To transform this scenario, Moreton-Robinson suggests the need to reconfigure "theory to deal with how to give up power to inform strategies to liberate us all from the oppressive and painful actualities of this very troubling and risky business."[62] This is the idea of shared power that empowers everyone versus hierarchical power, which is limiting.

CONCLUSION

Inherent within the concept of déjà vu is historical precedence. I am reminded of numerous principles for engaging in a new consciousness. In literature, Alice Walker has the conviction that genuine writing

cannot be separated from the way we live our lives.[63] In sociology, Paulo Freire explains that transformation begins first with thinking; second, speaking; third, writing; and fourth, giving meaning to our actions, thereby engaging in transformation.[64] Within the same discipline, Patricia Hill Collins explains the need to honestly engage in accountability of our actions.[65] And, finally, I strongly concur with the following philosophers: Martín Alcoff, who offers "new traditions" for eradicating white privilege;[66] George Yancy, who incorporates the importance of the "*philosophical i*";[67] Sandra Harding, who promotes "reinventing ourselves as Other";[68] Linda Bell, who acknowledges white privilege, and has heard and adhered to the message;[69] and the unknown white feminist voice (1996) who commented during a conversation at an American Philosophical Association conference that she had used "Racism and Sexism: Twenty-First-Century Challenges for Feminists," in her undergraduate course at Chicago Circle and found it to be very valuable.

What's Next? I see the vision of my own "new horizons." While it is important to recognize the theoretic mantra of philosophical discourse, if true transformation is to occur there must be specific norms that transgress boundaries imposed by race, gender, and class. When referencing feminist discourse, I spoke about the voices of white women/feminists, African-American women/womanists and the *third* womanist/feminist, the most liberating position of all. This author calls for an authenticity of consciousness, commitment, and courage from white women/feminists and African-American women/womanists to journey with the *third* womanists/feminists for meaningful transformation.

This *third* voice has accessed the true energy that provides the foundation of all life. It is a force, whose essential foundation is literally part of the mysterious fountain of being. It is a place that is invisible but something that is accessible to those with the proper mind-set. Only those fortunate individuals do so; they acknowledge the societal constructions of race, class, gender, and so on, which constitute personal identity, but also realize and transcend these entities which have been historically configured as necessary, essential, unabridgeable barriers and differences. They reconfigure them as important sites of identity formation in a truly liberating new world consciousness which finds a place for fluid differences within the framework of fluid similarities.

The *third* womanist/feminist voice, which is comprehensive in insight and possesses a moral ethos to do the right thing, will be able to effect the goal of a better world order for everyone.

By virtue of history, the African-American womanist of the "third voice" womanist/feminist is in a uniquely comprehensive, knowledgeable position to lead in the transformation of déjà vu theory and praxis. Even though, historically, there has been much debate about their ability to do so, they are the ones whose courage founded in multiple foundations must take the lead in transforming themselves and by extension others. In the words of D. E. Smith, "[T]he situated knower is always also a participant in the social she is discovering. Her inquiry is developed as a form of that participation. Her experience is always active as a way of knowing whether or not she makes it an explicit resource."[70]

Not only have they been forced by all aspects of society to know their "story," but also in order for them to carve out an existence, they had to know the "history" of white males and the "herstory" of white females. It is not an issue of the avenues that produced such knowledge, it is simply a matter of fact that if the African-American women/womanists were to be successful, often they had to sublimate their own texts to those of others. Their voices were not silenced for long; the "cooperative" spirit of their imagination allowed them to operate on several levels and live a life of multiple selves. While aware of the "rightness" of their own history, they had not only to validate it in the eyes of white men with norms predicated on a hierarchy of values but to teach white women/feminists who, while espousing another ideology that deplored binary opposition, in reality were mouthing a discourse similar to their white male counterparts.

In this chapter, several distinct variables have been outlined as they pertain to the déjà vu discourses of white women/feminists; African-American women/womanists; and the third voice of the womanist/feminist. It has been established that the cycle of déjà vu discourse can be broken only through the transformative ideology posited by the women of the *third* voice, who are new African-American womanists and new white feminists. Within that final group, the societal constructions of race, gender, and class are recognized but transcended because the discourse must operate out of a life principle that is grounded in the humanity that foregrounds all personal identities.

In order to effectively transition from déjà vu discourse of the white women/feminists and African-American women/womanist to the post–déjà vu discourse and praxis of the futuristic *third* womanist/feminist voice, these women must effectively coordinate transcendence and transformation. Not only must there be a recognition of the socially constructed variables of gender, race, and class, there must be an

acknowledgment of the manner in which they operate in terms of the societal correlatives relatives of time, space, and humanity. In essence, a more comprehensive humanity involves the following process:

- All races of women must engage in individual re-evaluation of personal discourses as well as collective discourse revealed in history and society at large.
- After acknowledging problematic areas, they must seek reeducation through informal and formal interaction with different races, classes, genders, while recognizing multiple legitimate differences.
- In reeducation, personal identity is redefined within but not limited to the space of its own integrity. We are individuals, but we share a common humanity.

Accordingly, the *third* futuristic womanist/feminist voice ushers in the age of not only a post–déjà vu feminism but a new world humanism. No longer is one's personal identity absorbed, denied, marginalized, or decentered; rather it is appropriately acknowledged within the new, comprehensive humanity that enhances the quality of life for all people.

NOTES

1. I am indebted to Beverly D. Miller, George Yancy, Earnest Curry, and Howard McGary for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.
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9. Ibid., p. 11.
10. Ibid.
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25. See Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Changing the Subject: Studies in the Appropriation of Pain." Paper presented at the "Symposium on Racism and Sexism: Differences and Connections," Georgia State University, Atlanta, Ga, 1991; Toni Morrison, "Friday on the Potomac," introduction to "*Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality,* ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992); and Paula Giddings, "The Last Taboo," in *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality,* ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992) pp. 441–463.
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