

EXPLORATIONS IN ETHNIC STUDIES



ETHNICITY AND THE ARTS

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Explorations in Ethnic Studies

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**Introduction:
New Vistas in Art, Culture,
and Ethnicity**

Bernard Young

Last semester at Arizona State University in the School of Art, I offered a course in multicultural issues in art. It is important to note that the state of Arizona is under national scrutiny because of the negative publicity it has received in the past few years on the Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday and other concerns about racial and cultural issues. I am not going to claim that Arizona does not have a lion's share of problems in this area; what I will claim is that most of my students are middle class, white, receptive, and sensitive to ethnic studies. It is typical that I only have a few students of color each semester. During the semester I introduced several new vistas to my students. One new vista which is historic and known to many people is the Harlem Renaissance. Only one young Hispanic student in the class had ever heard of the Harlem Renaissance. Nineteen-nineteen to 1929 was the period of which Langston Hughes wrote "Harlem was in vogue." Black painters and sculptors joined poets, novelists, dramatists, and musicians in an artistic outpouring that established Harlem as the international capital of black culture. These Arizona students became very familiar with the works of Aaron Douglas, William H. Johnson, Palmer Hayden, Romare Bearden, James Van Der Zee, Meta Warrick Fuller, and others. The students repeatedly asked: "Why have survey courses of American art history omitted these artists?" The answer to that question is complex and would take up too much space to answer here, but I realized as I taught the course that most of the materials were new for all the students in the class. The new vistas introduced became classroom activities that involved cognitive acts of acquisition and organization of knowledge that our present generation of students must be introduced to. I am certain many of these students in later years will discover, rediscover, and reanalyze this information as they enter the workforce and assume positions of responsibility.

This special issue of *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* features "Ethnicity and the Arts" and presents several new perspectives and prospectives about various

forms of art, culture, and ethnicity. It is especially exciting for me to edit and put together a journal of work in the arts with an emphasis on ethnicity because there are so few avenues to publish, communicate, and retrieve literature in art, culture, and ethnicity. It is becoming increasingly obvious that we are living in a multicultural nation with people of different ethnic backgrounds, religions, arts, socioeconomic levels, and native languages. If universities, museums, and other institutions that claim to foster cultural and artistic heritage are to survive in the near future, they must make drastic changes in their operational procedures. Multiculturalism is becoming the catch-phrase of the 1990s, and the new vistas that are being presented must be carefully attended to. According to Robin Cembalest, an associate editor of *Artnews*:

Demographics have certainly provided museums with some sobering news. In Los Angeles, which is touted as the most multicultural city in the country—and the model for what most other cities will soon be like—last year the population was 38 percent white, about 36 percent Latino, 15 percent African American, and 12 percent Asian. Yet a recent study by the city's chamber of commerce showed that 93 percent of visitors to local museums are Anglo.

It should become even more clear for institutions that the demographic changes have meant that there are more voices and, politically, they must listen to those voices. Currently, neither museums nor the current literature adequately represents the country's cultural diversity. If these institutions don't change and become current, they will become irrelevant. On a national level African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians constitute about a third of the US population, and their numbers are increasing faster than those of the white majority. By the year 2000, demographers expect minorities to constitute the "new majority" of young people in this country. Many traditionally trained researchers, artists, and creative people in higher education have failed to acknowledge the interrelationships and effects of ethnicity, culture, art, and socioeconomic status while conducting research, creating art, or producing new vistas. This situation usually contributes to a stereotypic and problematic literature, void of many realities, leaving minority scholars in a reactive mode that takes away from a more proactive and productive mode of research.

Writers like Cedric Dover in *American Negro Art* (1960), Alain Locke in *Negro Art: Past and Present* (1936), and *The Negro in Art* (1940), and numerous articles on African and African American art did discuss ideas on African American aesthetics, but there is a serious lack of consistency among writers who write about the aesthetics and arts of people of color. The history of art in Mexico is well documented, but the current available information on Mexican American artists is not very well documented. Mexican art has flourished for twenty centuries according to some scholars. The creative arts have long been an important part of Mexican life, and Mexico has given the world many important architects, artists, composers, and writers. Although many culturally different

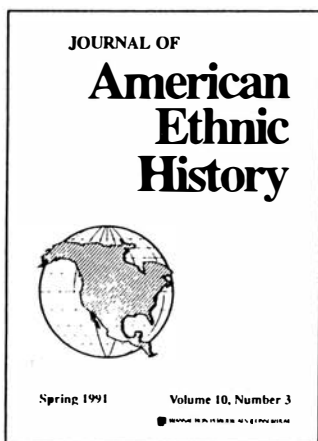
artists are making contributions, new vistas in art and discussions of cultural diversity in contemporary issues are difficult to locate.

Cedric Dover wrote *American Negro Art* (1960) and Samella Lewis wrote *Art: African American* (1990), but there has not been an abundance of literature written about African Americans and their past. Certainly some progress has been made, but there is still a need for much more research and analysis. Like African, Native, Asian, Chicano Americans, and other culturally distinct groups, neither our scientists nor our artists have been given very much representation in the histories of the United States. As Lewis reminds us in her text, only a very few minority writers, visual artists, and musicians have been included in the textbooks or are on library shelves.

An excellent example of what we need more of was demonstrated in the recent exhibition catalogue and scholarship of the Henry Ossawa Tanner exhibition that started at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The exhibition will travel for approximately one year. The catalogue is textbook size in depth and material. Tanner (1859-1937) emerged as one of the best known and most highly esteemed artists of his time in both the United States and France. The fact that he was an African American and he is only now receiving some of the much deserved respect he should have had years ago supports my position that the support is not abundant. Another text that should not be ignored is *Harlem Renaissance Art of Black America* (1987) with essays by David C. Driskell, Mary Schmidt Campbell, and others. The work of Antonio Rodriguez, and his text on *A History of Mexican Mural Painting*, is important, but newer materials that represent current conditions and new art have to be institutionally supported if we are to have a continued growth and have new vistas in art, culture, and ethnicity.

This issue of *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* is a brief beginning to open new vistas into the multi-cultural and multi-dimensional world of artistic expression. Angela M.S. Nelson in her article, "The Persistence of Ethnicity in African American Popular Music: A Theology of Rap Music," looks at a specific form of music, and Margaret M. Dunn and Ann Morris's "Narrative Quilts and Quilted Narratives: The Art of Faith Ringgold and Alice Walker" look at painted picture squares of traditional quilting and "visual metaphors" between the relationships in literature and traditional arts. John Labadie's "An Art-Historical Paradigm for Investigating Native American Pictographs of the Lower Pecos Region, Texas," Consuelo Lopez Springfield's "Edna Manley's *The Diaries*: Cultural Politics and the Discourse of Self," and Jacinto Quirarte's "Sources of Chicano Arts: Our Lady of Guadalupe" introduce an international focus to ethnicity and art, presenting interdisciplinary approaches to art history. All of these writers understand the need to break traditional barriers of how art has been studied and appreciated in American classrooms, and all provide readers with new ways to view the art world.

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An Art-Historical Paradigm for Investigating Native American Pictographs of the Lower Pecos Region, Texas

John Antoine Labadie

In the shadows of deep canyons in Southwest Texas and Northern Mexico, where the Pecos, Devils, and Rio Grande flow, are thousands of paintings on the walls of hundreds of rockshelters and overhangs. Archaeologists term such works "pictographic rock art." These particular pictographs were created over many centuries by Native American groups known collectively today as the Lower Pecos Region cultures.

This geographic region is approximately one hundred miles square and contains one of the largest, oldest, and least understood collections of archaic pictographs in North America. Who painted them? Why were they painted? What did they mean to those who produced them? Many of the questions surrounding Lower Pecos pictographs have been considered by archaeologists for more than fifty years. Others await means to adequately address them.

Toward this end, art history may be productively employed to enhance our understanding of this enigmatic art form. Paradigms for inquiry can be drawn from methods employed by art historians. Analysis of intrinsic factors such as style, iconography, and contextual function of rock art could provide new and meaningful insights. Likewise, inquiry which focuses on extrinsic factors, such as lifeways, sociocultural belief systems, technologies, and apparent cognitive capabilities, could also be productive.

Though no type of inquiry can recreate the cognitive or cultural worlds in which these world-class art works were produced, a research approach which utilizes consistent and systematic analysis, cross-cultural comparisons, and recognized methods of art-historical inquiry may represent productive avenues for research into Lower Pecos rock art. This paper discusses some potential applications of art-historical methods structured to enhance inquiry into lower Pecos pictographs.

Overview

In several respects the Lower Pecos region of Texas, near the Diablo (Amistad) reservoir, is one of the richest archaeological regions in North

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America. Perhaps no area of comparable size can boast of so many ancient archaeological sites. Additionally, here exists one of the truly unique pictograph regions in the world. Today one can still view galleries of superb murals, executed in a variety of polychromatic and monochromatic styles in various stylized and naturalistic forms. The art works of the Lower Pecos are perhaps comparable only to the famous cave paintings of Europe.¹

Pictographs are, among other things, physical evidence of cognitive activity. And in the case of the Lower Pecos region, the original concepts represented in these pictographs are lost forever, secrets of an extinct culture. Even so, a portrait and chronology of Lower Pecos life has begun to be defined through judicious field work and assiduous theoretical speculation by investigators from many disciplines.²

They have asked many questions: Who painted the pictographs? Why were they painted? What did they mean? What kind of tools and weapons did they have? How long did they live at these sites? What was the social structure? Where possible, answers have been proffered.

Cumulatively, work done in the Lower Pecos allows for the formation of various hypothesis and conjectures about the cultures of this region. On some issues of interpretation and attribution of artifacts, however, controversy still reigns; agreement among contemporary investigators is not the norm. The interpretation of pictographs is one such area.

Paradigm

Archaeology provides research tools to disembed artifacts from physical contexts and to subsequently draw inferences about them. It may also be useful to employ tools provided by art history to disembed deeper insights about rock art of the Lower Pecos. How might an art-historical investigation of the Lower Pecos pictographs be conducted? Before answering, some groundwork is in order. Modern art-historical inquiry is basically divisible into two modes: intrinsic and extrinsic.³

The intrinsic mode considers the aspects of connoisseurship, style, iconography, and function. Here, art historians empirically proceed from the art object itself. They become intimately familiar with it; their aim is to delineate its fundamental intrinsic properties in terms of one or more of the aforementioned aspects. Some hold that inquiry should be restricted to these matters.

The extrinsic mode focuses on examination and interpretation of the factors and conditions surrounding and shaping art objects and circumstances of time and place, including: artistic biography, psychology, semiotics, patronage, and other political, economic, scientific, religious, social, philosophical, cultural, and intellectual determinants, and the history of ideas. Extrinsic approaches are derived largely from other disciplines—particularly the social sciences.

It is common to find art historians working from more than a single perspective; often several aspects of both intrinsic and extrinsic inquiry are focused on art-historical problems. The results of such inquiries are integrated to increase insight into the problem of making more complete sense of a work of art or group of works.

But whether intrinsic or extrinsic in primary focus, art history is empirical, systematic, and has as its raw material creative objects—visual art works. Focusing both modes of art-historical inquiry on rock art may elucidate a greater portion of the meaning and purpose of the *oeuvre* of Lower Pecos artists. Furthermore, the philosophical perspectives art history brings to such an inquiry may also result in novel speculation about the artworks in question.

Examples

Two (necessarily compressed) examples of an art-historical paradigm applied to the pictographs of the Lower Pecos region illustrate this approach.

Example #1. Question: How were Lower Pecos pictographs made?

Art-historical mode: Extrinsic

Aspect: Connoisseurship

Focus: Techniques/methods of Lower Pecos rock art painting

At least five different techniques/methods were used to apply pigments to the limestone surfaces which form the many “canvasses” in the rockshelters and caves of the region.

Grinding locally occurring pigments and minerals into powders and then combining these with liquids could have produced the hues in pigments in these pictographs. Many of the colors were relatively easy to obtain: red ochre could be dug from the ground; limonite, also an ochre, is found in a range of hues from pale yellow through orange-yellow; manganese or burnt bone (carbon) could have provided the blacks; kaolin, stalactites, gypsum, or lime could have been used to produce relatively bright whites; and an unknown range of relatively permanent colors may have been obtained from local plants or materials which could have been obtained in trade.

The ways in which these various substances were ground and mixed into paint may never be discovered, but manos and metates on which some pigments were ground have been discovered in archaeological contexts. Binders of fat, grease, or other unknown liquids or pastes were probably used to turn the pigments into paint of the required consistency.

Recent Carbon-14 dating of pigments obtained from Lower Pecos sites tentatively confirms at least two things⁴: First, the vehicle (a liquid substance used to bind pigments in order to make paints, or one used to thin them) used in some Lower Pecos pictographs is organic in nature. This leads to further speculation about which types of liquids may have had what kind of significance for use in particular pictographs (e.g., blood versus water or a vegetable or fruit extract); and second, that the date of the oldest pictographs, approximately 3950 BC, conforms to the informed speculation of current investigators of Lower Pecos rock art.⁵

The most common means of applying pigment was a vegetal fiber brush. The way in which the majority of Lower Pecos pictographs are formed is indicative of this. Some of the larger pictographs are composed of a solid color placed on the rock surface with a series of overlapping brushstrokes. Other rock art panels are made up of single finely-drawn lines.

Locally available agave and sotol plants provided an ample resource for such painting tools and plant fiber brushes with pigment adhering to one end have been found in archaeological contexts in the region. Plants were folded along their length, wrapped to keep them in the desired form, and then shredded at the ends to provide what served as the bristles. Regardless of temporal style, it appears as if the brush was the tool of choice to make pictographs.

A second method of applying pigment was the use of the artist's fingers. Although "finger" techniques never enjoyed widespread use, as evidenced by the relative paucity of sites where this technique has been used, they appear to have been favored at particular sites by some Lower Pecos artists. Images created by this means are generally uncomplicated and relatively small in scale. In terms of appearance, polka dot patterns formed by fingerprints often fill in a complete schema or are used in combination with brushed lines to form images.

In a third method of painting (perhaps drawing is a better term), pigment was mixed with a hardener or binding agent such as beeswax. This produced what can be described as a crayon. Drawing tools made of yellow limonite have been found in excavations. Such tools were made by grinding pigment, mixing it into a binder, and forming the tools in a mold. Drawing tools of this type were probably used to execute more detailed pictographs or portions of pictographs or perhaps to outline the shape and location of a work prior to its execution.

A fourth documented method of producing pictographic images in the Lower Pecos appears to involve blowing liquified pigment onto the rock surface. Whether a tube was used or the pigment was sprayed directly from the mouth of the artist is not known. Most often, this technique is associated with red-stenciled handprints. This technique has been found in numerous other cultures in the production of artworks from the prehistoric era to the present.

A fifth technique used hard, dry pigments or unprepared minerals to draw—rather than paint—pictographs. Pictographs done with such tools are most often of simple composition and executed primarily in red or yellow. They consist of fine line strokes. Most lines are less than one-quarter inch in width and appear as if they were drawn using an unprepared chunk of ochre or perhaps hematite. Rocks of these types, with abraded facets on one or more sides, have been found in archaeological contexts.

Example #2. Question: Why were the Lower Pecos pictographs made?

Mode: Intrinsic

Aspect: Function

Focus: Conjectures on the purposes of Lower Pecos pictographs

Rock walls covered with hundreds of novel anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images apparently led many early investigators to infer that these pictographs represented the rituals of hunting cults simply because what appear to be animals and men with weapons (atlatls and bows and arrows) are depicted in these works. The cultures of the region were known to have been preliterate and it was

assumed that rock art recorded the rituals and experiences of the early residents of the Lower Pecos who, it was also assumed, subsisted primarily by hunting.

It was also postulated that rock art was painted under the influence of the mescal beans which are commonly found in archaeological sites. This seed of the mountain laurel tree has demonstrated psychoactive properties. Some early interpretations attributed pictographs to those cultures which had been involved in a red bean or mescal bean cult. This interpretation was widely accepted for many years. It is only within the last few decades that other explanations for the existence of these rock paintings have found a sympathetic audience among professional investigators.⁶

Contemporary investigators propose broader interpretations of pictograph subject matter across all pictographic styles. It is now suggested that pictographs were painted as an essential part of at least several different, and perhaps interrelated, kinds of rituals. Such interpretations imply that pictographs themselves are by-products of unknown cultural activity rather than the objects of ritualistic activity.

In Lower Pecos pictographs in particular, the superimposition of dozens of images of different styles implies many things about the potential purposes and the value pictographs may have had for their creators: An image painted on a rockshelter wall which was then painted over with more works may not, in itself, have been as important as the reasons it was painted or drawn there. It has been suggested that over-painting could have been an attempt to cancel or acquire the power associated with an underlying (previous) pictograph.

Pictographs could also have functioned as mnemonic devices associated with oral traditions, storytelling, renewal rituals, rites of passage, the invocation of some spiritual force, or magical exercise. A survey of the literature devoted to rock art and pictographs reveals a wide range of positions as regards speculation about the possible function or purpose pictographs may have had for their originators.

Clues from modern anthropology, ethnology, and also related contemporary archaeological evidence suggest that Pecos pictographs were most likely created by specifically designated individuals rather than by all members of the society. Medicine persons, or shamans, are the likely candidates. Even today, in Mexico and the southwestern United States, the shaman is regarded as the possessor of special knowledge about supernatural forces.

Contemporarily, conjectures by some investigators suggest that shamans may have fulfilled this same role in prehistoric cultures where pictographs played an important part in rituals surrounding humans and their relationship with metaphysical forces. Given this, it follows that pictographs may have been painted by shamans during certain rituals.

Pictographs do not fulfill the criteria for written language, but neither do they seem to be simply exercises in aesthetic expressiveness. Some modern investigators propose that these artworks may constitute a form of communication about specific aspects of the supernatural lives of the people of the Lower Pecos.

Summary

Whatever the original inspirations or sources of these artworks may have been, twentieth-century value systems and social constructs are far removed from those of even the most recent of the Lower Pecos pictographers. Current speculation about the meanings of pictographs is generally regarded by archaeologists as just that—speculation.

The Archaic, Late Prehistoric, and Historic people of this area are extinct. Furthermore, no current Native American group claims the Lower Pecos as its ancestral or historic homeland. With the extinction of these cultures passed the only firsthand information about Lower Pecos cosmology, iconology, and symbology systems. At this time, Historic Style pictographs which contain European motifs (horses, muskets, churches, long horn cattle) are the only rock art paintings which have substantial support for accurate postulations about their symbolism.

Contemporary cultural anthropologists and ethnographers have recorded the use of elaborate metaphors as commonplace in the conversation and artworks of hunter-gatherer peoples. Such constructs indicate a rich and colorful oral history and visual vocabulary as well as the intelligence and reasoning skills of the user. This information also exemplifies one of the chief difficulties in assigning meaning to early pictographs.

In metaphoric contexts, what may superficially appear as a natural symbol or reference—such as a person or a cactus—may actually be intended as an elaborate metaphor which carries obscure or nearly incomprehensible meaning outside of the immediate cultural group in which it is produced. And, unfortunately for those who seek to assign meaning to prehistoric artworks, it also follows that culture-specific metaphors are lost with the demise of the culture generating them. But whatever the results of inquiry, regardless of the field or discipline of origin, the cognitive world of the people of the Lower Pecos cannot be recreated.

Pictographs (and other artifacts) make their world as available to us as it may ever be. Investigations of these pictographs through the means provided by archaeology informed by art history may help to forge an enhanced linkage between the cultures of the Lower Pecos and those which occupy the world in the twentieth century. A comprehensive understanding of how and why these magnificent art works were accomplished will likely escape even our most scholarly efforts.

But even in the process of making sense of what are now regarded as the oldest documented Native American paintings, those involved in this worthy search will come ever closer to reweaving the artistic fabric which still holds strong through the centuries. When more connecting threads have been identified through strongly grounded, well-focused inquiry, we will all benefit from a renewed view of these pictographic art works.

Notes

¹James Graham and Jack Davis, *Appraisal of the Archaeological Resources of Val Verde County, Texas* (National Park Service Report, South West Region, Sante Fe, New Mexico, 1958).

²Harry Schafer, *Ancient Texans*, Texas Monthly Press, 1987.

³W. E. Kleinbauer, "Art History in Discipline-Based Art Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 21 (1987): 205-15.

⁴John Russ, Marian Hyman, Harry J. Schafer, and Marvin W. Rowe, "Radiocarbon dating of prehistoric rock paintings by selective oxidation of organic carbon," *Nature* 348 (1990): 710-11.

⁵Solveig A. Turpin, "Speculations on the age and origin of the Pecos River Style." Paper presented at the 16th Annual American Rock Art Conference, San Antonio, Texas. May 26-29, 1989.

⁶John Antoine Labadie and Joseph Henry Labadie, "Art History and Archaeology: A Symbiotic Relationship." Paper presented at the 30th Annual National Art Education Association Convention, Kansas City, Missouri, April 5-9, 1990.

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Sources of Chicano Art: Our Lady of Guadalupe*

Jacinto Quirarte

There have been two main streams of influence on Chicano artists aside from the obvious one that is the result of their artistic training, education and development in the United States. The primary influence came from Mexico, first during the colonial period in the form of New Spanish art and architecture, and then in modern times provided by the Mexican muralists through their work and their use of pre-Columbian art. The New Spanish materials formed the nucleus for the second stream of influence composed of the various manifestations of religious folk art found primarily in the Southwest.

The focus of this paper is on one aspect of the first stream that has its beginnings in the colonial period, the use of Our Lady of Guadalupe by Chicano and Chicana artists and their predecessors in the Southwest where large communities of Hispanics are found. These include the artists identified over the last three to four hundred years as New Spaniards, Mexicans, Spanish Americans, and Mexican Americans. A study of this motif in Chicano art and its background in Mexico and New Spain before that will allow us to place Chicano art within its proper historical and artistic contexts. The discussion includes questions of iconography relating to the cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe and its use as a subject

*Our Lady of Guadalupe

La Virgen de Guadalupe, or more exactly *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* or Our Lady of Guadalupe, refers to carved or painted representations always modeled after the images in the basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico which is said to have been miraculously painted on the garment of the Indian Juan Diego, to whom the Virgin appeared four times in 1531. This image has had great religious and political significance in New Spain (including the US Southwest) and Mexico in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It continues to have similar significance for the Chicano communities in the US, where it appears repeatedly in the work of the muralists and easel painters. The name, Guadalupe, comes from the shrine of a much older miraculous statue of the Virgin in Estremadura, Spain.

Chicano

The term "Chicano," a contraction of *Mexicano* (pronounced me he-ka' no), reflects two components in Mexican American and Chicano culture: The Spanish language in the sixteenth century in Mexico and the ongoing tendency by Mexicans and Mexican Americans to contract personal names and other words in which the *ch* sound is prominently used.

The peoples of central Mexico identified themselves as *Mexicas* (pronounced me she' ka) in the sixteenth century. Among these Náhuatl speaking peoples were the Aztecs, people of Aztlán. It may be that the original sound of Mexica when altered with the Spanish suffixes to form Mexico and Mexicano later led to the contraction of the latter form to Chicano. It was a short step from *Mexica* to *Mechicano*, and from there, *Mechicano* to *Chicano*, the latter being the much preferred sound among Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicano Spanish speakers. Other examples of contractions: *Concha* for *Conception*; *Nacho* or *Ignacio*; *Chencho* for *Crescencio*; *Chinto* for *Jacinto*, and so on. It should be noted that the prefixes in the last two examples are suppressed as in *Mexicano* when it changed to *Chicano*.

for religious icons at the beginning of this period and as a source for works which focus on Chicano identity. The representations discussed in this paper range from the tin paintings of northern New Spain and Mexico and the *retablos* (panels paintings) of New Mexico to murals, sculptures, prints, paintings, and performance pieces by modern and contemporary Mexican American and Chicano artists.

Other important sources for Chicano art, such as religious folk art and modern Mexican art, fall outside the confines of this paper.¹ The first, comprised of yard shrines and home altars and their relationship to earlier manifestations of religious folk art, such as *ex-voto* paintings, have been used as sources for works known as “altars” created by Chicano and Chicana artists. The second, comprised primarily of modern Mexican muralist art, was used by the early Chicano muralists as a source for their work.

Our Lady of Guadalupe

Our Lady of Guadalupe is one of the most powerful images in Mexican and Chicano culture. Representations of the Virgin appear repeatedly in religious and secular contexts. She is identified with Mexican nationality in that country and abroad by those who acknowledge that relationship (Hispanic Americans of Mexican descent in the United States). Numerous books and articles have been written about the importance of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the emergence of a Mexican identity as a nation and as a people.² She personifies the coming together of the Indian and European to create the *mestizo*. She is a religious and political symbol which evokes immediate reactions at these and other levels of meaning when viewed and contemplated by Mexicans, Hispanos (Spanish Americans), Mexican Americans, and Chicanos.

It is no surprise, therefore, to find that Our Lady of Guadalupe was a highly favored subject in the art of New Spain (Mexico), and later in the Southwest, Northwest, and Great Lakes region of the United States. Throughout the centuries that the image Our Lady of Guadalupe has been used in paintings and sculptures, the original, housed in the basilica of Guadalupe, north of Mexico City, has been used as a model. It has always been important to retain her pose and configuration, and the symbols associated with her, because any deviation from the original would divest the image of its meaning for the faithful who revere it as an icon.

In spite of the almost universal acceptance of Our Lady of Guadalupe, great controversy has raged over the centuries in Mexico over the question of whether the apparition of Our Lady ever took place.³ Those who have doubted it from the very beginning ascribed political motives to those who were supposed to have perpetrated the event. The opposition began to wane around the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century, when the Franciscans who had been most vocal against it began to abandon their charges of idolatry. In spite of the lack of official recognition during this period, Our Lady of Guadalupe became a cult figure for the people of Mexico (New Spain). First of all, *El Tepeyac*, where Our Lady of Guadalupe was reported to have appeared to Juan

Diego in 1531, became a pilgrimage center for the people of Mexico. Secondly, Our Lady of Guadalupe of El Tepeyac was made the “Principle Patroness” of Mexico City in 1737, and thirdly, “Pontifical recognition of the Guadalupan tradition and the ‘Universal Patronage’ of Guadalupe over all Mexico” was received in 1754.

Three decisive factors led to the success of the Guadalupe cult in Mexico during the colonial period. First of all, there is the coincidence of the sanctuaries of a major pre-Columbian divinity *Toci*, “mother of gods” and *Tonantzin*, “our mother,” celebrated with feasts and sacrifices before the Conquest at the hill of Tepeacac (Tepeyac) and the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe at the same place. Secondly, people from all parts of Mexico congregated at the site for purposes of veneration in pre-Columbian times and continued to do so when it became identified with Our Lady of Guadalupe. Most decisive of all is the “Indian” character of the image. This completes the identification of Our Lady of Guadalupe with all the Mexican peoples—Indians, Creoles, and *mestizos*.

Indigenous and European Relationships

Unlike European deities, pre-Columbian gods did not constitute an unchanging, immutable presence or entity. Each deity could and did shed its own attributes as well as acquire those of others without losing its identity. Each could have four manifestations that corresponded to the world directions and, when this was the case, could be distinguished by their color which was read symbolically rather than descriptively. They could also be found at the various levels of the Underworld and/or the sky, each of which was divided into nine and thirteen levels respectively.⁵

H. B. Nicholson,⁶ a specialist on Aztec religion, divided the numerous gods of the pantheon into complexes in which he included those that overlap in meaning and configuration. All of the gods under discussion are included in Nicholson’s *Teteoinan* Complex. Some of the gods included in this Complex are as follows:

Goddess	Meaning	Principle Jurisdiction
Teteoinan	“Gods-Their-Mother”	Earth mother, fertility, lunar?
Toci	“Our Grandmother”	Earth mother, fertility, lunar?
Tlazoltéotl	“Filth Deity”	
Atlan(n)tonan	“Atlan-Our-Mother”	
Cihuacóatl	“Woman Serpent”	
Quilaztli		
Tonan(tzin)	“Our Mother”	
Coatlicue	“Serpent-Her Skirt”	

There is another Aztec goddess with which Our Lady of Guadalupe can be compared. Nicholson listed *Citlalicue*, “Star-Her Skirt,” under *Ometeotl* (“Two God”) Complex. This and other goddesses can offer iconographic parallels with Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Francisco de la Maza,⁷ a specialist in Mariophany, in his discussion of the iconography of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, pointed to one of its sources in the Woman of the Apocalypse as described in chapter 12 of the Revelations of St. John. Specifically, the first lines of Revelation 12 read: “And there appeared a great wonder in the heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.”⁸

Our Lady of Guadalupe has a crescent moon under her feet and although she is no longer shown with a crown of stars, artists until the nineteenth century included such a crown in their representations of her. Other clues to the iconography are found in verse 14 of Revelation 12 as follows:

“And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.”⁹

The triumph of the eagle over the serpent is reminiscent of Aztec legend. The eagle on the cactus with the serpent in its beak was the sign that led to the founding of Tenochtitlan (Mexico City) by the Aztecs in 1325. It was later adopted by the new nation as a national emblem in the nineteenth century.

Representations of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Francisco de la Maza also discussed the numerous representations of Our Lady of Guadalupe that are specifically Mexican in form and content. Among these works is an eighteenth century folk painting from the city of Toluca in which Our Lady of Guadalupe was merged with the eagle of Aztec legend that later became part of the Mexican national emblem.¹⁰

During the colonial period and the nineteenth century, the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe was represented in numerous paintings and sculptures all over New Spain and later Mexico. The intent of the artists, as already noted, was always to replicate the original in the basilica of Guadalupe. However, two variations of the miraculous appearance were used by the artists. In one, Our Lady was represented by herself as she appears in the original in the basilica, and in the other, she was included with the four narrative episodes associated with the miraculous apparition; these were included as vignettes at the corners of the painting.

Both types of representations are found in the tin paintings produced in northern Mexico and the retablos painted in New Mexico. Tin paintings were made in such northern and northwestern cities as Guadalajara, Zacatecas, and Guajuato and distributed throughout northern New Spain; this practice continued when the area became Mexico in 1821. Most of the production centers were established toward the end of the eighteenth century. The style had its fullest development during the first half of the nineteenth century.¹¹

Although sculptures and paintings from the metropolitan centers of Mexico City and Puebla were also shipped to all of the mission fields from Texas to California, the need for locally produced sacred images was most pronounced in the internal northern territories of Arizona and New Mexico. Friars in California

and Texas were closer to maritime and overland shipping lanes and were, therefore, able to import religious images and furnishings from central New Spain, and later, Mexico. This was not the case in New Mexico where demand for religious images far exceeded the supply, thereby forcing local artisans to produce them. Being largely untrained, the artisans eventually developed a distinctive folk art style. A comparison of the tin painting with a number of retablos will illustrate the differences in style if not the content and meaning of the paintings.

The tin painting selected for our discussion is by an anonymous painter from northern Mexico. (Fig. 1) Our Lady of Guadalupe is seen in the center of the visual field surrounded by the mandorla that identifies her, and she wears a golden crown. The four stages of the miraculous apparition are shown in narrative vignettes at each corner of the painting. Each is framed by an elaborately painted gold frame. The narrative begins on the lower left-hand side of the painting and continues in clockwise fashion to the other corners where all subsequent episodes related to the miraculous apparitions are painted. The final episode is painted on the lower right-hand corner where Our Lady of Guadalupe is seen on the *tilma* (garment) of Juan Diego, on which she was mi-



Fig. 1

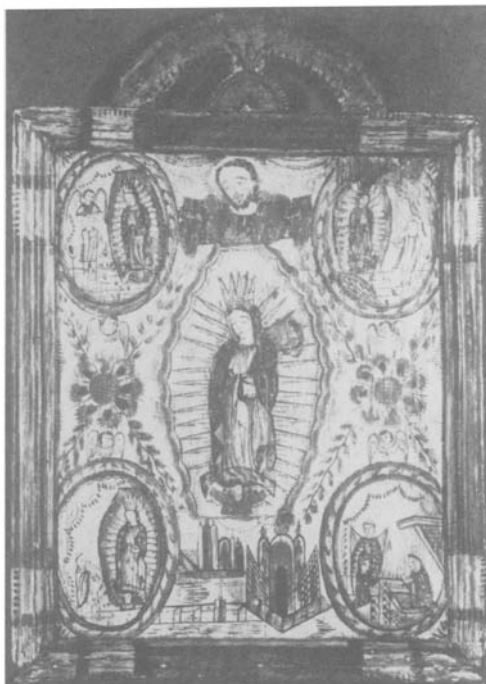


Fig. 2

raculously imprinted when the roses (another part of the miracle) were presented to Fray Juan de Zumárraga, Bishop of Mexico, as evidence that the apparitions had taken place.

The first of the two works by artists of New Mexico selected for discussion, is by Rafael Aragon, who is generally identified as a Spaniard.¹² He differed from the other santeros because he could read and write, and this ability was reflected in his work. He signed his paintings and often included lengthy prayers in them. Although his work can be considered folk in style, given his lack of training as a painter, it has a relationship to academic sources because he used engravings as models for his work. Finally, his painting is more sophisticated in its definition of form and the proportion of the human figure than most of the other retablo painters of New Mexico.

The retablo by Rafael Aragon has a large half circle extension on the upper part of the rectangular frame. (Fig. 2) The space between the inner half circle and the outer one was cut out, and the dove of the Holy Spirit was painted on the bridge between the two. As in the tin painting reviewed above, the retablo has Our Lady in the center with the representations of her appearance to Juan Diego represented in the same manner as that seen in the tin painting. The oval frames for each event are almost as large as the oval used to contain the mandorla surrounding Our Lady of Guadalupe in the center. The head of Christ is seen directly above the Virgin, and on the bottom, a church that refers to the Virgin's request (when she appeared to Juan Diego the second time) that it be constructed in her honor. The other spaces along the sides of the painting are filled with small angel heads with wings placed above and below the large flowers seen in the centers.

Aragon used line to represent all the motifs in his painting, and color to bring the narrative panel and its frame together, thereby creating an overall pattern which almost obscures the narrative aspects of the work. This is in contrast to the anonymous tin painter who built up his forms with brush strokes and left empty spaces between each of the narrative units and the central motif. This indicates that the artist had received some art training in contrast to Aragon who was self-taught.

The other New Mexico example does not include references to Juan Diego. (Fig. 3) The retablo is by an anonymous artist, initially identified as the "Dot-Dash Painter" and later as Don Antonio Fresques by E. Boyd, and more recently as the "Truchas Master" by W. Wroth.¹³ The work by this artist is generally dated between 1790 and 1830.¹⁴

The Truchas Master painted Our Lady of Guadalupe on a rectangular panel to which he added the upper half of a large semi-oval shape on top. An enormous flower with large petals is painted in the circular shape, and other smaller ones are painted on each corner of the narrative panel. Thin tendril-like branches along the sides stop short of connecting each of the flowers. A wide scalloped frame contains the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the mandorla that surrounds her. The entire unit has been expanded to fill the sides of the panel. The Virgin is crowned as in the earlier examples, and she assumes the traditional pose.

However, any further resemblance to the original in the basilica in Mexico City stops at this point.

The Truchas Master not only ignored the standard proportions of the slender figure of the Virgin, but he did away with all semblance of naturalism in depicting her downward gaze. The eyes are simple crescent shapes and each iris is indicated by a black dot. The other features are defined with an equal economy of means. The figure and the slender form of the original have been transformed into a schematic rendition in which there is an emphasis on the colors and vigorous line used to outline each form.

In spite of the many differences in rendition, largely the result of circumstances and the training of the artists or lack of it as well as their talents, the intent was always to create an image as close to the original as possible because it was to be used as an object of religious devotion. The artists were also very careful in presenting the episodes of the apparition leading to the actual miraculous imprint of the image of Our Lady on Juan Diego's tilma. Fidelity to the original continued in the work of Hispanic American and Mexican American artists in the twentieth century, including that of the Chicano artists who began to use the image in their murals fifteen to twenty years ago. Most, if not all twentieth century renditions, focus on the initial apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego or on the original image found in the basilica in Mexico City.¹⁵



Fig. 3

Most of the images of Our Lady of Guadalupe created by other Hispanic American and Chicano artists in sculptures, paintings, drawings, prints, and installation and performance pieces, relate to social, political, and artistic issues rather than religious ones. The emphasis has been on Hispanic heritage, Chicano identity and Chicano art. The discussion will begin with those examples in which slight changes have been made to those in which the entire image has been transformed and used to emphasize the non-religious issues raised by the artist.

A bulto by Horacio Valdez made in 1976-77 follows the traditional representations of Our Lady of Guadalupe, but the intent was not to create an object of veneration. It was meant to be taken as an image related to the



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Hispanic traditions in New Mexico. Valdez, like the other new santeros, reintroduced polychromy and larger size in order to make the pieces closer to the traditional santos produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁶

The works of the new santeros reflect the many movements of the 1960s which were aimed at attaining equal rights along all fronts for blacks, Hispanics, women, and other minorities in the United States. They also differ from the small unpainted santos which have been made in Cordova, New Mexico, since the early 1920s primarily for the tourist trade.¹⁷

The need to retain Hispanic culture and identity places the work of Valdez and the other santeros like him in the same situation as the Chicano artists in other parts of the Southwest, Northwest, and the Great Lakes region who used their art to make similar statements. The organization of Chicano artists' groups throughout these different regions is reflected in the formation of *La Cofradía de Arte y Artesanos Hispánicos* for the purpose of supporting Hispanic artistic freedom.¹⁸ It has members from throughout the state of New Mexico.

Chicano muralists who have painted Our Lady of Guadalupe in the barrios since the late 1960s and early 1970s have emphasized the traditional representations of the holy image but have added Chicano references. An

example is seen in a detail of a mural on the side of an off-ramp of the Coronado Bridge in San Diego, California, painted by members of the *Toltecas en Aztlan*, an artists' group.¹⁹ (Fig. 4) Arturo Roman, a member of the group, painted Our Lady of Guadalupe in the traditional pose but substituted the head of a Chicano youth with mustache and headband for the angel seen in the original image. The artist retained the angel's wings but added the red, white and green colors of the Mexican flag to make a statement about Chicano antecedents and identity. Guillermo Rosete, another member of the group, painted the demonstration scene to the right in which the demonstrators are shown carrying the flag of the United Farmworkers Union (Huelgo Eagle on a white circle inside a red field), and banners with images of Our Lady of Guadalupe. (Fig. 5)

Other Chicano artists have used Our Lady of Guadalupe to focus on the meaning of the Chicano experience. In so doing, they have taken the sacred image out of the realm of reverence and veneration but have broadened the meanings traditionally assigned to Her.

Among the earliest efforts to use Our Lady of Guadalupe to make a statement about women and their role in the Chicano movement was made by Ester Hernandez in a linocut print and a painting dating from 1975. (Fig. 6) The work is titled *La Virgen de Guadalupe Defendiendo los Derechos de los Xicanos* (Our Lady of Guadalupe Defending the Rights of Chicanos). When the linocut version was printed on the cover of the December 1979 issue of a guide for public radio in Santa Rosa, California, titled *enfrecuencia*, there was a negative reaction to it.²⁰ Earlier, in a published interview, the artist explained what the figure meant to her:

The figure "represents woman becoming an active participant, breaking out of some traditional images—the colonial mentality, while maintaining her culture, informing, teaching, and learning from her people; taking a militant stand on all fronts, on behalf of La Raza: La Chicana at the forefront of the arts, in schools, as writers . . . whatever. Encompassing everything."²¹

Hernandez retained the most recognizable motifs of Our Lady of Guadalupe—the mandorla, the crescent moon, and the small angel that supports the image—and used them as a frame for the karate figure, shown in an action pose with all the extremities forming two primary directions made up of diagonals and horizontals that accentuate its dynamism. The other forms add to the movement that permeates the image.

Yolanda Lopez, who now resides in San Francisco, used Our Lady of Guadalupe in a series of works she exhibited in the Mandeville Center for the Arts, San Diego, in 1978.²² Among the works on women and Our Lady are several which are of particular interest because they focus on Chicano culture and identity. The artist substituted a number of human figures and an Aztec deity for Our Lady in several works, among them, her grandmother, an Indian woman nursing her child, the artist herself, and *Tonantzin* (Our Mother) which is actually

a small Aztec sculpture generally identified as *Coatlicue* (Serpents, Her Skirt). The self- portraits include a performance piece in which the artist is photographed moving toward the viewer armed with paint brushes and wearing blue shorts, a sleeveless undershirt with stars painted on it, and sneakers; and a painting in which the artist has appropriated the attributes of Our Lady and her pre-Columbian counterpart. (Fig. 7) She runs toward the viewer with an expression of triumph holding the serpent in one hand and the mantle with star-studded blue field in the other.



Fig. 6

Lopez obviously did research on Our Lady of Guadalupe and the various manifestations of the Aztec earth goddesses, which have traditionally been considered the equivalents of the Catholic deity. The use of the pre-Columbian deities to make statements about identity is also found in Mexican art. In a series of works devoted to “Our Gods,” done between 1914 and 1918, Saturnino Herran superimposed the Crucified Christ on the colossal figure of the Aztec deity *Coatlicue* to make a statement about the merging of indigenous religion and Spanish Catholicism in Mexico.²³ Colonial artists in Mexico City had earlier used Indian and European figures in paintings with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe to make a statement about the emerging Mexican nationality comprised of Spanish and Indian components. Lopez used Our Lady to make a statement about identity in which the pre-Columbian and Hispanic components form an integral part.

The most unusual of the new renditions of Our Lady of Guadalupe is a drawing with colored pencils by Cesar Martinez of San Antonio, titled *Mona Lupe, the Epitome of Chicano Art*.²⁴ (Fig. 8) Our Lady is represented from the



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

waist up and her hands overlap the lower part of the frame, an obvious reference to the universally known painting *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci. The artist ignored the original configuration of the Our Lady except for the mantle and the mandorla that surrounds her image.

Martinez used the *Mona Lisa* as a format for his drawing, in order to make a statement about the definition of Chicano art and the ubiquitous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in so many murals, drawings, prints, paintings, and other works of art by Chicano artists. The artist demonstrated his knowledge of art history when he decided to use the *Mona Lisa* in his drawing because many other artists have used the image in the past to make all sorts of social and political as well as artistic statements. Martinez used it to make a comment about Chicano art as it relates to Chicano identity and its personification by Our Lady of Guadalupe, which embodies religious, national, ethnic, social and political meanings for Mexicans and Chicanos.

Summary

The miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been an important source of inspiration and a point of reference for Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicano artists, as well as for their predecessors in New Spain, because of the many levels of meaning and significance assigned to it. Although the vast majority of people see the image as an object of devotion and veneration, artists and others have used it for non-religious purposes, that is, as the source and rallying point for Mexican identity and nationality. Our Lady of Guadalupe has had and continues to have cultural, historical, and political meaning for Mexicans, Spanish Americans, Mexican Americans and Chicanos.²⁵

Our Lady of Guadalupe was used in New Spain to focus on the forging of a new Mexican identity as early as the eighteenth century. There are a number of paintings from this period in which the image of Our Lady is flanked by Indian

and European figures and symbols. The dual components—Indian and European (Creole) and their merging (mestizo)—were always emphasized in these images.

The Tin Painters of northern Mexico and the santeros of New Mexico created images of Our Lady of Guadalupe that were meant to be used primarily for veneration purposes. The artists always used the original image, which they attempted to faithfully replicate by itself or with small narrative scenes at each corner relating to the miraculous apparition of the Virgin to Juan Diego. The Chicano muralists also used the traditional image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, with slight variations, to make statements about Chicano culture and identity.

More recently, Chicano and Chicana artists have used Our Lady of Guadalupe in paintings, drawings, prints, performance pieces and installations to focus on issues relating to Chicano heritage, identity, and art. Specific themes in their works have dealt with the identity and role of women in the Chicano movement, and the ubiquitous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Chicano art that seems to be synonymous with that art.

These images which can be jarring or gently mocking of firmly held beliefs, remind us that Chicano art is far more complex than the mere inclusion of images of Our Lady of Guadalupe. They are but one part of an art that has a much broader genesis, content, and meaning. The intent of the artists has also varied. Some have used Chicano motifs and themes to make social or political comments; others have used them to celebrate Chicano culture as a positive force. In all of these cases, Our Lady of Guadalupe has been used by artists to comment on the substance and meaning of the Chicano experience in the United States.

Notes

¹For a discussion of the continuing relationships between the earliest Spanish settlers of the Southwest and their religious folk art from tin paintings, santos, *ex-voto* paintings to yard shrines, home altars, see Jacinto Quirarte, *A History and Appreciation of Chicano Art* (San Antonio: Research Center for the Arts and Humanities, 1984), 125-34. See the same publication, pp. 66-84, for a discussion of the relationships between Mexican American and Chicano art to modern Mexican art.

²Francisco de la Maza, *El Guadalupanismo Mexicano* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981). First Edition, 1953; Jacques LaFaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness 1531-1813* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 209-311.

³LaFaye, 254-67.

⁴La Faye, 295.

⁵For a discussion of Aztec cosmology, see Miguel Leon Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963).

⁶Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Mexico," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, gen. ed. Robert Wauchope, vol. 10, Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica, Part One, vol. eds. Gordon F. Ekholm and Ignacio Bernal.. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 395-446.

⁷de la Maza, 182-86.

⁸LaFaye, 245.

⁹de la Maza, 182.

¹⁰de la Maza, 184.

¹¹For a discussion of Mexican folk retablos (tin paintings), see Gloria K. Giffords, *Mexican Folk Retablos: Masterpieces on Tin* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974).

¹²William Wroth, *Christian Images in New Mexico* (Colorado Springs: The Taylor Museum of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 1982), 105-14.

¹³Wroth, 171-84.

¹⁴Wroth, 173-74.

¹⁵For reproductions of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe see J. Quirarte, *Mexican American Artists*, 1973, facing p. 46; and for numerous examples, see Jacinto Quirarte, *A History and Appreciation of Chicano Art* (San Antonio: Research Center for the Arts and Humanities, 1984).

¹⁶For a reproduction of the Valdez work, see Quirarte 1984, Fig. 43, Charles L. Briggs, *The Wood Carvers of Cordova, New Mexico* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978) 36-83.

¹⁷Briggs, 36-83.

¹⁸Briggs, 210. Other references to *La Cofradía de Arte y Artesanos Hispánicos* in the text are taken from this source.

¹⁹Quirarte, *A History and Appreciation of Chicano Art*, 203.

²⁰*enfrecuencia*, Diciembre 1979, cover. Jorge Cendejas reacted with shock upon

seeing Hernandez's print of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the cover of this publication and expressed other concerns in a letter printed in the January issue of the same publication.

²¹Dorinda Moreno, "Ester, Lupe, y la Chicana en el Arte, in " *La Razon Mestiza II* (San Francisco: Concilio Mujeres, Summer 1976) no pagination.

²²Exhibition Catalogue: *Yolanda M. Lopez: 1975-1978* (San Diego: Mandeville Art Center, December 1978).

²³For a discussion of the use of the *Coatlicue* by Mexican artists, see J. Quirarte, "The Coatlicue in Modern Mexican Painting," *Research Center for the Arts Review* (April 1982): 1-8.

²⁴Quirarte, *A History and Appreciation of Chicano Art*, 179-80.

²⁵Banners with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe have been used by Mexican and Mexican American leaders to further their causes. Father Miguel Hidalgo used them in the fight for Mexican Independence that was declared on 16 September 1810. Emiliano Zapata, one of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, used them in public demonstrations. César Chávez, the leader of the United Farmworkers Union, used them in the strike against the grape growers of California that officially began on 16 September 1965. The banner referred to the ethnic identity of the farmworkers and the date to Mexican Independence.

Narrative Quilts and Quilted Narratives: The Art of Faith Ringgold and Alice Walker

**Margaret M. Dunn
and
Ann R. Morris**

Traditionally, quilts are “women’s art,” and they reflect the pattern of women’s lives—a patchwork-like pattern of connection and compassion. In *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*, Alice Walker reports that when she looked for the creative spirit that contemporary black women have inherited, she found part of her answer in an anonymous black woman’s quilt hung in the Smithsonian Institution. Walker describes this unknown black woman from Alabama as “an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use.”¹ Following in the footsteps of that anonymous woman, a number of contemporary black artists work in cloth and words to create narrative quilts and quilt-like narratives although, until recently, neither quilts nor women’s writing were seen as “real art.” Faith Ringgold, for example, has made “politically engaged black feminist art out of quilting . . . and performance,”² and Alice Walker has won acclaim with her womanist prose. Each of these women is a quilting artist. Ringgold tells stories in cloth; Alice Walker stitches stories into quilted narratives.

Houston and Charlotte Baker suggest that, for African American women, the “patchwork quilt as a trope” offers a vast array of “interpretive possibilities.” Historically, the Bakers explain, black women were denied time and materials for artistic expression. Yet the women had to sew, and they had to make quilts. Quilts, in fact, were their tradition, the heritage that they could pass on to succeeding generations. The actual quilt, then, is a tangible bond between present and past, while the quilt as metaphor reflects “a communal bonding that confounds traditional definitions of art and of the artist.”³ The artist, in other words, is usually defined as one who breaks new ground and stands alone outside the received tradition. Yet the quilt-artist is the *carrier* of tradition, embracing the past and creating continuity. In this manner, Ringgold’s narrative quilts and Walker’s quilted narratives stitch past and present together as they reflect and explore the patterns of black women’s lives.

Faith Ringgold is an internationally acclaimed visual and performance artist whose “narrative quilts” (this is her term) are included in her touring exhibitions. In the mid-seventies, Ringgold was working primarily with fabric, but she wanted to get back to painting. She decided to mix the two media by painting *on* cloth and by framing paintings *with* cloth. At the same time, she began to add text to her creations. In a 1972 series, for example, she painted short, haiku-like texts on landscapes; in other works she included terse statements by black women such as Sojourner Truth.

Then in 1980, Ringgold was commissioned to create a quilt for a traveling exhibition, a project which helped Ringgold realize, as she puts it, that the “quilt, so intimately connected with women’s lives, could become a most effective vehicle for telling the stories of their lives.”⁴ Working with her mother Willi Posey, Ringgold created a pieced and painted quilt entitled “Faces of Harlem.” Containing no written text, this quilt tells its story entirely in pictures, but three years later Ringgold created her first “story quilt” (again, this is Ringgold’s term) entitled “Who’s Afraid of Aunt Jemima?” The Aunt Jemima quilt’s fifty-six pieces include squares of story-text about a revisionist Aunt Jemima. This Aunt Jemima is not a turbaned mammy, but rather a successful businesswoman whose mother runs a brothel in New Orleans. In addition to the squares of “text” that tell Jemima’s story, the quilt contains painted picture-squares depicting the other characters and squares of traditional quilting. The placement of squares in the overall design, however, at first glance appears peculiar. To “read” the text of the Aunt Jemima quilt, one begins at top left and reads down the left side; then one moves to top right and reads down the right side. Yet the quilt itself appears to be “centered” by a “title square” in the middle. In this manner, that is, through the strategic placement of squares, Ringgold implies the complex community of which Aunt Jemima is the center. The story-lines of other lives are part of Jemima’s story, yet these other lives have directions of their own. To consider Ringgold’s Aunt Jemima, in other words, is to realize the importance of “community.”

Later story quilts by Ringgold also contain text-squares, picture-squares, and traditional quilt-squares, and again the placement of squares in the total composition is crucial to the overall visual effect as well as to the story that is told. For example, text-squares in “The Wedding: Lover’s Quilt #1” are restricted to one vertical strip in the center, like the aisle of the church. This placement of text is appropriate, because the text-strip tells a story of infidelity and fear that divides bride from groom, family from family, and friends from each other. In “Sleeping: Lover’s Quilt #2” the text-squares comprise a sheet that partially covers two lovers lying in bed together. Yet while the “sheet” under which they both lie appears to bring the man and woman together, the story in the “text” describes the woman’s inner conflict and betrayal of her lover. The flowing text-sheet reads in columns, from left to right. It moves, in other words, only in one direction. And at the end of the story, it is clear that his outstretched hand will never touch her.

In contrast to these quilts that tell straight-line stories, Ringgold’s “The

Dinner Quilt” tells a story that is circular, like the overall design of the quilt itself. In the text, the narrator describes a typical extended-family dinner when she was young—how conflicts and liaisons simmered and brewed throughout the meal. Many years later, she understands much that had earlier been confusing, but she finds that understanding and adulthood have brought, inevitably, complicity. Like the text-squares that surround the dinner table on the quilt, the narrator of the story is likewise a part of the whole fabric. A similar circularity structures the quilt entitled “Change: Faith Ringgold’s Over 100 Pounds Weight Loss Story Quilt.” In “reading” this quilt, one begins at the top center, moves roughly counterclockwise through picture-squares and text-squares, and ends up again at top center. The title is an apt description of the content. In the text-squares, Ringgold describes how she gained weight over a period of years, and then how she lost it. And the point of the convoluted, somewhat circular design is that one aspect of her life is meaningless without all the others, that no one’s life is as simple as a “beginning-middle-end” story. Ringgold’s weight gain and weight loss were complex processes that involved others as well as herself, and thus the quilt pattern abstracted from her experience is a complicated one. As Ringgold explained in our interview with her, “How the story fits into the design of the quilt is very, very important. . . . The story has to be woven into the total composition of the work.”⁵

The dividing line between visual art and verbal art is thus blurred in Ringgold’s narrative quilts, just as it has traditionally been blurred in metaphors of needle and pen. Spinning, weaving, and stitching are historically “women’s work,” and those who do this work with fabric have also long been equated with those who use words as their materials, creating verbal quilts as well as comforters. Female storytellers spin yarns and weave tales in the text-as-textile metaphor that includes Arachne, Ariadne, and Penelope as legendary personae.

Among contemporary writers, perhaps no one is more aware of this than Alice Walker. Her novel *Meridian*, she said in a widely quoted interview, was patterned like “a crazy quilt— . . . something that works on the mind in different patterns.” “A crazy quilt story,” she continues, “is one that can jump back and forth in time, work on many different levels, and one that can include myth.”⁶ Barbara Christian has explored this quilting technique in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and in *Meridian*, but not in Walker’s other work.⁷ Yet the influence of quilts pervades all of Walker’s fiction.

As if to make the metaphor of quilting explicit, in *The Color Purple* Walker (who worked on a quilt while writing the novel) makes clothwork one of the most important activities. Celie literally discovers and defines herself through her at-home clothesmaking industry. Fabric, yarn, thread, and piecework are suggested and exchanged between characters throughout the novel, and the quiltmaking of Celie, Sofia, and Corinne draws the women together in a common enterprise and community. Seeing in this quiltmaking one of the novel’s themes, one critic emphasizes the fact that “sewing is an act of union, of connecting pieces to make a useful whole.”⁸ In one sense, Walker achieves through metaphor and verbal description what Ringgold does through fabric and paint, each using the quilt as,

in the words of critic Lucy Lippard, a “visual metaphor for women’s lives.”⁹

Walker creates a “visual metaphor” in her collection of stories, *In Love and Trouble*.¹⁰ The stories are often angry, sometimes stoic, and always truthful about the harsh realities of black women’s lives. The characters within each story do not recur or interact, and there is no specifically common setting such as a city block or neighborhood. Yet this is not simply a random collection of unrelated tales. In the book, the stories are bonded together thematically, each telling of racial and sexual oppression. Further, the book is crafted like a pieced quilt—specifically a “strip quilt.” In this quilt design category, which is indigenous to Africa and often found in slave quilts from southern plantations, pieces combine to form large vertical or horizontal stripes that march from one end of the quilt to the other. The visual effect of these quilts can be striking, with each pieced “strip” different from the others and yet somehow a harmonious part of the overall design. The effect is the same with Walker’s stories. In the collection, which might be called a “quilted narrative,” each story delineates a separate life. No story’s characters cross into any other story. Yet in their very parallelism, the tales form an integrated whole, a “whole cloth.”

Indeed, this “whole cloth” is a tapestry depicting women in love and in trouble. “Roselily,” the first fiction, describes a woman who, on her wedding day, surrounded by her four children, prays that a loveless marriage will bring respectability. The next two stories deal with unhappy marriages, the fourth and fifth with parent-child relationships. Thus, the first five stories focus on love more or less ironically, but they certainly also contain a lot of trouble. In contrast, the last eight stories focus on trouble, but they also contain a lot of love. The stories are often angry, frequently grotesque, and unremittingly truthful about the harsh realities of black lives. One such reality, indeed the central reality for each protagonist, is foreshadowed in the book’s two epigraphs—excerpts that highlight the conflict between an alien world and a defiant self. The first epigraph, from Elechi Amadi’s *The Concubine*, tells of a young woman whose “personal spirit” brings her in conflict with authority and tradition. The second epigraph, from Rilke’s *Letters to a Young Poet*, is an exhortation to “hold to what is difficult.” Most of Walker’s characters manage to heed the words of Rilke, but Walker shows how alien and treacherous is the white world in which they must live. In “Strong Horse Tea,” for example, a white mailman refuses to help Rannie Toomer get a “real” doctor for her dying baby son, Snooks. In “The Welcome Table,” an old black woman is physically carried from a white church she had entered to pray. And in “The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff,” a starving black family is refused food stamps because the parents and children don’t look ragged enough. Snooks dies of pneumonia, the old black woman falls over dead in the dusty road, and Hannah Kemhuff’s four children starve to death. This could be the stuff of melodrama, but Walker’s vision is subtle and complex, not melodramatic.

The mother of Snooks, Rannie Toomer, for example, is far from an attractive character. Illiterate and dull, her “long crusty bottom lip” hangs down while she listens, with her mouth open. Because she has not washed since her baby took ill,

she smells “like a wet goat.” Similarly unattractive, the old black woman who is bodily carried from the white church is clearly mad. She smells of “decay and musk—the fermenting scent of onionskins and rotting greens,” and her headrag is “stained with grease from the many oily pigtailed underneath.” When she thinks she sees Jesus coming down the dusty highway toward her, she emits “short giggles of joy, jumping about and slapping her hands on her knees.” Other characters are just as sad, perhaps even as embarrassing as these two. Yet in Walker’s compassionate art, in the tapestry that she creates, all the “pieces”—no matter how flawed—are important parts of the human community.

Two of the happier stories in this book, “Everyday Use” and “To Hell With Dying,” are often anthologized. In “Everyday Use,” a black country woman and her two daughters clash over the disposition of some family quilts, described by Walker as follows:

[The quilts contain] scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell’s paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra’s uniform that he wore in the Civil War.¹¹

These quilts are family albums, pieces of many lives stitched into one whole cloth. They are in fact like the quilt coverlet that covers Mr. Sweet in the last story in the book, “To Hell With Dying.” Mr. Sweet—an incorrigible alcoholic beloved by neighborhood children—dies on his ninetieth birthday, surrounded by people who love him, under a quilt coverlet that symbolizes the community of which he is a part. This is a community that knows pain, like the pain that drove Mr. Sweet to his alcoholic excesses. Yet it also knows love, like the love that surrounds Mr. Sweet again and again, saying “to hell with dying” and bringing him back from the brink of death. As Walker makes clear, the characters in these thirteen stories are a heterogeneous lot. Some of them find healing ways to deal with the world. Some of them are smart, beautiful, and successful. Many, though, are like Maggie in the story “Everyday Use”: “Like good looks and money, quickness passed her by.” Perhaps this very diversity is the point of the book, explained in effect by its sub-title: “Stories of Black Women.” Walker has commented that these are stories *by* black women, that is, stories that Walker herself heard or witnessed. Thus she has stitched together history and legend, life and imagination, to create her quilted narrative.

It is no wonder, then, that Faith Ringgold and Alice Walker admire each other’s work. Ringgold’s “The Purple Quilt” was inspired by Walker’s *The Color Purple*—a story-quilt inspired by a quilt story. Commenting about this quilt and others, Walker herself observed in a press release for Ringgold’s 1987 exhibition: “One feels the marriage of the stories with the quilts is true. . . . We are covered in the warmth of the stories. Sustained by the vivid history of these quilts.” Thus story-quilts and quilt-stories combine history and vision, tradition and innovation, practical use and uncommon beauty. If in their pieces they reflect the fragmentation and difficulty of women’s lives, they also reflect the role of

black women as “connectors,” as creators of community. From a scrapbag filled with bits of history and pieces of life-stories, such quilters as Ringgold and Walker create something coherent and whole.

Notes

¹Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (New York: Harcourt, 1983), 239.

²Michele Wallace, “Variations on Negation and the Heresy of Black Feminist Creativity,” in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist.*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Meridian, 1990), 59.

³Houston A. Baker and Charlotte Pierce-Baker, “Patches: Quilts and Community in Alice Walker’s ‘Everyday Use,’” *The Southern Review* 21 (Summer 1985): 714.

⁴Thalia Gouma-Peterson, “Faith Ringgold’s Narrative Quilts,” *Faith Ringgold: Change: Painted Story Quilts*, Exhibition Catalog (New York: Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, 1987), 10.

⁵Interview, 27 September 1987.

⁶*Black Women Writers at Work*, (New York: Continuum, 1983), 176.

⁷Barbara Christian, *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1980), 180-238.

⁸M. Teresa Tavormina, “Dressing the Spirit: Clothmaking and Language in *The Color Purple*,” *Journal of Narrative Technique* 16 (Fall 1986): 224.

⁹Lucy R. Lippard, “Up, Down and Across: A New Frame for New Quilts,” in *The Artist and the Quilt.*, ed. Charlotte Robinson, (New York: Knopf, 1983), 32.

¹⁰Alice Walker, *In Love and Trouble* (New York: Harcourt, 1967).

¹¹Walker, *In Love and Trouble*, 56.

**Edna Manley's *The Diaries*:
Cultural Politics and the Discourse of Self**

Consuelo López Springfield

"Let me be what I am, a woman
wrestling to find a final image."

—Edna Manley
The Diaries

A critic of imperialism, race and class privilege, sculptor Edna Manley contributed to the ascendancy of a West Indian cultural aesthetic. Her productivity in the creative arts and her promotion of indigenous cultural organizations were vital to the growth of a post-colonial identity expressing Jamaican national unity and cultural plurality. The wife of Premier Norman W. Manley and the mother of Michael Manley, Jamaica's former Prime Minister, she drew strength from her cross-cultural heritage as a British-trained artist seeking to express the collective unconsciousness of her people. Her creative work finds its symbols in the subaltern currents of Caribbean life in the ongoing processes of community-making that forge a national identity out of peoples displaced from many lands. Her art is integrative: Afro-Caribbean and European themes merge in a symbolic universe suggesting "wholeness." Her self-reflections, in diary form, also illustrate her determination to link opposing metaphors of the self into a central, organizing image.

In *The Diaries*, visions of a personal reality intersect with the collective histories of her people.¹ Social consciousness and self-liberation are intricately linked; historical events stimulate and are stimulated by the creative process. In contrast to feminist critic Elaine Fido's contention that "the new decolonization battle being fought in the Caribbean is that of woman against man, and the parallels with the more familiar decolonization struggle are many,"² Manley indicates that democratic collectivity is finally achieved through the creative efforts of both men and women to attain self-dignity. She asks her readers to respond creatively to the revolutionary fury that grows steadily in societies dominated by capitalism and by outworn concepts of race, class, and gender:

What helps a lot—though difficult to achieve in these days of stress—is to clutch on to some sort of sense of history. We are going through a period of change—change that has been forced on us by the conditions at the bottom—change long, long overdue. So that we are *all* finding ourselves challenged at the most demanding levels. We speak bitterly, even contemptuously, of the professional class who run away—of the businessmen who move their money out, of the ‘spoilt’ women who don’t want their children to grow up under equal educational facilities, and even those who run because of the new colour prejudice and the fear of being attacked, raped, everything. These things happen in every revolutionary period, and although this has not been a very bloody revolution, it could become that at the drop of a hat. The incidents of violence come nearer and nearer home—and when it happens to us, will we be bitter, will we still see it as part of a process? . . . So stay steady, and steady in the face of any eventuality—one has to hold on to history. (194)

In the transformation of culture, there is no certain road to follow, she tells us; history is written in “one or two ways—the old way of using force and power in the face of suffering and need, or seeing through the madness of the movement into the deep roots of the need for change” (174).

Underlining Manley’s historical vision is a feminism acquired in her youth and fueled by contact with Jamaica’s laboring class. The everyday struggles and creative achievements of women, she argues, are intricately linked to historical processes, to economic and political changes which affect their collective futures. Her four diaries, written between 1939-86, unveil the internal workings of consciousness that led her to unite race with feminist values in her personal symbolic realm. Begun at a time of intense labor unrest and demands for political independence, they reveal a profound need to create a personal landscape, to explore the possibilities of self, and to encounter herself in a mythic realm where archetypes would connect her life with the lives of black women and the oppressed.

Born in Cornwall, the daughter of a Yorkshire clergyman and a Jamaican mother, Manley demonstrated, early in life, a daring, independent mind. To her teachers, she appeared “original,” a rebellious schoolgirl to whom “conventional things are light—airy things to her, capable of destruction at a moment’s notice.”³ In 1921, while studying art in London, she married her cousin, Norman, a dark-skinned intellectual from Jamaica’s “brown middle class” who would later guide the Crown Colony towards independence. Her journey from the Old World to the New began in 1921, less than a year after marriage, when she crossed the Middle Passage with Norman and their infant son, Douglas. Within

a short time, Norman's prosperous law practice enabled him to buy Drumblair, a sprawling estate with spacious lawns, acres of meadows, stables, and a tennis court and to hire maid, cook, chauffeur and nurse, gardener and stable boy.⁴ Many of her friends were young, progressive English women who worked as journalists, teachers, and welfare workers. Wealth freed Manley, soon a mother of two, from routine and allowed her to edit *Focus*, Jamaica's first literary magazine and the nationalist weekly *Public Opinion*. She was also able to sculpt, entertain, ride horses, attend horse races, cricket and boxing matches, parties, ocean outings, and galas. Soon, she became a dynamic mentor to young and aspiring local talents and a commanding presence in Norman's intimate political circle. "Drumblair was open to people of all the varied hues and stations of Jamaican society from the white governor to the poor, black, struggling intuitive artists Edna inspired and nourished," Darrell Levi writes. "She in return often visited them, unaccompanied, at bars in the depths of Kingston's slums, scandalizing the conservative elite."⁵ Participation in popular religious meetings and oral poetry recitals led her, in the words of Rex Nettleford, to find new symbols to express her "artistic voice, a mirror image of self, an archetypal sense of place—in short, an indigenous iconography."⁶ Her "whole approach" to work "changed" while attending pocomania meetings "long before Ranny Williams was born, even; or Louise Bennett," she once explained; "gradually, the whole thing became, more and more almost a sense of destiny."⁷

Manley took part in mass rallies, soup-kitchen lines, and partisan meetings, helping to promote the newly-formed People's National Party (PNP) which Norman headed, all the while continuing to sculpt, teach, and encourage the growth of an authentic West Indian aesthetic. At a time when local art continued to be viewed through the prism of traditional middle-class English models, she created a coherent mythology symbolizing the "new consciousness of self and of country"⁸ by fusing European and African elements in Jamaican national life. Although she soon established an international reputation abroad and created a national audience for art exhibitions, she remained artistically alienated in bourgeois society and in need of self-confidence. "There was nobody to judge things by," she told artist Basil McFarlane, "nobody to share the excitement of the creative life."⁹ For nearly fifty years, she turned to diary writing as a vehicle for exploring her inner life and the social conventions of her age. She explains her need for autobiographical analysis:

So I take a pen and write when the loneliness, the emptiness comes on—might in itself help one to grow and to understand. For this I am sure it isn't wise to meet death without an effort of cognition—it isn't wise to go on with the assumption that courage is the only valid virtue. One has to have thought, one has to have wrestled with the angel. (90)

While sculpting allowed her to explore the possibilities of self, to transform reality through the powers of the imagination, her diaries convey the texture of her life-in-process and the relentless spirit of commitment that led to her political

engagement. Edited by her granddaughter, poet Rachel Manley, they capture her creative and personal growth, allowing a pattern to emerge as swift, bold strokes on canvas gradually produce a picture of a subjective self. Embedded in her description of Renoir's the *Woman Reading* are her essential ideas on her style of self-portraiture:

Paint can go on the canvas so many ways, smoothly, roughly, irritably, full of flicks and swirls; it can go on spontaneously and with speed and this is obvious in every mark left behind, or it can go on ponderously, brooding, slowly. So much for paint, and then, take colour, how it glows framed in its sombre black! And painted on with such a world of wisdom, such knowledge and capacity to leave colour and paint to make their own suggestions with such loose, self assured guidance from the brush. . . . All that and so much more is there, so much that is intimate, and yet so much that is secret and rare. (2-3)

At times, mere notations, the “ordered narrative of the day’s events,”¹⁰ the diaries, like art, reveal a process of subjectivity.

Her audience is perceived as plural: the self, Norman, Rachel, and succeeding generations, all of whom are seen to be intelligent, interested in art, life, self-



Fig.1: Edna modelling the recreation of ‘Tomorrow.’

discovery, and human relationships. As the diarist ages and comes to terms with the inevitability of death, her relationship with the reader shifts. The initial “you” of the first entry, for instance, appears to be both an “other” self and an imagined

reader who may have been Norman (for Manley's letters to her husband are filled with inner probing). Later on, aware of the historical value of the diaries, she often comments didactically on life, politics, and art.¹¹ She captures historical events as a backdrop to her life, seeing history as a place where inner and outer lives meet.

Manley also aims at educating her offspring and future generations of West Indians. In minute details, her diaries chronicle the joys and anguish of a family who introduced a new era of political self-determination to the people of Jamaica. Emotions are explored often in partisan settings: fear during her public speaking debut in a church in Harlem, worry over Norman's Jamaica Welfare program, bitterness toward Alexander Bustamante's "bully-boy" tactics to defeat the PNP,¹² and pride in Michael's acute sensitivity to the spoken language of the folk. Although feminist critics contend that "the female autobiographer has lacked a sense of radical individuality . . . that empowered Augustine and Henry Adams to write their representative lives large,"¹³ Manley's diaries illustrate that the personal is historical. Individuality and community intertwine; creative service leads to self-empowerment. Her diaries also justify partisan failures to present and future generations. "One of the things that future generations may not understand is that with all our faults, our weaknesses, we nevertheless were breaking new soil," she insists. Being the first Jamaican "First Lady" was "a tremendous job—like putting an unbroken horse to draw a chariot. You're there—there's no running away and the footlights are on" (215).

Edited after her death in February, 1987, *The Diaries* demonstrates a persistent conflict between her need for solitude, a precondition for creative growth, and her involvement in communal life. Inspired by the Romantic and Symbolist movements, she saw art as "associative" or what Michael Gilkes refers to as "an impulse toward unity of Being."¹⁴ Throughout her life, she strove to integrate her personal world with the political reality that defined her social landscape. As C. Rhoda Cobham-Sanders points out, Manley wrestled with the dichotomy between Eurocentric conceptions of the artist as an individual talent creating original symbols to express personal aesthetic ideals and Afrocentric perspectives of art as shared communal expression.¹⁵ As artist-diarist, Manley attempts to resolve a dialectical struggle between these two competing views by producing a third, "hybrid" cultural aesthetic with feminist creativity at its center. Cuban poet Nancy Morejón refers to this process of *méstissage*, the interweaving of cultural forms, as

the transmutation between two or more cultural components with the unconscious goal of creating a third cultural entity—in other words a culture—that is new and independent even though rooted in the preceding elements. Reciprocal influence is the determining factor here, for no single element superimposes itself on another; on the contrary, each one changes into the other so that both can be transformed into a third. Nothing seems immutable.¹⁶

Francoise Lionnet points out that “in this constant and balanced form of interaction, reciprocal relations prevent the ossification of culture and encourage systematic change and exchange.”¹⁷

Manley sees her artistic goal explicitly as the fusion of European myth with West Indian social reality. In 1984, for instance, frail, exhausted and depressed, she contemplated suicide while wrestling with *The Listener*, inspired by the tale of Orpheus. As she yearns for the “strength” and the “way” to say farewell, her granddaughter, Rachel, comes to her aid:

Rachel’s poem arrives and she writes of Eurydice—
and there it is at a bound—NOT farewell—but “and
she looked back.” In Rilke’s great poem Orpheus is
summoning her back from death—the gods grant
Orpheus the chance to challenge them and play his
heavenly music, which defies even death. But she
must follow the music as it seems to precede her . .
. she must not look back to see its source. But she
looked back. (286)

Manley re-interprets the ancient myth to fit her crucial needs: coming to terms with Norman’s death,¹⁸ her advancing years, and landscape reft by political terrorism. “How,” she asks, “does one put into contemporary and acceptable form an old Greek legend—born in the land of reggae—born in the land of a place where life and death are perhaps not accepted as tragedy but with a robust, almost emotionally excitable [sic].” Important is the arrested image—one that appears in many of her works—of a person glancing over a shoulder in sudden anticipation. It is an image drawn from her innermost self, symbolizing her ambivalence toward and her deep desire to understand and to accept radical social change. “Karl Marx made his titanic contribution when we were youngsters—and then, bearing his thinking in our minds, we worked, we wrestled with the Jamaican context,” she writes. “God bless Marx, but God help his followers.” To this, she adds, “the women are the force in the Caribbean now—in Jamaica anyway. They have borne the loads” (181).

Manley’s private dwelling place can be found in the rugged coasts and surging waves of Cornwall and in the sunlight and sea-waters of tropical Jamaica. Water imagery permeates her artistic consciousness and the dark, mysterious properties of the ocean womb, the primal flow of life, are the source of her feminine self. The first entry begins with an evocation of mood that is at once pensive, wistful, and restrained. The inner self, dark, mysterious and secret, is likened to a deep, dark pool. As she ponders the recesses of her own psyche, she penetrates into the essence of self-existence as a necessary means toward self growth. “Outside at the bottom of the hill,” she writes, “lies the deep, still pool, without a ripple, without a movement, so secret, so inscrutable, holding its imperturbable mirror to the drifting wane white moon.” Although the moon moves on, “it leaves something, something to remember, something to care for, something to develop and make grow, something that not everyone understands to build on” (3-4).



Fig. 2: Eve (1928)

that such times as one has lived has only succeeded in enveloping one in layers and layers of ties and conventions—and then the rest of life stretches out as a sadly [sic] brief time in which to struggle out of the wrappings to some kind of intellectual and emotional freedom” (2).

From the innermost recesses of consciousness, she struggles to redefine art,

The “ocean my mother” appears, moreover, as the source of her creative inspiration. The diarist perceives herself an “ocean creature” seeking rebirth in the sea’s depths and in the sensuality of its sweeping waves. “I have been wrestling with the idea of an ocean sculpture and all the drawings are locked into the almost obsession about a woman’s figure lying in the water,” she writes. “As a child I had been a little obsessed with the danger—’moods and calm’—almost playful moods of a summer sea. Now as I write I remember in the studio this morning, how the thought came of a Caribbean sea—and this I think came after I had released and faced the fear” (286). Her inner self exists in a world of twilight, “like a great octopus at rest, drifting with the sea, nebulous, yet capable of the most instantaneous and tremendous tension” (6). Female metaphors of moon, water and mist form links between two worlds: the England of her childhood memories and the reality of Jamaica, a place of becoming and of affirmation.

As she ages, she seeks solutions to the difficult transitions that she encounters in life: the loss of youth, fecundity, husband, and financial security. At each stage or “path,” she searches for a center, a point of new departure. Metaphysically, she attempts to transcend the contradictions between the collective self and the seeker of “some kind of intellectual and emotional freedom” (2). Life is a “struggle to free oneself from oneself,” Manley writes in 1939; “at some period one achieves complete self-consciousness, and the realization comes that one’s mind is like a

self, and society. At forty, she explains her need to revisit the past and in remembering, to conclude one period of her life and to enter into a new phase. “And so perhaps the time has come to look back and remember and even to make lists of the rememberings that make an end,” she begins, “for every beginning draws the final line in some conclusion and all the forty years of end are important in this first year of a beginning” (5).



Fig.3: The Negro Aroused

“You Must Lift From the Bottom Up”

Through the working of consciousness that is the very essence of diary-writing, Manley develops a profound awareness of an inner need to transform her aesthetic rendering of race into a personal icon.

Although she had cast her vision of the revolutionary potential of Jamaica’s oppressed black population as early as 1935 in *The Negro Aroused*, it was not until her later years that she embraced race as vital to her own identity and self-worth. “Norman felt you must lift from the bottom up—that you must go to the

people,” she writes at eighty; “I knew nothing of politics—but seeing it in the terms Norman saw it, I learnt it from him” (208-9). In time, she learned to understand “all the difficulties of overcoming a sort of still strangeness that comes from difference of colour and class” (209). But it was not until she experienced the loss of privacy, wealth, husband, and physical strength that she saw herself as a woman of color.¹⁹ Her diaries reveal that life transitions were difficult and often painful; and to survive as an “older woman” in a society comprised overwhelmingly of young black people struggling to free themselves from the burdens of the past, she was forced to seek common ground with men and women who held newer and, at times, opposing views of race in political discourse.

During Michael’s 1972 campaign, while she worked on a number of works portraying the Afro-Caribbean grandmother as an heroic spiritual leader, she alleged black ancestry. “I know that my tie with Jamaica comes very strongly through my mother, as well as through Norman,” she writes in a diary entry; “also, in a deep acceptance of being coloured.”²⁰ She fails to mention, however, that her family in England was both shocked and angered by her sudden racial claim. Whether this was due to a conscious omission or an editorial decision is uncertain. We can only speculate that access to the original diaries might reveal the private repercussions of her public stance.

Changes in Manley’s attitudes toward racial identification and interdependency were gradual and thinly-veiled. In the diary entries of the 1940s, Manley describes the hill people as “almost a lost people,” a “tragic people,” who are “dark and desperate and really very stupid” (26-31). Initial entries attest to a romantic self-image as an existentialist artist and political wife whose creative work interprets social reality for a people in need of artistic vision. As she experiences interdependency in an expanded familial circle, however, she outgrows the early prejudices that had emerged during unsuccessful political campaigns in the hill country. She shows no sympathy for the middle class “leaving in swarms” and driven by “love of money, their special privileges, a refusal to face and accept colour and racial equalities” (144). Psychological ties to the black community can be found in an entry describing her work on a nude, “a young girl—black, three quarters length, standing in a pool of water.” The “pool” of water recalls earlier references to the inner psyche—profound, peaceful, and protected from the banality of social life. Her creative purpose in carving the girl, we are told, is “to find my own handwriting in a nude, my own emphasis and simplification.” She describes the figure as “a very young girl—utterly wild and untamed—not fully mature—caught standing in a river—kinky hair, uncombed—slim arms—very negro. . . . Life hasn’t begun yet for this girl—the men, the childbearing, the weary looks—no I have chosen ‘a bright morning’” (65). The passage reveals her desire to express her personality not in an European image, as in her early sculpture *Eve*, but in the image of a Rastafari youth.

Soon before her death, Manley confided that her understanding of Rastafarianism took time; “but when I did, I quickly understood the difference and I became fascinated with what I felt was a ‘faith’ that was going to grow and spread

... to me it was the identification with a Black God” (291). She realized clearly that Rastafarian imagery, much like her own archetypal symbols, subverts the very patriarchal constructs that dominate traditional myths. “All the white imagery that consciously and unconsciously had found its creative expression in the white Christs all over Europe—all over the world— carried there with the Christian religion, couldn’t *mean* the truth to the black people of the Caribbean or black America” (291). She goes on to relate an anecdote about a “very impressive” head of a stone carving of Sampson mounted on a log of wood that is taken away by Rastas and of how she had accepted, blithely, their transgression. “I think that Sampson could be the first person,” she laughs, “to connect his strength and virility to his hair” (292)!



Fig. 4: *Ghetto Mother*

As she ages, she reacts to the growing urban violence that tears at the very fabric of social life by turning to archetypal images expressing the sanctity of human life and the increasing burdens placed on black women. Indeed, her ability to acquire new strengths, new sources for selfhood, are linked to her own survival within the family and the black community at large. “As I think of survival, I think of my Jamaican woman,” she writes; “I called my woman and children in the end, *Ghetto Mother*—the agony of the ghetto mother” (249). In her mythological world of women-centered themes, the ghetto woman is strong,

resilient, and protective. *The Cry of the Children*, she explains, “came straight out of my *heart*. . . . It is, I know, a naked statement of *me*—and all I went through in 1980 with the killing of the children” (227). Her use of biblical forms to represent the aspirations of her people and her own feelings about death, sorrow, and the burdens of old age appeal, moreover, to Afro-Caribbean cultural traditions. And while the study of poetry, myth, music and psychology helped to enrich her perceptions of human bondings and the discourse of family life, her sculpture expresses deep communal ties with her mother, grandmother, and granddaughter.



Fig. 5: *The Hills of Papine*

In her art and diaries, Manley articulates visions of generational unity among black women. They parallel her own efforts to establish a genealogy among her female Jamaican ancestors. She relates an incident that occurred in 1965, while discussing plans for a statue of Paul Bogle.²¹ She surmounted anti-white sentiment by claiming that she came from Hanover, her mother’s Jamaican birthplace. “We’re a bit backward in Hanover,” she declares, “but still I’m doing the statue and I know about Bogle” (71). She remembers her mother as “a passionately independent woman” (278); and she describes the “mutual” grandmother whom she and Norman shared as a “Horsewoman *par excellence*” adding that “she could ride any horse (like me!), only she was beautiful and had a magic side-saddle seat—whilst I rode like a ‘gamin,’ no seat, no grace, but GOOD and sensitive hands” (250).

As Manley interprets the devastating effects of political violence and economic blight on Jamaican family life, we meet children and grandchildren, the troubled offspring of an unstable society, who depend increasingly on her

precarious resources. “There is so much that is worrying just now, both on the personal front and politically,” she writes; “but the carving and my faith in it is a sort of rock to which I cling” (120). In her later art, binary opposition dissolves as Manley sculpts images of maternal interconnectedness. “It’s been a strange experience,” she confesses while carving *And Would not be Comforted, Weeping for Her Children*, and *Women and Children*. “There’s been no duality over it—only a shrinking away from the subject, a fear that it was negative, and then finally I felt it is the truth” (222).

As diarist, she not only voices communal aspirations but she also instructs the younger generations to find creative remedies for social ills. Her beliefs go beyond traditional Western feminism to embrace society as essentially androgynous. “In spite of his tremendous genius, Blake saw God as a father figure, but what about the mother figure,” she writes in 1981; “when I was at Nomdmi, and very inspired, I was feeling my way toward a Man Woman Godhead” (224). To Manley, “Godhead” signified “stillness at the core” (50), a state of peace and wholeness.

Conclusion

In *The Diaries*, Edna Manley documents a journey to selfhood, a tale of marriage, widowhood and of her identification with the large black Jamaican community. The process of personal growth is uneven as she finds herself trapped often in self-pity and despondency. As she writes and sculpts, she comes to terms with her own womanhood as head of the family and matriarch to a society under stress. Her internal battle finds its reconciliatory images in archetypes emphasizing the strength and determination of black Jamaican women. In a sense her autobiographical journey is also a nationalist vision coinciding with her son’s political campaign for a government that represents, if only on a symbolic level, the aspiration of the popular masses. Hers is a narrative, too, of a woman seeking a room of her own, wanting to nurture and to be loved.

As artist, mother, and grandmother, Manley is concerned with inner growth, national progress, and racial understanding. She expresses her feminism through art, not political agendas. Although as an artist she had embraced feminism at an early age and in her own personal terms, she rejected the feminist movement. “Women’s lib,” she wrote in 1975, “seems cold” (132). Hers was a popular position at the time. The local media had “projected white feminists in Europe and North Americas as ‘women’s libbers,’ hysterical perverts who burned bras and, they implied, probably wanted to kill off the male sex,” Sistren, the feminist writers’ collective, explains.²²

Although she did not link the feminist struggle to the class struggle, Manley believed strongly in the power of women to transform society. By making the private diary available to a public reading, she implicitly challenges women and men to question the direction of social change.²³ Her diaries indicate that through *métissage*, the creative interweaving of cultural traditions, we can construct empowering new images of a communal self, released from the bondage of patriarchal constructs and the power of its institutions.

Notes

¹Rachel Manley, ed. *The Diaries* by Edna Manley (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989). Subsequent page references to *The Diaries* are cited in the text.

²"Radical Woman: Woman and Theatre in the Anglophone Caribbean," *Critical Issues in West Indian Literature* (Charlotte Amalie, Virgin Islands: Caribbean Books, 1984), 37.

³Letter from her teacher, Miss Hanna, of West Cornwall College. Quoted in Wayne Brown, *Edna Manley: The Private Years, 1900-1938* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1975), 45.

⁴Brown., 152.

⁵*Michael Manley: The Making of a Leader* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989), 36.

⁶"Tribute to Edna Manley." Mimeographed speech delivered on 15 February 1987, at Kingston Parish Church. In possession of the author.

⁷Pocomania is an Afro-Caribbean religious practice. Williams and Bennett delighted Jamaican audiences with satirical poems that explored communal experiences. "Edna Manley's Retrospective," *Jamaica Journal* 4 (March 1970): 37.

⁸"Edna Manley: Sculptor," *Jamaica Journal* 18 (February-April 1985): 29.

⁹"Edna Manley's Retrospective," 33-37.

¹⁰Robert A. Fothergill, *Private Chronicles* (Cambridge University Press, 1974), 58.

¹¹Wayne Brown's biography of Manley, based largely on her early diaries and the correspondence between Edna and Norman Manley, must have influenced her assessment of the historical value of the diaries.

¹²"Busta," a cousin of Norman, was his political rival for many years. He became Prime Minister while head of the Jamaican Labour Party.

¹³Bella Brodski and Celeste Schenck, eds. *Life/Lines* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1.

¹⁴*Racial Identity and Individual Consciousness in the Caribbean Novel*. (Georgetown, Guyana: Ministry of Information and Culture, 1974), 5. Manley's

thoughts on “being” appear similar to those of Simone de Beauvoir; however, there is no evidence that she had read any of her works.

¹⁵C. Rhoda Cobham-Sanders provides important insight into Manley’s role in the development of Jamaican literature. She writes that “in the renaissance of the post-1938 era,” Manley enjoyed “the adulation of the young men within the ‘little group’ and was fond of taking up and dropping her protégés on aesthetic as well as personal whims.” See *The Creative Writer and West Indian Society, Jamaica: 1900-1950* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Microfilms, 1981), 56.

¹⁶*Nación y mestizaje en Nicolás Guillén* (Havana: Unión, 1982), 23. Translated by Françoise Lionnet and quoted in *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 15. Mestissage can be compared to the notion of “mestizaje” popular in Latin American literature. It refers to racial misgenation among white and Indian populations. Lionnet argues that it should be used positively to express solidarity among colonized peoples.

¹⁷Lionnet, 16.

¹⁸Norman died on 2 September 1969 at the age of seventy-six. He had been stricken by cardiac asthma in 1968 precipitating a move to Nomdmi.

¹⁹She claimed black ancestry during the time of Michael Manley’s leadership in the PNP and it was popularly held that her new racial identification was a pragmatic attempt to gain votes among the large black voting constituency.

²⁰Entry dated 25 August 1972, *The Diaries*, 111.

²¹Bogle, who led a popular rebellion, is a national hero.

²²Honor Ford Smith, ed. *Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women* (London: The Women’s Press, 1986), xxiii-xxiv.

²³In the introduction to *The Diaries*, editor Rachel Manley writes, “these diaries she bequeathed to me, often reminding me of their existence and my eventual responsibility for them. I once asked her what I should do with them. She said when the time came I would know.” As editor, she removed, she explains, “a short story included in Diary One, a travelogue of China in Diary Two, a list of odd, hallucinatory incidents” in Diary Three and “the poetry dispersed throughout the diary.”

The Persistence of Ethnicity in African American Popular Music: A Theology of Rap Music

Angela M. S. Nelson

The racial oppression of black people in many ways has fueled and shaped black musical forms in America. One example is the blues which originated in the rural South among poor, nonliterate, agrarian African Americans.¹ In the North the music became more formalized, and singers such as Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, Mamie Smith, Ida Cox, and Sarah Martin became known as the queens of the “classic blues.” Another musical genre is jazz, which was largely based on the twelve-bar blues harmonic structure and phrasing. It was more “polished” than the earlier New Orleans jazz at the turn of the century, and its major influences came from New York City, Chicago, and Kansas City. Finally, on the religious front, gospel music was in its early stages of development around the time early blues was evolving. Influenced by blues and jazz, gospel was revolutionary (and controversial) in its combination of drums and fast, rocking rhythms.

As evidenced in jazz, blues, and gospel of the early twenties and thirties, black musicians borrowed heavily from other black musical forms to (re)create new forms. As the decades progressed, this “borrowing” resulted in such new genres as rhythm and blues, soul, and contemporary gospel; and jazz progressed into swing, bebop, cool, funky/hard bop, third stream, and free form. The unifying values found in each of these African American musical forms comprise a black music aesthetic which includes artistic sincerity (conviction), improvisation, innovation, percussiveness, rhythm and syncopation, dynamic spirituality, and the spoken word. Additionally, each of these forms is an interpretation of the historical experience of blacks in American society, and therefore can be read as history. More recently, a new black musical form called “rap,” or hip hop, has evolved from the contemporary urban descendants of southern blacks of the Great Migration. Like its black musical precursors, rap music also describes black American experience, but from an entirely new perspective: the perspective of late twentieth-century urban black youths.

Rap music is an expressive style which emerged in New York City in the late seventies and early eighties. The leading figures of rap music were young black men who were making a living spinning records for local clubs and house parties. "Disc jockeying," or "deejaying," became an important source of income for these men; therefore, intense competition for jobs among deejays resulted in their having to find new ways to defeat their opponents while trying to win the admiration of the crowd. In this attempt, deejays began making percussive instruments out of audio equipment like the record turntable. One technique called "scratching" involved spinning a record backwards and forwards very fast while the needle was in the groove.²

As deejays found it more difficult to operate the records and rap at the same time, "M-Cs," or rappers, were employed. MCs would put on a show for the crowd, dancing in front of the deejays and bouncing lines off of each other. MCs further created new percussive sounds by vocalizing on a microphone, while deejays continued to (re)create new songs by "cutting and mixing" older popular songs. The poetical vocal dubbing by the MCs with a microphone over pre-recorded music evolved into rap music.³

In addition to artistic sincerity, improvisation, innovation, percussiveness, the power of the word, rhythm and syncopation, and spirituality, another aspect of the black music aesthetic is its theology. Black music, in general, tends to be naturally theological, says black theologian James Cone, because in black music a people's deepest aspirations and beliefs are manifested as the divine Spirit moves them toward unity and self-determination.⁴ My intent is to show that a theology of contemporary black experience is both implicit and explicit in a portion of rap. This will be done by examining the historical and thematic relationship between rap and blues and the social contexts of both forms in view of the theological connections that have already been shown between the spirituals and the blues. When I refer to a theology of rap, I am speaking of *theology* as the rational (and partly subjective) discourse reflecting on human encounter with Ultimate Reality (or God) and the interpretation of that experience in faith and practice, which includes the study of religious beliefs of individuals and groups in historical and contemporary life.⁵ In this respect, the theological themes that will be examined include concrete truth, self-affirmation, social and political liberation, (the burden of) freedom, and knowledge and education. My search for the theological themes in rap will consist largely of a comparative analysis of the blues in order to disclose these core concerns as primarily expressed in the lyrics of two contemporary rap artists, Public Enemy and Kool Moe Dee.

Early blues, the true foundation of all secular black musical forms in America, was representative of, and created by and for, poor male and female ex-slaves in southern rural communities. In African American musical history we actually come full circle in rap which, though dating back only to the mid-seventies in its current form, is also representative of a culturally specific group: poor African American adolescents and young adults in northern urban

communities. In spite of the obvious differences, the historical, political, social, theological, and cultural frameworks are similar to that of its progenitor, the blues. Whether crooning the blues or rapping the blues, the secular mode of black musical expression has been an effective means by which blacks have voiced their highest concerns regarding the inequities in American life.

The blues, in contrast with the spirituals, express conditions associated with what James Cone refers to as the “burden of freedom.”⁶ Ex-slaves had to cope with the intersection of racism and its side effects of poor housing, inadequate education, and limited job opportunities. Many of the early communities of former slaves revolved around the sharecropping system, an arrangement that kept black men and women in debt to their white employers virtually all year around. Such conditions were ripe for the “ghettoization” of freedpersons in the South and the creation of the blues. Although the circumstances are not exactly alike, ghettoization still persists today amidst “inner city” housing in large urban areas. Sylvester Monroe, in his book about growing up in the Robert B. Taylor Homes in Chicago during the 1960s, tells of living conditions somewhat similar to those of the southern exslaves. The themes of despair and poverty, and being caged in, predominate. It is out of this environment that rap music and its expression of “inner city” black reality emerges:

Trey-nine was shorthand for 3919 South Federal Street, the northernmost in a two-mile Stonehenge of red-and-cream brick high rises called the Robert Taylor Homes in memory of the first black director of the Chicago Housing Authority. Mayor Richard Daley had cut the ribbon in 1962, with a homily on the great liberal dream of public housing; it was still thought, in that innocent time, that you could deliver the poor from their desperation by heaping up great piles of bricks and mortar around them. . . .

But for too many of the newcomers, it turned out to be a place where hope died. Projects like the Taylors, in Chicago and elsewhere, were built by design in those parts of town where black people already lived and were intended to keep them there. Rather than break up the ghetto, the planners rebuilt it, straight up, with all its poverty and all its debilities piled sixteen stories high in crowded vertical neighborhoods. Other projects rose to the north and south of the Taylors, and an expressway was routed past them, effectively cutting them off from the surviving white neighborhoods nearby. The twenty-eight buildings that made up the Taylor Homes became a city within a city, poor, black, insular, dependent, and dangerous. . . .⁷

Burden of Freedom

Even though the meaning of “freedom” to blacks of the 1870s was somewhat different to blacks of the 1980s, rap musicians (like the creators of the blues) are commenting on the “burden of freedom.” The Taylor Homes residents of the sixties, seventies and even today are “free”—in abstract terms—but they are not fully free, to choose the kinds of schools they want to attend, in what neighborhoods and homes they wish to live, or the occupations they would like to pursue. “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five further depicts the same burden of freedom described above in a story about young black people and the decisions they make because of ghetto life:

A child is born with no state of mind
Blind to the ways of mankind
God’s smiling on you and he’s frowning too
‘Cause only God knows what you go through
Now you grow up in the ghetto livin’ second rate
And your eyes will sing a song of deep hate . . .
You’ll admire all the number booktakers, thugs,
pimps and
pushers, and the big money makers
Driving big cars, spending twenties and tens
And you want to grow up to be just like them
Smugglers, scrappers, burglars, gamblers, pick pocket
peddlers, even pan handlers
And you want to grow up to be just like them
You say I’m cool, I’m no fool, and you wind up
dropping
out of high school
Now you unemployed, all nonvoid, walkin’ round
like you
Pretty Boy Floyd
Turn stick up kid, look what you done did
Got sent up for an eight year bid
Now your manhood is took and you’re name tag
Spent the next few years as an undercover fag
Being used and abused to serve like hell
Till one day you were found hung dead in a cell.⁸

The kind of freedom very much on the minds of Grandmaster Flash and “inner city” black youths who live in projects like the Taylor Homes is identical in spirit to the “freedom” explored by rapper Kool Moe Dee in “Pump Your Fist.” In this rap, Kool Moe Dee not only recognizes that blacks live in a racist society which represses their human potentiality, he also recognizes that a “slave mentality”⁹ is not entirely the “fault” of white oppressors. Liberation, which largely involves a psychological mindset of determination, is the responsibility of the oppressed. When Kool Moe Dee says that drugs are a “weak man’s game,” the bottom line is that crack and cocaine kill people regardless of race:

We feel the wrath/From what happened in the past
 Has made us walk a path
 Made by slavery/No bravery
 We lost/Our unity our source
 Of power and we lost/All race pride/In our Holocaust
 Now it's my creed/I'm from a stronger breed
 My ancestors indeed had to bleed
 Whipped "till they were freed"
 And now/I look back and say
 How did we allow/Physical slavery
 I just don't ever again/See it now I vow
 But are we free/In actuality
 Let's talk reality?Can't you see/The slave mentality
 It's a sickness
 That eats you up like cancer/And money's not the
 answer
 Won't advance ya
 Don't take a chance you/Lame
 Selling drugs for fame/That's the weak man's game
 It's a shame/You got the chains on your brain.¹⁰

Concrete Truth

As evidenced in Kool Moe Dee's lyric, the burden of freedom is a central concern of late twentieth-century rappers just as it was to early twentieth-century bluespeople. In Cone's theological analysis of the blues, he notes that blues is an "artistic response to the chaos of life," the experience of being black in a racist, sexist, and oppressive society: "No black person can escape the blues, because the blues are an inherent part of black existence in America."¹¹ Rap music falls into this lineage because it too is a music created by a societal constituency that cannot escape "the blues." Just as Cone comments that "the blues and truth are one reality of the black experience,"¹² so are rap and truth a unified reality in today's black experience. Cone further notes that the "blues are not abstract; they are concrete. They are intense and direct responses to the reality of the black experience."¹³ So, blues truth was concrete truth just as is the case with rap music today. The rap group Public Enemy illustrates this regard for concrete truth-telling in their rap "911 is a Joke." The tone of the rap is sarcastic and sardonic, but it addresses a serious problem in "inner cities"—the emergency public services not responding to calls in black and Hispanic neighborhoods:

Now I dialed 911 a long time ago
 Don't you see how late they're reactin'
 They only come and they come when they wanna
 So get the morgue truck embalm the goner
 They don't care 'cause they stay paid anyway
 They teach ya like an ace they can't be betrayed
 I know you stumble with no use people

If you life is on the line then you're dead today
 Late comings with the late comin' stretcher
 That's a body bag in disguise y'all I betcha
 I call 'em body snatchers quick they come to fetch
 ya?
 With an autopsy ambulance just to dissect ya
 They are the kings 'cause they swing amputation
 Lose your arms, your legs to them its compilation
 I can prove it to you watch the rotation
 It all adds up to a funky situation.¹⁴

In Jon Spencer's theomusicological analysis of blues, he notes that the "religion of the blues was not morally opaque as critics have claimed; it was oppugnant."¹⁵ He suggests that one form of "evil" blues radically oppugned was Jim Crow ethics: the ethics of discrimination and oppression based on race. This concrete truth is the historical reality of African Americans. Public Enemy, in their rap "Pollywanacraka," comment on the hypocrisy of this "system" including white supremacy and the fear of miscegenation ("mixing of the races"):

I try to tell my people
 There should not be any hatred
 For a brother or sister
 Whose opposite race they've mated
 No man is God
 And God put us all here
 But this system has no wisdom
 The devil split us in pairs
 And taught us White is good, Black is bad
 And Black and White is still too bad. . . .¹⁶

Self-affirmation

Contemporary rappers, like early bluespeople, are responding to the "burden of freedom," in part by relaying portrayals of reality, or concrete truths, to their audiences through their personal experiences. They also relay positive portrayals of themselves as a means of affirming their personhood (and vicariously the personhood of their people) in a world that is constantly telling them they are "nobodies." The affirmation of "black somebodiness" is perhaps best illustrated in boasting. The epitome of boasting in rap is making merit of one's ability to rap, to control and manipulate "the word." A good example is Special Ed's "I'm the Magnificent":

I'm the magnificent, with the sensational style
 And I can go on and on for like a mile
 A minute, 'cause I get in it like a car and drive
 And if the record is a smash I can still survive
 'Cause I'm the man of steel on the wheel that you're
 steerin'
 Or rather playing on the record that you're hearin'.¹⁷

Another rapper, MC Lyte, not only boasts of her own creative ingenuity, she also complains that “sucker MCs” want to copy her style:

The dope, def rhyme that is always being taken
By a sucker MC who wants to be like me
No trait of originality . . .
So like I said before go for yours sucker.¹⁸

Kool Moe Dee, in his rap “I Go to Work,” perhaps outboasts them all regarding his ability to rap. He likens himself to an architect who “builds rhymes” that are so tall “skyscrapers look like atoms.” His “rhymes,” he boasts, “built a nation of rappers” and that is is the “daddy” of them all:

Daddy’s home/Start the race
I’m coming in first/With each verse/I build a curse
So rappers can’t capture Moe Dee’s rapture/After I
got ya
I have to slap ya/Senseless with
Endless rhymes don’t pretend this
Is anything short of stupendous/And when this rhyme
is done
Your mind will become/So trapped in the rap.¹⁹

Knowledge and Education

Boasting is one of the primary ways rappers affirm their “somebodiness” in a society that is constantly telling them they are nobody. Using explicitly religious language, Kool Moe Dee advocates another means to self-affirmation, and this is the acquiring of knowledge and a spiritual foundation:

Knowledge and wisdom/And understanding
Possessed by gods/Transferred to man in
A script or a book/A scripture that looks
Like a Biblical writing/Inviting a hook
Of a song sing along with a strong
Subliminal/Message divesting all men from
Criminal/Acts of the Devil
Revealed and revealed
Designed to recline the mind to a lower level
With no spiritual level
Read the Holy Koran/Or the Bible
Because it’s liable/To be a revival
For the weak who seek power it’ll bring
Infallible power/Knowledge is king.²⁰

Kool Moe Dee suggests that knowledge and wisdom from sacred scripture will send subliminal messages to black people to divest themselves from the “acts of the Devil,” which are the divine evils of drug pushing, emotional abuse, physical violence, hypocrisy, and greed. He claims that knowledge will give power to the dispossessed of society because evil feeds off of an apathetic mind:

Evil feeds/Off a source of apathy
Weak in the mind/And of course you have to be

Less than a man/More like a thing
No knowledge your nothin'/Knowledge is king.²¹

He also states strongly in “Pump Your Fist” that “knowledge is the danger zone” of power that causes “liars, bigots and hypocrites to panic”:

Knowledge is the danger zone
Liars and bigots and hypocrites start to panic
They get frantic
Power generated by the truth
Time to educate the youth
The lust of money
Is out of control. . . .²²

In short, Kool Moe Dee believes scriptural knowledge (self-empowerment and self-affirmation) inspired by God is the answer to doing battle with the “acts of the Devil.” He also views the love of empty fame and fortune as “evil,” and he tells his people that they can transcend such temptations through knowledge, because where “knowledge is king” it is a “spiritual thing.” With “knowledge as king,” he says, the souls of black people cannot be bought:

All praise fame/Positions
Wants to be a star/Drive a big car
Live bourgeois/And won’t know who ya are
Lost in the source/And praising the dollar
Whether your faith is/Christ or Allah
The knowledge of God/Will teach one thing
The dollar is moot/Knowledge is the king.²³

Social and Political Liberation

In comparison to Kool Moe Dee, Public Enemy has always been controversial in its handling of issues in the black community. They too rap about liberation from oppression, but their manner of discourse—honest and sarcastic—intimidates most conservative-minded people. Their spirituality is, as Cornel West would say, “combative.” They tell the “truth” as they have witnessed it, and their conclusive advice to their people is that, with the weapon of knowledge, they must “fight the powers that be”:

Now that you’ve realized the prides arrived
We got to pump the stuff to make us tough
From the heart/It’s a start, a work of art
To revolutionize make a change nothin’s strange
People, people we are the same/No we’re not the same
Cause we don’t know the game
What we need is awareness, we can’t get careless
My beloved lets get down to business
Mental self defensive fitness
(Yo) bum rush the show/You gotta go for what you know

Make everybody see, in order to fight the powers that be.²⁴

The “powers that be” are what Kool Moe Dee called the “acts of the devil”: the white supremacist ideology that has kept black people subjugated and forced “the blues” to be reincarnated as rap. But the prerequisite to “going for what you know” in order to revolutionize black reality in America is “awareness.” Public Enemy is *aware*; they clearly see the state of affairs in America, and they tell the truth—the blues truth—regardless of who is listening.

Public Enemy also speak out specifically about the social and political liberation of men in the black community. In their “Brothers Gonna Work It Out,” Public Enemy prophesy that “one day” black men are going to learn how to serve as role models for each other, and by acting as role models they will work out the problems that plague black men:

Brothers that try to work it out
They get mad, revolt, revise, realize
They’re super bad
Small chance a smart brother’s
Gonna be a victim of his own circumstance
Sabotaged, Shellshocked, rocked and rules
Day in the life of a fool
Like I said before to live it low
Life take your time, time ya go slow
Look here, not a thing to fear
Brother to brother not another as sincere
Teach a man how to be a father
To never tell a woman he can’t bother
You can’t say you don’t know
What I’m talkin’ ‘bout
But one day . . . brothers gonna work it out.²⁵

Whether is is with the more direct religious language of Kool Moe Dee or with the “combative spirituality” of Public Enemy, rappers through their boasting affirm black personhood and through their truth-telling address matters of theological concern in the black community, the nation, and the world. As we are confronted with Kool Moe Dee’s teaching and Public Enemy’s “combative spirituality,” we can hear the profound theological reflection of a generation, if we listen!

Notes

¹William Barlow, “*Looking Up at Down*”: *The Emergence of Blues Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, 1989), 4-5.

²Madeline Slovenz, “Rock the House,” *New York Folklore* 14 (1988): 151-63.

³Dick Hebdige, *Cut ‘n’ Mix* (London: Comedia Books, 1987), 138.

⁴James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1980), 6-7.

⁵*Webster's New World Dictionary of American English*, 3rd college edition, 1988.

⁶Cone, 112.

⁷Sylvester Monroe and Peter Goldman, *Brothers: Black and Poor* (New York: William Morrow, 1988), 35-37.

⁸Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five, "The Message," *Hip Hop Greats: Twelve Classic Raps* (Roulette Records, 1986).

⁹The phrase "slave mentality" is discussed in Amiri Baraka's (LeRoi Jones) *Bluespeople* (New York: Morrow Quill, 1963), 57: "[T]he post-slave black society in America was a completely unique thing to the ex-slaves as well as to the rest of America. There was also such a thing as the "slave mentality," which had a large part in shaping the new black society. By "slave mentality" I mean what had been the most socially unfortunate psychic adjustments that the slave had made during two hundred years of slavery. The very speed with which the white South dealt with the ex-slave's formal aspirations to complete freedom and social and economic autonomy can be attributed to the negative influence of the slave mentality upon the great mass of Negroes. Two hundred years of bending to the will of the white man had to leave its mark. And that mark was indelibly on the very foundations of the new separate black society."

¹⁰Kool Moe Dee, "Knowledge is King," *Knowledge is King* (Zomba Records, 1989).

¹¹Cone, 114-15.

¹²Cone, 114.

¹³Cone, 120.

¹⁴Public Enemy, "911 is a Joke," *Fear of a Black Planet* (Def Jam, 1990).

¹⁵Jon Michael Spencer, *Protest and Praise* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 115.

¹⁶Public Enemy, "Pollywanacraka."

¹⁷Special Ed, "I'm the Magnificent," *Youngest in Charge* (Profile, 1989).

¹⁸MC Lyte, “Stop, Look, Listen,” *Eyes on This* (Atlantic, 1989).

¹⁹Kool Moe Dee, “I Go to Work.”

²⁰Kool Moe Dee, “Knowledge is King.”

²¹Kool Moe Dee, “Pump Your Fist.”

²²Kool Moe Dee, “Knowledge is King.”

²³Kool Moe Dee, “Knowledge is King.”

²⁴Public Enemy, “Fight the Powers that Be.”

²⁵Public Enemy, “Brothers Gonna Work It Out.”

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