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Dialogue

The Human Element

An Interview with Professor Lorelle Semley

Brett A. Cotter '19 and Joshua H. Whitcomb '19

The student work featured in *Of Life and History* is made possible by the extremely talented History Department faculty and their indefatigable mentorship. In every issue we feature a faculty member and share their insights on the value and importance of historical inquiry with our readers. This year, Joshua H. Whitcomb '19 and Brett A. Cotter '19 spoke to Professor Lorelle Semley about her intellectual trajectory, her award-winning book, including her future projects. The interview appears below with only minimal revisions made for clarity.

Professor Semley, an Associate Professor in the History Department at Holy Cross, teaches broad inter-disciplinary courses that contribute to several programs, including Africana Studies, Peace & Conflict Studies, and Gender, Sexuality, & Women's Studies. She received her doctorate in History from Northwestern University. Prof. Semley has written extensively on the French empire, the African diaspora, and the Atlantic World. Her recent monograph *To Be Free and French: Citizenship in France's Atlantic Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2017) won the 2018 World History Association Bentley Book Prize. She is also the author of another highly acclaimed book, *Mother is Gold, Father is Glass: Gender and Colonialism in a Yoruba Town* (Indiana University Press, 2010). Prof. Semley is currently working on two new projects connected to the African and Caribbean populations in Bordeaux, France.

When did you discover your passion for history? Did you make that decision as an undergrad, or was it earlier than that?

I was a French major in college. I definitely did not know that I was going to be a historian then. In fact, I was initially introduced to history through my French studies and African Studies. I spent my senior year of high school in France and I achieved a pretty proficient level of French, so when I started as an undergrad at Georgetown, I immediately placed into the typical French literature classes. However, I really was not a big fan of those. There were some African Studies courses being offered in the department, so I actually took those instead of the literature ones. At the time, I really did not know what graduate school was. I had not thought about it much and I did not really understand how people even became professors. Regardless, I had the notion in my head that I wanted to study history in grad school, even if I had only taken two history courses in college. Then one day, I got a wonderful piece of advice that I should do a Master's program in African Studies. So that's what I did, at Yale. There I was able to get some

background in history, like learning what historiography was for the first time and so forth. Yet at the same time, I was debating whether to specialize in political science or history within the program. I was pretty sure by that time that I wanted to be a historian, but I was still considering being a lawyer, or ‘international lawyer,’ whatever that means. After grad school, I worked for two years in D.C. One day, on my lunch break, I took a walk to the Museum of African History. It was that day, in that museum, that I thought to myself, “yeah, I think I want to do this.” “This” being African history.

I would like to ask you a little bit about your professional journey as a historian. Could you describe the work that went into achieving your PhD and also what various steps in your professional journey led you to where you are now?

Doing the Master’s in African Studies at Yale was really important because it impressed upon me the idea that to study African history I would always have to do so in an interdisciplinary way. I always assumed it would involve interviews, it would involve field work, it would involve looking at literature and religion and art. You know, all of these different things and all of these different connections. When I was looking at PhD programs, I chose Northwestern because it had an African Studies program. Well it had a ‘center,’ and did not necessarily have the language component like some places. I chose this program because it allowed me to focus on African history, while simultaneously introducing interdisciplinary components like anthropology, political science and literature which, in turn, informed my historical research. But being in a history PhD program, I also became very quickly aware of how I was defining myself as a historian, through my coursework. At Northwestern they had a pretty robust African history cohort. There were a few of us in my year, but in any given history course, you could easily be the only African history PhD candidate. Now that can be very lonely and difficult because you are kind of marginalized when everyone else thinks the way you are doing history is different from them. We [African Studies students] would talk about going into the field to do summer research and we would say, “oh, I have to get a summer research assistant,” and everyone goes, “huh, what?” You know, you need help with interviews and stuff like that in our field, it is just a little bit different and not always so focused on the archive. The other thing about my graduate work was that I had specifically gone to Northwestern to work with an advisor who had recently been at Johns Hopkins, Sara Berry. Within the first half of first semester at Northwestern, however, she said, “you know what, I think I am going to go back to Johns Hopkins”. There I was, at this school where I came specifically to work with her and here she is leaving. She has remained an important mentor to me though. I always tell students do not go to a school just to work with this one

person because they could just up and leave you. Rather, you go for the whole program. This change forced me to take different kinds of courses, like some gender history courses taught by Europeanists. Many of the core courses in the programs were taught by Europeanists and Americanist scholars and that exposed me to many new things. I ended up doing a lot more on African diaspora for example. But I am glad I took these courses because I believe these influences made me a stronger historian, especially in my approach to history. I do not exclusively read Africanist scholars. I feel like I have to read everyone, right? Whereas there are some scholars who will just focus on the scholars in their subfield.

Another important part of my graduate school experience, especially in the particular field that I am in, is that in the summers, you have to get a head start on your fieldwork -like finding the place where you will do your dissertation research. I had the fortune of doing an internship with the State Department in the US Embassy in Senegal the year between my Master's and my PhD. It was clear at this point that I was not going into the Foreign Service, but whatever, I was able to do it. Then, because I had been in the program, I applied again and was able to get an assignment in Benin, which was where I wanted to do my field work. Grad school, at both places [Yale and Northwestern], was again, really about this interdisciplinary kind of thing. Like, knowing scholars in my fields, but also knowing scholars in other departments as well. Even many of my friends were working in vastly different fields. This kind of intersection of peoples and disciplines in graduate school is really interesting and it really can inform your scholarship.

What has your experience at Holy Cross been? Do you have any memorable moments? Has anything surprised you? And how has teaching impacted your research or understanding of history?

There is a way in which students at any school are stereotyped - by the way their professors talk about them; by the way they talk about themselves in relationship to schools where their friends go. There is an idea that Holy Cross students are somewhat quiet, less gregarious and very polite. I have found that students of this college, of your, era, this century, are similar in a lot of ways. I have interviewed at different places. I have taught at different liberal arts colleges, and I see the ways in which students present themselves or the ways in which students think through things. I have given talks at big state institutions and I notice similar things. I think there is a little bit of reluctance to put oneself out there or do/say something risky. That really forces you as a professor, in general, to try and be creative about drawing things out of your students. Especially in a place where you have such small classes. I am used to teaching small classes because I have only taught at

liberal arts colleges. I was just at an event Monday for graduate students interested in teaching liberal arts colleges. When I went on the market, I did not even really know what a liberal arts college was. When I was at Yale, I did not even know where Wesleyan was and I ended up teaching there [laugh]! My first job after my PhD was at Bryn Mawr and then I kind of figured out what this whole liberal arts thing was. That really opened the doors to later jobs at liberal arts schools like Holy Cross. And I really like them [liberal arts colleges].

What I really like about them and the thing that is particular about Holy Cross and other small colleges is that your research really has to be informed by your teaching. That has been my theory at least. If you are no longer doing research, then your teaching is not going to be as good as it could be. Teaching and forcing yourself to explain technical things or very convoluted things can help you write things more clearly. People tend to think, “oh yeah history, you just talk about people and throw out some dates and what not.” Yes, it is not a chemistry problem set, but sometimes you have to explain really complicated things, especially when you are talking about African history as you have to translate it and make it seem approachable to students. Students can sometimes be very intimidated by the newness of it. Also, sometimes I am teaching outside of my area of expertise, and I have to do additional research on that topic and think about how it relates to other things we are discussing in the course. You know, some of my best ideas in my writings have come from class discussions. I once taught a seminar at Wesleyan called “Women’s and Gender History” and during a class discussion a student brought up the term “public motherhood.” Well, that term became the key thematic point of my first book. Another example that I particularly liked came in a Human Rights course I was teaching. We were talking about the story of King Leopold’s Ghost and Belgian colonization in Africa. A student said something like, “well it seems that the people who were the most vulnerable and the poorest were the ones who were the most mobile and travelling. Leopold never went anywhere.” We tend to think of mobility as being something that only the most powerful people in history had access to, but this point by the student, led me to this idea that perhaps enslaved people are in fact the most well-travelled people of the modern era. They travelled great distances and in multiple directions and that sort of made me think differently about how I conceptualize African history particularly in relation to an Atlantic world.

To follow up on the student-professor dynamic at small liberal art colleges: what has it been like for you as a professor of race and African diaspora in predominantly white universities?

I have always attended predominantly white institutions from high school onward, so I am used to that kind of dynamic. That being not many people of color in a room talking about an issue. But I have to say that my classes, especially my classes here at Holy Cross are some of the most diverse classes I have had. For both those students and for me, having many students of color in a room can yield extremely fruitful conversations on issues of race without any one student feeling singled out and having everyone turn and look at them to get their opinion on the matter. The histories I bring up in class however are not just histories about people of color for people of color. They are for all of us and there are lessons within them that concern every student and not just the student with whom those histories are concerned.

Historians spend a lot of time doing research and research can lead to unexpected discoveries. Are there similar pivotal moments related to your research experience?

The two books I have written were very different. The first book, *Mother is Gold, Father is Glass*, is derived from my dissertation research. It involved heavy fieldwork, living in this town in Benin for ten months in one clip and then spending several summers subsequently. The field work was punctuated by archival research both in Benin but also in France. I had to navigate and move between those two spaces and spent a large chunk of time living in West Africa. With that kind of research, the pivotal moments come when you are talking to people, and you interview people and they do not say the things you expected them to say, and you cannot get them to say things that you want them to say, and it can be very frustrating. And really, I was kind of young. I had taken some years off so I was a slightly older graduate student, but at that age you do not know anything, you are in your twenties! And I had a research assistant who was from the town, and she was a middle-aged woman, and we spent a lot of time together.

We were interviewing people every day. That can get tiring sometime. My research assistant was very invested in the process. She shaped things in terms of how she began a conversation. I spoke to her in French and then she translated into Yoruba, and then I was writing the field notes in French. She refused to speak English to me even though she could speak English because she said, “your American accent is so gentle and nice!” My whole time in Africa was in a foreign language, particularly African language—which I was definitely not fluent beyond

casual conversation. I could order tomatoes at the market but that was about it. I could hear what people were saying, I could greet people, I could do those things, but there was no way I could carry on a conversation or an interview by myself. We went through this point where we were interviewing people and she said we should interview this person, and I said, "They are going to say the same thing when we ask them this question." She replied "yeah, you are right, it is really frustrating." Then we went to have the interview, and the person says the thing that we expect them to say, and she said, "See? That wasn't worth it." But then I said, "you know what? Now that I think about it, maybe that's the point. The point that people keep saying the same thing, in this kind of repetitive way and in the same kind of language, maybe that is the point, and I need to pay attention to the story that they are telling and the words that they are using. The repetitive nature of it – that's the clue into how people feel about these particular issues."

The questions I was asking people were about family and kinship, about the towns their families came from, their religious practices, their marriage practices and all kinds of things like that. And people would always say the same thing, saying that "we never would marry Muslims" and that "we are a Christian family." And then my assistant would say "but I was just at your Muslim baby naming ceremony like three weeks ago!" and they would respond, "oh yeah, well of course". There was this way in which people would say one thing, but then there would be this underlying thing that was much more complex. And I could not get at that unless I had done a hundred or so interviews with people and lived in this place for several months. Because, there are things that you see because you are an outsider and they are remarkable to you, and there are things that you do not see or assume because you are an insider. Some things that she thought were not important I thought, "wait a minute I think that is important." It was an interesting back-and-forth, I was not expecting that. When reading about how you do fieldwork, you read about how that relationship with your research assistant is important, but the kinds of ways you have to think differently about the language that people use is vital.

And then one of the last interviews I did was really important and I actually brought it up in class the other day. I was talking to a woman who was a mayor of the town that I was in, and she was the first woman to ever be elected or appointed mayor. We were talking about development issues and how to bring new opportunities to this town, which is sort of marginalized in the country of Benin. It is on the border, they speak Yoruba which is mostly spoken in Nigeria so it is not the main language. And she said, "well we have our international partners," and she kept using this word, "partners," and I asked her, "what do you mean, like, donors?" But she kept insisting on this word, "partner." And, at the time I had

enough sense to realize that that was really important for her to use that word, and what she was trying to do was to create a language that was not a dynamic of being in need and accepting gifts, but about this idea that “we are together, and we are working out this problem, and we are going to work it out together.” And I was just talking about it in my class when we talked about aid agencies and humanitarian aid and the sort of dynamic in which people sort of view relationships with African countries and how Africans can try to rewrite that language. That is a very different book.

The second book, *To Be Free and French*, was very different because it was archival based. I had so many documents, I could not believe how many documents I had! I had fragments of documents too, and I had to build a narrative out of it. But this book, because it was about French empire and citizenship and it was about France, Africa, the Caribbean, I had a whole host of archival documents. I downloaded entire books and archives off of the national library of France. I mean, it was a completely different project. I took all of these pictures of documents, and it was just completely different, with almost no interviews, maybe five, that I did myself.

The surprise came with reading documents that many people had read many times before, but just seeing something different in them, reading them closely. I mean, everyone has read these letters from the Haitian revolution, everyone has seen this letter from Toussaint Louverture. But I am reading it somehow, with the experience I have or the interests and questions that I am asking. I am seeing something different. And it was interesting to have a very different research project but realize how even when you are in the archive it is a moment of discovery, even when it is something that has been trod over many, many times. The other moment that was really important was, I had all these different chapters on port cities and how they dealt with questions of citizenship and belonging, and I had a colleague who said, “you cannot just have a chapter on Haiti, since it is a very different case.” They broke away from the French empire, they became independent in 1804. I needed another French Caribbean colony, so I decided to do Martinique. I did not know I could go to Martinique but I did get to go! The town that I had chosen had been one of the premier colonial cities in the French empire in the nineteenth century, especially once Saint-Domingue, now Haiti, was no longer part of the French empire. But this particular town had suffered a volcanic eruption at the beginning of the twentieth century from which it never recovered. It is not the same place that it was. It might have been twenty or thirty thousand people who were killed in minutes, you cannot re-inhabit a place like that, because, you know, it is haunted! They have all these places, and you are reading about these places from the nineteenth century, and you go there. And to go to the landmark and see the opera house, for example, which is not the opera house

anymore, it is just some stairs and then nothing. But then to see what it is next to, and to physically visit the place. Even when I was doing a very archival based research project, I still had to do fieldwork. And the archive is also like a form of fieldwork, the conversations that you have with people, the sort of way in which a set of documents is organized in a file, the little pieces of paper that are sort of in there and you do not know why they are in there. There is always this moment of discovery, even if your project is created in a very different way.

In your recent talk you at the History Honors Ceremony, we could not help but notice how drawn you were to certain people or ‘characters’ from your research. In our own research, we have had an experience where we felt like we knew a historical figure we were studying personally. Has this ever happened to you?

Oh yes! In my second book, each chapter had a lot of different people in it. The only way I could make the different port cities matter and make sense together was to have people who connected them. And I did not know I would have these people that connected them, but in the few interviews I did, I stumbled upon connections between the places. This is the best example. I was interviewing someone in Benin in West Africa and this was a sort-of elite family who are known as “bersilien” or “Brazilian” (in Benin they were known more specifically as aquda). “Brazilians” were people that returned to West Africa in the 19th century and sort of made their home there. Oddly, the women who I was interviewing from this family had an English name, Patterson. I really did not think too much about why her name was Patterson at that time, but later, I was interviewing her son and he says, “well my grandfather was from Senegal.” I was like what?? His grandfather had actually been a Senegalese man who was in the French Colonial service and he was one of the first administrators in Benin. And the son said, “well you know he was on the website Senegal-métis,” the mixed-race Senegal studies site. There are a large number of mixed-race people all over the west coast of Africa, but they became particularly powerful in Senegal, especially the women and I talk about that in the book. Turns out Patterson gets his British name when the Brits briefly took over that part of Senegal where he was living. Well I thought “this is amazing!” I have my Senegal-Benin connection. I can talk about this Patterson guy. Well it turns out he was a descendant of a Martinican who had gone to Senegal in the 18th century after a war and rose to become mayor of one of these two towns I was looking at. Therefore, I had found a person who could connect three of these port cities I was researching. It seemed crazy, but it convinced me that this idea to talk about French Empire was not really crazy at all, but that people were really circulating, in a trans-Atlantic way, between all of these places.

Would you describe yourself as a social historian? What does that mean?

I do usually describe myself as a social historian because it is something of a general term. I understand social history to have emerged out of the 1960s, and it is usually thought of history from the bottom-up where you are concerned with the people. You are no longer writing this history that is from the gaze of the colonizer but from the colonized, for example. And for me, it is not just about in either of my books being attached to one or two individual people. Every single person whom I wrote about in any detail I felt a sort of attachment, but also a responsibility that I had to somehow excavate that story and humanize that person.

Do you still have to consider political history to make sense of the social one?

Yes, definitely, it is not like I do not talk at all about French colonial administrators. In my first book, those were the documents I had and I did talk about them quite a bit, and I also humanized them to the extent that they are characters in the story. I talk about the ways in which they are interacting with people and imagine what their thoughts are as they are making certain demands or writing down certain things. And definitely colonial administrators played a role in the second book as well. It is about French ideas of citizenship, so I have the lawyers, the attorneys, the colonial administrators, various other people who are in the story. I name them, I talk about them, I contextualize them. But the idea for me is instead of leading with these stories, I wanted to talk about the Senegalese guy who was from Martinique, I could have talked about the British guy from which his name came, but I did not want to talk about him. I talked about the Martinican ancestor and the Senegalese and Beninois descendants.

Recently you spoke at Columbia University, a presentation on Bordeaux, correct?

It was actually a museum.

It was through Columbia then?

Yes, Columbia has this art gallery that is affiliated with it, and I was invited to do a talk. There was an art historian student who had written a book about the image of the black model in nineteenth century art, and particularly around Paris. They had speakers coming in and scholars coming in and talking in different ways about their own research in ways that connected with this art exhibit. A colleague of mine at Columbia had mentioned me because I work on Bordeaux—I had been on a panel

with her—to give a different perspective because my next project is going to be about African and Caribbean communities in Bordeaux from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. I talked about Black Bordeaux, which is something that people are beginning to know a little about, to just destabilize the focus that people always have on Paris, and so it was really interesting. The art exhibit was gorgeous, it was all of these beautiful paintings and then the audience was so different from the audience that I normally have. It is usually other historians, academics. These were just really exuberant people that go around to art exhibits and go to talks. People came up and told me these stories, one woman was from Bordeaux, another black woman's family had grown up in one of the towns around Bordeaux as a military family, and she said that “there were tons of people like us!” It was this really amazing opportunity. And it also forces you to write and talk in a different way, to a general audience, it is funny that you ask if I would consider myself a public historian, which is not a term I would actually use, because I think of public history and public historians as the people who put up art exhibits and do digital art, and I do not do that that much. I never put together an art exhibit, though I did sponsor one when we did the Afropolitan Conference.

That was my next question!

Right, but we were putting on an academic conference, but we wanted to have other events to serve the community more broadly. I had noticed that my colleagues when they were putting on academic conferences they would invite high school students, or they would have music. We did it all, we had an art exhibit, a musical performance, and this academic conference as well. And I think some of the musicians actually went into some of the schools in Worcester as part of the conference.

But the other kind of historians that I would suggest, the kind of history that I do, is I try to do narrative history, I try to do more of that—writing a history that is more narrative, more readable, in an attempt to reach a broader audience that is not just academic.

Is that something you had been considering for some time now? Or were you inspired by your experience at the Colombia-talk?

In the second book I tried to write it in a more narrative style, I tried to tell more stories and I was very conscious of that. And the next project I have, though there is a book I am writing that is a historical study of Bordeaux, but I am also writing a piece of historical fiction at the same time. Going really far with the storytelling to the point where you are writing fiction. I think along your intellectual itinerary, you

go down this road and you wind up in this other space. And the thing that probably inspired me was when I wrote my first book I worked very closely with a retired editor who had been a journalist, and she was highly critical of jargon-filled writing. And she would just rip my chapters apart, “Explain everything, do not assume anyone knows anything.” And it is literally the best advice I have ever had, because one of the profound pitfalls of historical writing is that no one else can read it and understand it except someone who is not only an historian but is someone who is in your field. And I think that is terrible.

You had mentioned that you were starting new research soon, correct?

Yes, and already doing it!

Are you taking research leave for it?

In 2021, yes. It is through the Yale Center for the Study of Race, Indigeneity, and Transnational Migration.

Could you tell us about this your new research project?

My new project on Bordeaux grew out of the second book [*To Be Free and French*], so with this book I was looking at all of these different people from different points in the French Empire. Many times—randomly in a document— something would come up where the person would say that they were going to see their family in Bordeaux, or that they have family in Bordeaux. And this would be people from the Caribbean. The man I mentioned in my talk at the honor society, Tovalou Houénou, was a student in Bordeaux. He was a high school, university and law student there. And I was like: what is going on in Bordeaux! I wanted to find out more information, so I decided to do this project.

I have presented it in a variety of ways, and one of the arguments that I make is, I may be doing a project on Bordeaux, but I am approaching it as an Africanist. I am following African and Caribbean communities to Bordeaux and trying to understand how they live there, and trying to piece together the lives that they lived, as opposed to just thinking that they were marginal or incidental to this city, when there were thousands of people who were passing through Bordeaux in the eighteenth century alone. And I thought about what that means. The way that I worked in the second book was the same way that I am working on this one. I have been doing different conference papers and trying to force myself to write different chapters. I have done several summer research trips to Bordeaux, I am trying to go again this summer, producing these chapters, and I drafted an article that I am

writing. At the same time, when I decided to do this book project, one of the things I noticed in it was the same problem I had with the first book. I do not have consistent information. I have a lot of information in some ways but I do not have consistent information. I will find an interesting person but I do not know anything about what happened to them before or what happened to them after. So that is when I decided that I would, and I could as a tenured professor, write a piece of historical fiction, to imagine how to fill in those gaps. If I find that – and I have seen this – evidence that an eight-year old child arrived from Martinique in Bordeaux in the 1770s, and I want to imagine that she stayed there—because later I see people who had been living in Bordeaux for thirty or forty years later on in the eighteenth century—then what story could I tell about her life? That is why I got the idea to do the historical fiction.

The fellowship that I have is through the ACLS, the Frederick Burkhardt Residential Fellowship for Recently Tenured Faculty. It is a fellowship with a designation for faculty at liberal arts colleges, and it is an opportunity to pair up with an institution or center of your own choosing. You ask them if they will sponsor you. The idea is that you go will there, you will do your research. I am familiar with Yale because I went there for graduate school, I know that the library there has everything you could possibly ever want [laughs], so it is a non-issue. And I actually live in Connecticut, so there is a variety of reasons. This opportunity to have this space where I could reach all of these different kinds of people: intellectuals working on different kinds of topics. While I am there I will be working on trying to write up chapters of the book. I have written a proposal, one chapter and drafted some others, had ideas for others, but this is really an opportunity to write up as much of it as I can, and then see if I can secure a relationship with the publisher so that I can finish it.

We noticed in our earlier email exchange with you that your email signature contains an interesting quote from the novel *Ghana Must Go*: "They were dreamer-women. Very dangerous women. Who looked at the world through their wide dreamer-eyes and saw it not as it was, 'brutal, senseless,' etc., but worse, as it might be or might yet become." Taiye Selasi, *Ghana Must Go* (2013)

It stuck out to us as it seems simultaneously optimistic, empowering, but also a little foreboding. What did you find attractive about this quote?

I have a very long commute. It is an hour and twenty minutes each way, and so I started listening to books on tape. What I noticed about listening to books on tape is that they are performances, and the person is really conveying a lot of information with their voice. The best ones are—it runs like a movie in your head,

and the reader for *Ghana Must Go* was a phenomenal. In this case, it is a thick novel, and she assumed all of these different voices in the novel, and so it was just a pleasure and a joy to read, and is a beautifully written novel. I remember listening to it and hearing that quote. I did not read it, I heard it, and it stuck out to me. And I was like, “I need to find out what page that is on.” I found the quote, and it is really interesting because when I read the quote-- I see the quote as being quite hopeful. That women are dangerous because they see what is in front of them, but the reason why they are dangerous is that they can imagine a different possibility. The danger is in imagining what the world could become. But I have asked a couple of people, “do you read that to mean that the world could become worse?” For me what makes them dangerous is that they have this capacity to imagine other possibilities that would threaten the status quo—as opposed to, they are dangerous because they know how bad it is going to get. I am feeling like when you read it, you thought there was something ominous about it because what the world might become might become worse, right?

Exactly, “dangerous” does not necessarily have to be negative, right?

Right. Because in the context of that, the larger context of that part in the novel she was describing a particular woman character who was not particularly powerful, if I remember correctly. You know, she was like a younger woman, she was not a wealthy, powerful woman or anything like that, but she had this insight into how the world worked. Playing with this idea of how you can both be empowered and vulnerable at the same time, and that goes to the core things that I have always written about. At any time when you are talking about people of color and especially ones that sort of managed to rise up to a more elite status, or assume some position of power, there is a way in which you can enjoy some power and enjoy some status but there is always this vulnerability that is there. And I think that is the most complex kind of historical question when you are looking at these kinds of issues: How can people be all these things at once!