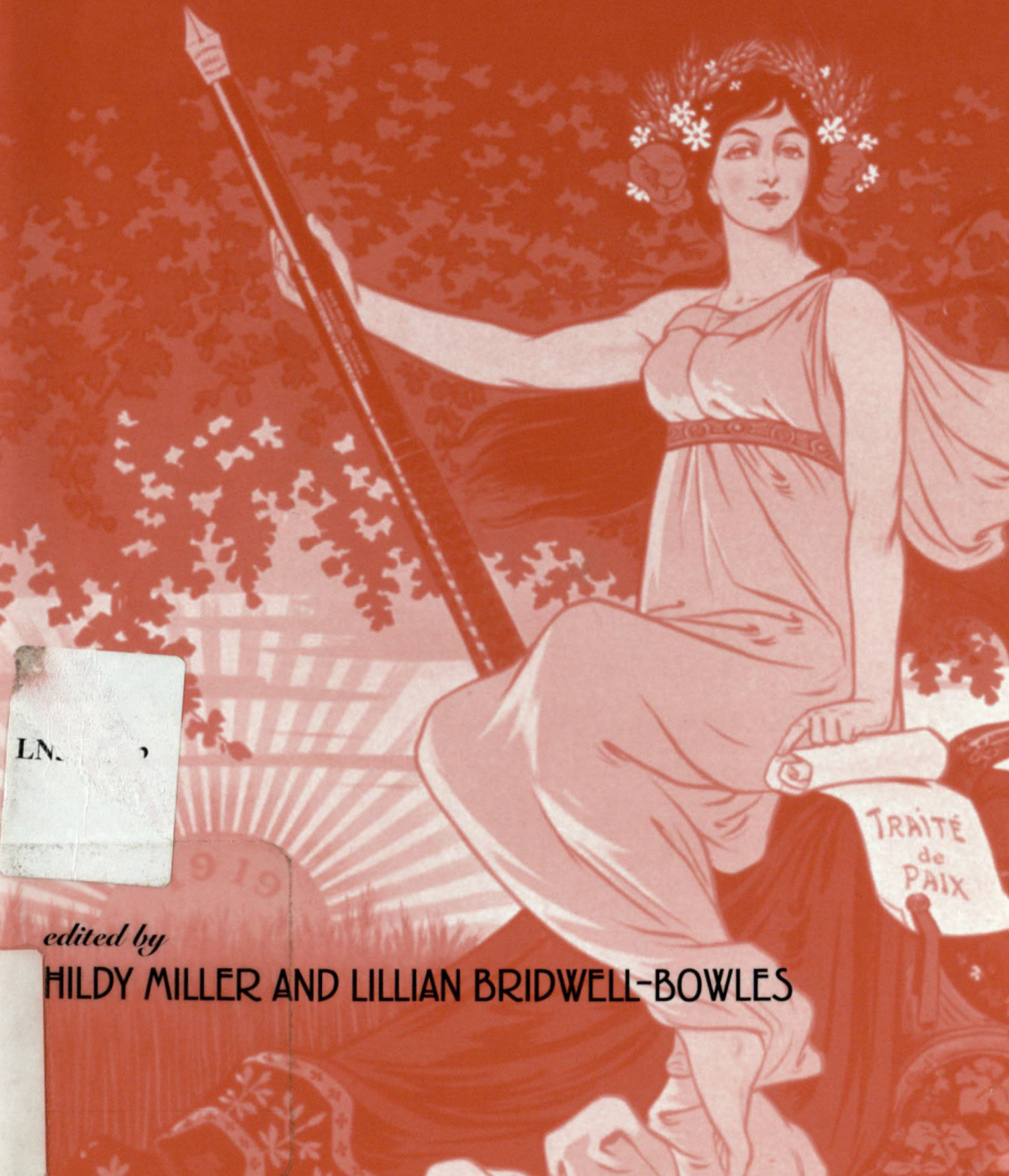


RHETORICAL

women

ROLES AND REPRESENTATIONS



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edited by

HILDY MILLER AND LILLIAN BRIDWELL-BOWLES



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Rhetorical Women

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Roles and Representations

Edited by
Hildy Miller and Lillian Bridwell-Bowles

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA PRESS
Tuscaloosa

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Typeface: Minion

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rhetorical women : roles and representations / edited by Hildy Miller and Lillian Bridwell-Bowles.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8173-1458-X (alk. paper) — ISBN 0-8173-5183-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. English literature—Women authors—History and criticism. 2. American literature—Women authors—History and criticism. 3. Feminism and literature—English-speaking countries. 4. Women and literature—English-speaking countries. 5. Authorship—Sex differences. 6. English language—Rhetoric. 7. Feminism in literature. 8. Sex role in literature. 9. Women in literature. I. Miller, Hildy, 1950– II. Bridwell-Bowles, Lillian.

PR111.R48 2005

820.9'9287—dc22

2004025899

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Cooper and Crummell



Dialogics of Race and Womanhood

Elizabeth West

It is somewhat ironic that in her 1892 signature publication, *A Voice from the South*, Anna Julia Cooper would offer such unequivocal praise for Alexander Crummell, a man who had a longstanding reputation for teetering at the extremes of Puritanical rigidity. In spite of his stoicism and inflexibility, Crummell's widely circulated essay "The Black Woman of the South: Her Neglects and Her Needs" (1883) inspired sympathy and aid for black women in the postbellum South. In this work Crummell articulates an ideology of black womanhood that he has shaped for decades before the Civil War and that remained for the most part unchanged. This constancy is found in the clearest and most steadfast convictions as well as the ambiguities in his work.

Simply due to the length of his career, Crummell is an important figure, for he sheds light on the transition of African Americans from the nineteenth-century antebellum period to the closing years of the century. Born in 1819 to free black parents in New York, Crummell grew up in a community of black antebellum activists. His father, Boston Crummell, was among those blacks who founded the first African American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, and both Crummells regularly participated in black conventions held throughout the antebellum North (Moses 13). Although Crummell spent

more than twenty years away from America—nearly five (1847–1853) in England pursuing a degree at Queen’s College and nearly twenty (1853–1872) in Liberia as a missionary—he was nevertheless a significant voice for the abolitionist cause. Crummell’s writings provide meaningful insight into the philosophy of one of the most prolific and published black writers in the nineteenth century. His postwar works—in particular, his most passionate plea for black women—can be studied in concert with Cooper’s writings. The dialogic resonations between Cooper’s and Crummell’s writings tell us much about how class and gender informed rhetorics of black womanhood in the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

Alexander Crummell and Anna Julia Cooper were unlikely contemporaries. Cooper, born a slave in North Carolina in 1858 to her slave mother and her mother’s master (Hutchinson 4), was decades younger than the august and revered Crummell, but was closer to the degradation and poverty of which they both spoke. Though generations apart, the two would find common ground in their commitments to education and racial uplift. Upon his return to the United States in 1872, Crummell was assigned the pastorship of a leading group of black Episcopalians in Washington, D.C. He would grow this group into St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, one of the most prestigious black churches in late-nineteenth-century Washington. As a member of St. Luke’s and the community of black scholars and activists in Washington, Cooper would come to know Crummell well, so well that she would deliver an 1894 address honoring him for fifty years of service to the church.

Together, the writings of Crummell and Cooper provide a more complete picture of Crummell, revealing his important place among the black elite, and particularly his influence on the rhetoric of black womanhood that grew out of this influential group. While Crummell has been less recognized for his interest in women’s issues, Cooper’s references to Crummell, as well as her reverberations of his most resolute philosophical ideals, highlight his influence not only among African American male leaders but among women as well. Crummell and other “prominent post-Reconstruction black male leaders . . . were the targeted audiences for much of her persuasive discourse” (Logan 115). A telling revelation of how Crummell and Cooper represent the sometimes strained gender relations between the male and female black elite at the close of the nineteenth century is evidenced by the tension between Crummell’s 1883 essay “The Black Woman of the South” and Cooper’s 1886 essay “Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration of a Race.” Cooper’s essay, the first in her collection *A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South*, whose title itself is a response to and perhaps a signifying on Crummell’s widely circulated pamphlet “Black Woman of

the South,"¹ immediately engages Crummell in a dialogue. There lies a level of irony in Crummell's being the author of "The Black Woman of the South": he is alien to the experience for which he claims authoritative voice. He is a freeborn black Northern male, taking up pen and paper to articulate the trials of the newly freed black female population of the South. But Cooper, who was often candid in her criticisms of black men, is less so in her answer to her pastor's work. The title of her collection, *A Voice from the South*, clearly signifies on one who supposes himself an authority on the South, but who is himself not of the South. Identifying herself as a voice from the South, Cooper unseats her predecessor with her subtitle—*By a Black Woman of the South*. Crummell speaks as an outsider, while Cooper is herself the embodiment of the subject—the black woman of the South.

Cooper's clever title gives voice and subjectivity to the black woman, but her rhetoric of female empowerment is not always explicit or primary in her work. This is exemplified early in the essay "Womanhood," which at the onset seems to merely affirm the rhetoric of female domesticity. Like Crummell, Cooper grounds her discourse on civilization and human progress in a number of Western and biblical paradigms. She echoes Crummell's early works that appropriate the social and ideological discourse of leading nineteenth-century European scholars, particularly with her references to François Guizot's and Thomas Maucaulay's works that affirm woman's central contribution to the making of civilization. Cooper argues that the destined progress and prominence of America lies in the hands of its womanhood, and she cites Maucaulay, who has said, "You may judge a nation's rank in the scale of civilization from the way they treat their women" (12). She follows with a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson, who makes a similar claim: "I have thought that a sufficient measure of civilization is the influence of good women" (12–13). From Guizot's account of women in the feudal system, Cooper again emphasizes the significance of woman in the shaping of the civilized world. Drawing from such respected scholars, Cooper also demonstrates her own learnedness. More importantly, however, she lulls her conservative audience into momentary ease with authoritative sources that ostensibly confirm a patriarchal discourse. Her male audience is not disturbed by her affirmation of woman's central role in nation building, because while woman may be hoisted onto an ideological pedestal, she is there unempowered. Maucaulay's words have not raised woman by virtue of her own power but, as he says, by virtue of how "they" (men) treat her. The well-treated woman of Maucaulay's vision is no less objectified than the ill-treated woman among barbarians. While the passage from Emerson is less an objectification of woman, he too fails to paint woman as an em-

powered figure. Emerson's "good women" do not challenge nineteenth-century notions of the domestic and dependent woman. In fact, Lydia Maria Child, a leading abolitionist and women's rights advocate, criticized Emerson for his denigrating vision of woman. In her 1843 essay "Women's Rights," Child recalls a lecture by Emerson that she thought inspired the male spirit while doing little more than subjugating woman once again to the realm of man's object. Cooper offers no such critique of Emerson, but rather calls on Emerson as an intellectual ally.

Cooper's intellectual alliance with Western patriarchal figures suggests her compliance with their gendered ideals, but there are critical moments in her writing that compromise this generalization. The ambiguity of Cooper's message becomes apparent with her critique of Western chivalry as a system of privilege that has left many women alienated: "Respect for woman, the much lauded chivalry of the Middle Ages, meant what I fear it still means to some men in our own today—respect for the elect few among whom they expect to consort" (14). Here, Cooper opens up her discussion for a critique of gender and class as she condemns the class-dominated gender rhetoric of Western society. But as Mary Helen Washington has pointed out, in the introduction to the 1988 Schomburg republication of Cooper's text, Cooper fails to offer a sustained discussion on gender and class. According to Washington, Cooper "is never able to discard totally the ethics of true womanhood, and except for the one passage about black laundry women, she does not imagine ordinary black working women as the basis of her feminist politics" (xlvi).

Cooper's assessment of chivalry falls short of serious interrogation as her critique is buried in her return to the image of woman as ultimately dependent on man's protection. This ideological wavering is especially evident in a compelling passage that asserts woman's equality. Arguing that Christ confirmed the redemption of woman from the fall of Eve, Cooper maintains that woman's equal place was made clear by Christ: "throughout his life and in his death he has given to men a rule and guide for the estimation of woman as an equal" (18). Her suggestion of the equality of men and women is, however, inherently compromised by the suggestion that the system of male and female equality is to be administered by man. In this same passage, the assertion of sexual equality is undermined further as Cooper describes Christ's valuation of woman as a "sacred charge to be sheltered and cared for with a brother's love and sympathy." Once again, Cooper's rhetoric of sexual equality collapses into a gender hierarchy that renders woman a ward of man.

While Cooper's assertions of sexual equality signify her resistance to the

male-dominated rhetoric of late-nineteenth-century America, her repeated acquiescence to a discourse that ties womanhood to domesticity ironically ties her more firmly to the patriarchal ideals that she attempts to overturn. Her numerous affirmations of the primacy of the black woman's role as homemaker and nurturer echo the sentiments of black male elites who, like Crummell, identified the black woman's role in racial uplift as primarily that of homemaker. Just as Crummell had from his earliest works maintained that woman's place in the home signified the civility of a people, Cooper reiterated this reading of woman's place. She argued that "the position of woman in society determines the vital elements of its regeneration and progress" (21). And again, like Crummell, who maintains a rhetoric of gender essentialism, Cooper links woman's central role to her nature. The primacy of woman's role in civilization building is not the result of being "better or stronger or wiser than man, but from the nature of the case, because it is she who must first form the man by directing the earliest impulses of his character" (21). Woman, then, through natural design, is especially fit for her role. She is the physical source from which human life springs, and thus is also the earliest source for shaping human character and caring for the dependent offspring.

The arguments offered here by Cooper have been voiced by philosophers and activists before her. She acknowledges this fact and that she has been preceded by one who has already posited this argument in defense of the black woman of the South. She concurs with Crummell's general plea for the black woman of the South and his summary of her needs, but she also challenges him. Cooper is shrewd, however, softening her criticism with an initial offer of respect and reverence. She acknowledges Crummell as the authority who has preceded her in calling public attention to the needs of Southern black women, and she acknowledges the enormous challenge to follow his work: "'Cursed is he that cometh after the king[,]' and has not the king already preceded me in 'The Black Woman of the South'? They have had both Moses and the prophets in Dr. Crummell and if they hear not him, neither would they be persuaded though one came up from the South" (24). Cooper's adroitness here lies in her deference to Crummell's authority, which, ironically, highlights her as the more fitting authority. While she identifies Crummell as the "king," she points out that she is the very subject of which he speaks—she is a black woman from the South, not a distant observer. Drawing a parallel between herself and Crummell, whom she identifies as the embodiment of Moses and the prophets, Cooper indirectly suggests the prophetic and important nature of her message.

Cooper's acknowledgment of Crummell as her predecessor demon-

strates her sensitivity to her audience. However, she privileges her status as insider and suggests that as an insider she might more ably tell of the sufferings of Southern black women. Though she unseats him as authoritative voice, Cooper maintains her alliance with Crummell by underscoring her similar alarm at a matter that had long troubled Crummell. Dating back to his missionary years in Liberia, Crummell resented the leadership and authoritative roles that white clergy assumed in the church and politics of black Liberia.² Cooper criticizes the white clergy of the Episcopal Church for their refusal to accept that blacks themselves are capable of addressing the circumstances of black women. She warns of the misdiagnosis that results when outsiders assume themselves authorities: "But the doctors[,] while discussing their scientifically conclusive diagnosis of the disease, will perhaps not think it presumptuous in the patient if he dares to suggest where at least the pain is. If this be allowed, a *Black woman of the South* would beg to point out two possible oversights in this southern work which may indicate in part both a cause and a remedy for some failure" (36).

By italicizing the words "Black woman of the South," Cooper calls attention to the connection between her work and Crummell's widely circulated tract, "The Black Woman of the South." Her presumption of authority is further revealed in the above passage with her metaphor of the black woman as the suffering patient: Cooper is the black woman, the patient, who, from personal experience speaks of the sufferings endured by neglected black women in the South. In addition to identifying the limitations of the white clergy to understand the black woman's struggle, Cooper identifies two problems in the missionary work of the Episcopal Church—its exclusion of black men in discussions on this issue and its dismissal of black women's central role in racial uplift (37). On the latter point she credits Crummell for having already argued for the needs of the black woman of the South, his having already laid out a proposal to meet these needs, and she notes the failure of the church to respond: "The ground has been ably discussed and an admirable and practical plan proposed by the oldest Negro priest in America, advising and urging that special organizations such as Church sisterhoods and industrial schools be devised to meet her pressing needs in the Southland . . . Yet the pamphlet fell still-born from the press so far as I am informed the Church has made no motion towards carrying out Dr. Crummell's suggestion" (42–43). Cooper criticizes the church for its failure to address the needs of black women in the South; however, she is careful not to alienate herself from the church.

Repeatedly situating her work as derivative of a legacy begun by Crummell, Cooper implies that her dialogue with Crummell is a rhetorical nexus.

Crummell has preceded her with his account of the black woman's unique circumstances, but she offers a view from another space, widening the lens through which these concerns can be viewed. Ultimately, however, Cooper reminds her male audience that her vision of the black woman's role is consistent with theirs. She endears herself to this group of clergymen with her affirmation that the uplift of the black woman will be signaled by her place as "the intelligent wife, the Christian mother, the earnest, virtuous, helpful woman, at once both the lever and the fulcrum for uplifting the race" (45). A shrewd rhetorician and thinker, Cooper is certainly aware that with these words, she confirms the ideology of female domesticity that this audience embraces, thereby rendering her presence and her message less threatening to their patriarchal sensibilities.

Cooper occasionally shifts from her conciliatory rhetoric, challenging dominant conventions of gender and even specific assertions of those she holds in high regard. This is especially evident in "Womanhood," with her judicious challenge to Crummell's dismissal of a particular group of black females. Referring to Crummell first with reverence and praise, applauding his advocacy of black women in the aftermath of slavery, Cooper shifts to a critique of his argument that it is the postbellum black woman of the South, excluding the colored, who needs to be protected and educated. In "The Black Woman of the South," Crummell maintained that black and colored women were distinct groups with different needs and opportunities: "In speaking to-day of the 'black woman,' I must needs make a very clear distinction. The African race in this country is divided into two classes, that is—the colored people and the negro population" (*Africa and America* 62). According to Crummell, with their history of privilege, colored women are in less need of aid than women of "pure negro blood," who were maintained on plantations without the benefits of civilization granted to colored women. Cooper, a "colored" woman of the South herself, responds to Crummell's construct of intraracial identities with the suggestion that he has overlooked the hardships suffered by fair-skinned black women: "I would beg, however, with the Doctor's permission, to add my plea for the colored girls of the South:—that large, bright, promising, fatally beautiful class that stand shivering like a delicate plantlet before the fury of tempestuous elements, so full of promise and possibilities, yet so sure of destruction; often without a stronger brother to espouse their cause and defend their honor with his life's blood . . . Oh, save them, help them, shield, train, develop, teach, inspire them! Snatch them, in God's name, as brands from the burning" (24–25). The melodramatic language employed here by Cooper, who is generally calculating and critical, exposes the signifying nature of this passage.

Her image of the "fatally beautiful" colored girl draws on the common nineteenth-century literary representation of the tragic mulatto. She clearly undermines Crummell's assertion that colored women have had a history of privilege, and she transposes Crummell's plea for the poor, defenseless black women of the South to her plea for the unprotected, violated colored girls of the South.

Cooper's picture of the colored girl of the South is more despairing than Crummell's black woman, who at least has been offered the protective discourse of a prominent black male voice. Her choice of the word *girls*, in contrast to Crummell's use of *woman*, suggests further that Cooper's young, abandoned females face a threat more immediate than that of Crummell's more mature black woman. The picture of young, helpless girls invoked by Cooper is more personal and troublesome than Crummell's picture of a symbolic, universal black woman. Cooper's colored girls represent the more compelling picture of youth and innocence lost, and it is the loss experienced by many, as suggested by Cooper's contrasting use of the plural *girls*, with Crummell's use of the single, iconic, and more distant *black woman*. Crummell has made a case for the needs of the black woman of the South, but his dismissal of the colored girls, particularly as highlighted by Cooper, leaves them without an advocate, and leaves him appearing at least slightly unfeeling. Crummell proclaims his right to protect the needful and worthy black woman: "for the mothers, sisters, and daughters of my race I have a right to speak. . . . And when I think of their sad condition down South, think, too, that since the day of emancipation hardly any one has lifted up a voice in their behalf, I feel it a duty and a privilege to set forth their praises and extol their excellences" (*Africa and America* 71). That he would deny his colored mothers, sisters, and daughters similar praise and protection seems callous in light of Cooper's description of their despairing place in Southern society.

Cooper's delivery of this message before the black clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church must have left Crummell ill at ease by the implications of his earlier exclusion of colored girls. The severity of Cooper's criticism is eased, however, by her return to those ideals that strike a chord of agreement with her mentor. She returns to their mutual emphasis on the black woman's central role in racial uplift and the significance of collective race progress. She elucidates this point by recalling the then-deceased Martin R. Delany's assertion that "when he entered the council of kings the black race entered with him" (30). Cooper disagrees with Delany, arguing that on the contrary, "no man can represent the race. Whatever the attainments of the individual may be, unless his home has moved on *pari passu*,

he can never be regarded as identical with or representative of the whole. . . . We must point to homes, average homes, homes of the rank and file of horny handed toiling men and women of the South" (30-31). She continues this argument with a rhetorical sleight of hand: she rejects Delany's tone of individualism but appropriates his metaphor. In her own words, Cooper explains, "Only the Black Woman can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me'" (31). The black elite discourse of female domesticity is left unchallenged by Cooper as she makes a more compelling assertion—that the door to achievement and progress for the race will be opened not by the black man, but by the black woman. Cooper maintains that the domestic space is woman's realm, but she identifies woman as the agent of race progress, thereby suggesting that home is a political space and that leadership lies there.

Cooper argues that black women can best be prepared for their special calling through the assistance of missionary groups, and through the long-term improvement that comes with education. Like Crummell, she argues for the necessity of educating women, and her position is anchored in the prevailing rhetoric of woman's special place as nurturer and homemaker. "The position of woman in society determines the vital elements of its regeneration progress," and that role is prescribed by nature (*Voice from the South* 21). As the medium through which children are shaped into moral and useful adults, woman must be educated to fully carry out her role. Woman's duty, according to Cooper, "is one that might make angels tremble and fear to take hold!" (22). This elevation of woman's role to one exceeding angelic heights is reminiscent of Crummell's words in his earlier (1882) sermon "Marriage." Here, Crummell identifies man's advantage over the angels—his procreative powers: "The angels above have no productive powers: but man is made a fertile creature, and is possessed with the gift of fecundity. And in this one feature of his constitution, he is superior to the angels" (*Greatness of Christ* 45). In contrast to Crummell's analogy that draws on the nongendered use of the term *man* to represent humankind, Cooper draws a comparison between woman and angels. It is not woman's procreative powers that merit her comparison to angels, but rather her responsibility to train children. For Cooper it is the act of raising children that warrants special acknowledgment. That this act is assumed a responsibility especially fit for women further supports Cooper's assertion that black women will lead the way to the improvement of the race.

Crummell and Cooper emphasize the unreadiness of Southern black

women for their special calling. Though both call for missionary groups to go South and actively work among the greater population of ill-prepared black women, Crummell seeks women to act as primary agents in this work. In "The Black Woman of the South," he charges Christian women with the job of uplifting their disadvantaged counterparts. It is through a "mission of 'sisterhoods'" peopled by "large numbers of practical Christian women, women of intelligence and piety, women well trained in domestic economy" that the black woman of the South will be uplifted" (*Africa and America* 75-76).

Crummell's call for a "mission of sisterhoods" was at least a quarter of a century old by this time, for he had made similar pleas for black women in Liberia during his missionary years there. In his 1860 address "The English Language in Liberia," Crummell argued that the intellectual needs of women had been ignored throughout history: "The world has been six thousand years in existence, and it has hardly yet begun to do justice to the intellect of woman" (*Future of Africa* 43). He warned that Liberia's future could not be secured if it failed to "raise [its] daughters and . . . sisters to become the true and equal companions of men, and not their victims" (44). Just as he would propose more than twenty years later in "The Black Woman of the South," Crummell recommended to this audience of fellow Liberians that female societies be formed to begin the long process of educating and preparing Liberian women to fulfill their roles in the process of civilizing Liberia (44-45). Though Crummell recommended that this education start "elementary, even in its nature; and by gradual signs, rise to something more ambitious" (44-45), he envisioned something grander in the long term. He argued that "the master need in Liberia is that of a female seminary, of a high order, for the education of girls" (45).

As revealed in a number of his late-nineteenth-century writings, the compassion for the cause of black women's education that Crummell expressed early would carry over to his leadership in the post-Reconstruction era. His support for the founding of St. Mary's Girl Academy during his pastorship, his support for the kindergarten program, and his continued public support for women's education clearly highlight his commitment to improving the circumstances of black women. But as was often the case with Crummell, there was contradiction in his rhetoric. This contradiction is especially evident in his plea for industrial education in "Black Woman of the South," and the contrasting message in "Excellence," which calls for these young black women to prepare to enter "the doors of a higher Academy" (*Africa and America* 345). He acknowledges the importance of utility and practicality to the rudiments of human existence, but to these young women

Crummell recommends higher aspirations: "you can do better, everywhere in life, by the attainment of excellence" (352). This celebration of higher learning is absent two years later when Crummell warns against overly ambitious blacks who seek impractical education. In his 1886 sermon "Common Sense in Common Schooling," Crummell tells his congregation:

I fear we are overdoing this matter of higher learning. Everywhere I go throughout the country I discover two or three very disagreeable and unhealthy facts. I see, first of all, (a) the vain ambition of very many mothers to over-educate their daughters, and to give them training and culture unfitted for their position in society and unadapted to their prospects in life. I see, likewise, too many men, forgetful of the occupations they held in society, anxious to shoot their sons suddenly, regardless of fitness, into literary characters and into professional life. This is the first evil. (b) Next to this I have observed an ambition among the youth of both sexes for aesthetical culture; an inordinate desire for the ornamental and elegant in education to the neglect of the solid and practical. And (c), thirdly, to a very large extent school children are educated in letters to a neglect of household industry. (*Africa and America* 330)

Crummell's position here reveals both a picture of his philosophy on education and his elitism. While we might applaud his foresight on the necessity of educating women, we must also recognize that his philosophy is grounded in an ideology of classism—in some respects Crummell echoes the very aristocratic sensibilities of the privileged nineteenth-century American society that he often criticizes. His notion that the education of the masses be limited to practical learning conveys a message of intra-racial class hierarchy, a message that will be transformed into the twentieth-century black elitist rhetoric of the talented tenth.

In her writings as well as in her activism, Cooper, like Crummell, expressed a belief in the necessity of an educated African American leadership. In an essay titled "What Are We Worth?" Cooper argues that education will be the critical marker that determines the future place and worth of blacks among humankind. According to Cooper, blacks, like other races, will be led by an educated leadership and will be judged by their ability to be educated and to then apply that education to the pursuit of progress. Education is a raw material that must be refined and fit "into the world's work to supply the world's need—the manufacture of men and women for the markets of the world" (*Voice from the South* 244). Education must be had by all people

who hope to be of worth to humanity: it is an investment that “pays the largest dividends and gives the grandest possible product to the world—a man” (244–45).

Cooper’s metaphors ring with capitalist symbolism, but she is not suggesting that the importance of education is its promise of material gain. She echoes Crummell’s argument on the primacy of industry as the foundation of group survival and the elevated cultural status that is the result of more classical learning. She explains that there is a dynamic relationship between intellect and industry: “Wealth must pave the way for learning. Intellect, whether of races or individuals, cannot soar to the consummation of those sublime products which immortalize genius, while the general mind is assaulted and burdened with ‘what shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed.’ Work must first create wealth, and wealth leisure, before the untrammelled intellect of the Negro, or any other race, can vindicate its capabilities” (261). The struggle for wealth or economic security is the most basic human quest, but wealth does not equate to what Cooper considers the higher level of human achievement—one not evidenced in the greater population. While work and wealth are fundamental human concerns, higher learning is the call for only a select few: “One mind in a family or in a town may show a penchant for art, for literature, for the learned professions, or more bookish lore. You will know it when it is there. No need to probe for it. It is a light that cannot be hid under a bushel—and I would try to enable that mind to go to the full length of its desires” (262–63).

Scholars frequently credit W. E. B. DuBois as the originator of this philosophy; however, the theory of an elite talented tenth leadership is clearly espoused by Cooper a decade before the publication of DuBois’s 1903 essay “The Talented Tenth.” Cooper’s vision of an insightful and exceptional few who will lead the masses demonstrates the dubiousness of Houston Baker’s assertion that “Cooper is not a DuBoisian but a Washingtonian” (34). She is neither. While Cooper did not contemplate philosophical and social issues in isolation, she was no less a creative and independent thinker than her male counterparts.

However, if one feels compelled to connect her class philosophy of racial uplift to a leading late-nineteenth-century race leader, Crummell is a more fitting candidate. Crummell predates both Cooper and DuBois with his early nationalist writings that imagined an educated black leadership paving the way for a prosperous Liberian nation. Crummell would carry over these nationalist ideals to his post-Reconstruction rhetoric of the 1880s. To the 1885 graduating class of Storer College in West Virginia, Crummell

made clear this ideology. He explained that the educated men of the race possessed the superior minds needed to tackle the great problems of the race and to influence the elevation of the race as a whole: "Who are to be the agents to raise and elevate this people to a higher plane of being? It is to be affected by the scholars and philanthropists which come forth in these days from the schools. . . . [I]t is a work . . . which will require the most skillful resources and the wise practicality of superior men" (*Africa and America* 36).

Like Crummell, Cooper envisioned an educated elite that would lead the masses, and she too would also maintain the central role of the educated black woman in this mission: "In *A Voice From the South*, Cooper calls for a mass, female standard for evaluating the effectiveness of African-American praxis, a decade before Du Bois penned his concept of 'The Talented Tenth'" (James 44). Just as Crummell called for societies of women to aid the black woman of the South, Cooper too maintained the importance of such an effort. In contrast to Crummell, however, Cooper called for both men and women missionaries: "'I am my Sister's keeper!' should be the hearty response of every man and woman of the race," she instructs (*Voice from the South* 32). It is the united effort of black men and women that will change the lives of black women in the South. And Cooper notes that it is an effort that requires more privileged blacks to transcend class barriers. Her recommendation is far reaching as she suggests that barriers of class and sex be overridden in the greater interest of racial solidarity: "We need men who can let their interest and gallantry extend outside the circle of their aesthetic appreciation; men who can be a father, a brother, a friend to every weak, struggling[,] unshielded girl. We need women who are [so] sure of their own social footing that they need not fear leaning to lend a hand to a fallen or falling sister. We need men and women who do not exhaust their genius splitting hairs on aristocratic distinctions and thanking God that they are not as others" (32-33).

Though Cooper has called on privileged blacks to set aside their preoccupation with class, her own rhetoric of racial uplift reveals an elitist ideology that draws on education to mark class boundaries. An educated elite will lead the masses, and in Cooper's analogy that elite will consist of women as well as men.³ Hence, outstanding women of the race must be educated. Cooper repeats this position in her writings, but her views are often carefully couched in a rhetoric of female domesticity and feminine moderation. She argues that an education for young women teaches them that more is expected of them than to "merely look pretty and appear well in society" (*Voice from the South*, "The Higher Education of Women" 78). Here Cooper alludes to a prevailing nineteenth-century middle-class ideal of woman-

hood. Dating back to early American Puritanism, women who dressed elaborately and drew excessive attention to themselves were marked as unwomanly and even violators of Christian ideals of womanhood. The mark of true womanhood was the modest, unassuming woman, and this is the image of womanhood that Cooper aligns with the image of educated black women. Cooper is aware of the narrow plank that she walks as she attempts to reconcile two distinct worlds. She posits the seemingly contradictory argument that education—which is associated with worldliness—will influence women to better perform their domestic responsibilities: “The earnest well trained Christian young woman, as a teacher, as a homemaker, as wife, mother, or silent influence even, is as potent a missionary agency among our people as is the theologian” (*Voice from the South* 79).

Cooper negotiates a delicate argument; she is not simply asking for a practical education for women, but is instead suggesting that the classical curriculum—deemed the educational realm of men—be opened to women. She acknowledges the often-made argument that a classical education for women may interfere with marriage. At the heart of Cooper’s argument is the premise that a classical education does not put woman’s femininity at risk, but rather renders her a more intellectual mate for man; and calling on the ancient poetess Sappho, Cooper further suggests that a classical education leads woman to spiritual fulfillment. While Cooper offers serious refutation to claims that too much education can be harmful to women, she later offers a witty yet piercing answer: “I have been told that strong-minded women could be, when they thought it worth their while, quite enduring” (72). Though Cooper very likely drew a humorous response from her audience, her remark hints at the spirit of female independence and empowerment that she often couched in a rhetoric that played to middle-class images of female domesticity.

Like Crummell, Anna Julia Cooper held a firm conviction in the role of woman’s place in race progress, and both would emphasize the necessity of educating black women to meet this end. For Crummell and Cooper, however, the priority of higher education spilled over into a rhetoric that privileged Anglocentric conventions and ideals. Their classical learning left them accepting the dominant rhetoric of European cultural superiority. It would be too simplistic an analysis, however, to conclude that their reverence for Western culture was mere capitulation. Like other black leaders in the post-Reconstruction climate, Cooper and Crummell were aware that they faced a white public that was indifferent at best and often hostile to blacks and their unresolved place in American society. “The Race Problem in America” and “A Defense of the Negro Race” are two speech titles that exemplify the

social mood that Crummell was responding to in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. As these titles indicate, race is a problem, and the presence of blacks in American society is seen as the source of that problem. In "A Defense of the Negro Race," Crummell responds to a criticism of blacks delivered in an 1882 address, "On the Relations of the Church to the Colored Race," by a white Episcopal clergyman, Dr. J. L. Tucker. Crummell answers Dr. Tucker's charges that blacks inherently lack qualities such as morality, honesty, and industry (*Africa and America* 86). In addition, Crummell cites Dr. Tucker's charge to the Northerners that they freed blacks only to leave them a burden on the white South (114). Tucker's charge was an often-articulated claim by white Southerners in their justification for the reign of terror that they would initiate in the post-Reconstruction South. This rhetoric followed the increasing public representation of the freed blacks as a blemish upon the American landscape. It is this rising antiblack sentiment that Cooper, too, is clearly aware of and responding to.

Cooper and Crummell were among those black elites who responded to inflammatory and denigrating representations of blacks by affirming the ability of blacks to adopt the ways of Western culture. Countering a rhetoric that proclaimed blacks inferior because they did not have the education and culture of Westerners, black leaders like Crummell and Cooper argued for the humanity of blacks. Cooper argued for the worth and place of blacks among all other races not by asserting the merits of black culture, but like Crummell, by affirming their ability to appropriate Western learning and culture. But it is not Western culture in general that Cooper deems the exemplum of higher civilization. What she extols are the high arts and learning of the Western world, not its common culture. She echoes Crummell's affirmation that the great achievements of Western society render it the model for rising nations.

While Cooper clearly holds European civilization as the exemplum of human progress, she, like Crummell, is quick to recall Europe's barbaric past. In her essay "Has America a Race Problem; If So, How Can It Best Be Solved," Cooper cites numerous moments in European history that exemplify Europe's early barbarism. Echoing an analogy often drawn by Crummell, Cooper cites Europe's barbaric history to argue that just as Europeans rose out of heathenism and incivility, blacks too would rise to greatness. She determines that the greatness of European civilization is not the result of an inherently superior people, but rather the result of an ever-improving humankind.

The deductive framework of Cooper's historical philosophy gives her argument authority, and her view of humankind is consistent with a domi-

nant Western worldview that took shape during the European Enlightenment. The Enlightenment philosophy of mankind as ever learning and moving toward human perfection has remained an influential view in Western culture even today. Though Enlightenment philosophers constructed this progressive view of humankind under the presumption that humankind meant white civilization, many black leaders and scholars would appropriate this view and transform it into a rhetoric of black uplift. In like fashion, Cooper asserted a progressive theory of humankind. She shaped her argument in a rhetoric that underscored a dominant American ideology of identity: "As the European was higher and grander than the Asiatic, so will American civilization be broader and deeper and closer to the purposes of the Eternal than any the world has yet seen" (166).

Few nineteenth-century Americans would dispute Cooper's assertion that America is the betterment of her European ascendants—it was a vision dating back to Colonial American society. Cooper's ontological view of humankind as ever improving flowed logically into her race theory; hence, while Europe represented a great civilization, its greatness would be supplanted by its offspring—America. America's greatness would be expressed differently from her predecessor. America would not rise to greatness through legendary military conquests or industrial achievements but through higher principles of humanity: "the last page . . . to mark the climax of history, the bright consummate flower unfolding charity toward all and malice toward none,—the final triumph of universal reciprocity born of universal conflict with forces that cannot be exterminated" (166).

Cooper maintained that throughout history the conflicts between different races of people has served to improve mankind, and she turns to French historian François Guizot to elucidate this point: "'Take ever so rapid a glance,' says he, 'at modern Europe and it strikes you at once as diversified, confused, and stormy. All the principles of social organization are found existing together within it . . . all classes of society'" (159). She adds: "While in other civilizations the exclusive domination of a principle (or race) led to tyranny,⁴ in Europe the diversity of social elements (growing out of the contact of different races) the incapability of any one to exclude the rest, gave birth to the LIBERTY which now prevails. This inability of the various principles to exterminate one another compelled each to endure the others and made it necessary for them in order to live in common to enter into a sort of mutual understanding" (159–60).

From this Cooper deduces that "equilibrium, not repression among conflicting forces[,] is the condition of natural harmony, of permanent progress, and universal freedom" (160). Therefore, America, with its diversity of

racess, is destined to "learn that a race, as a family, may be true to itself without seeking to exterminate all others" (168). Like the European land of many races of people that eventually found a way to coexist and flourish, America and its many races of people would do likewise, Cooper argued. This mutual coexistence would then lead to America's greatness—the result of contributions of many race families. As one among many of America's race families, blacks too would contribute to the building of a great American civilization. Though blacks in late-nineteenth-century America were still clearly suffering from the aftermath of slavery, Cooper expressed confidence that their presence was a meaningful one: "I believe with our own Dr. Crummell that 'the Almighty does not preserve, rescue, and build up a lowly people merely for ignoble ends'" (173–74).

While Cooper and Crummell accepted the dominant discourse that touted the superiority of Western culture, they challenged claims of white superiority. This position seemed unambiguous to them and to many among the black elite in late-nineteenth-century America. Their views seemed unaffected by the possible contradiction between a belief in the progress of the black race and a concomitant belief in the cultural views of those who had maintained blacks in cultural and economic destitution: they seemed to believe that a clear distinction could be drawn between Westerners and Western civilization. While these arbiters of racial uplift articulated a rhetoric of race unity, their efforts have sometimes been interpreted in a contrasting light.

Scholar Kevin Gaines argues that the rhetoric and reality of this black elite leadership was often contradictory: "Amidst legal and extralegal repression, many black elites sought status, moral authority, and recognition of their humanity by distinguishing themselves, as bourgeois agents of civilization, from the presumably undeveloped black majority; hence the phrase, so purposeful and earnest, yet so often of ambiguous significance; uplifting the race" (2). Gaines further identifies this elite ideology as oftentimes grounded in patriarchal leanings that were promoted by black male leaders such as Crummell and Martin Delany (4), and he argues that "Cooper's thought, particularly her gender consciousness, both contested and reflected the assumptions of the black intelligence and black middle-class ideology" (129). Gaines underscores the integral place of Western bourgeois ideology in much of uplift philosophy, and his charge that "Cooper's writings cannot easily be disentangled from her Western ethnocentrism" (129) is a tenable reading.

However, even if we read elite ideology as simply a reification of white bourgeois values, we must still remember that uplift ideology was not a

monolithic discourse. Clearly, some among the elite were committed to bourgeois values for their own self-interest, but others were committed because either they believed this represented a higher form of civilization or they simply surmised that it was a means to an end—namely, black assimilation into the larger society. Cooper and Crummell expressed a vision of hope that saw blacks emerging out of a cultural darkness. Though slavery had left them lagging behind the civilized world, blacks would rise out of this abyss to find a meaningful place in the greater society. Like other black activists of this era, Cooper and Crummell believed that black progress would be marked by the successful acculturation of blacks. They sanctioned a Western discourse of high culture that centered woman as the icon of domesticity, man as the worldly-wise provider, and European cultural mores as the universal mark of civility.

Again, Crummell and Cooper were able to embrace Western civilization as the benchmark of African American acculturation because they maintained a progressive view of the history of mankind, suggesting that later civilizations were successively more advanced than their predecessors. Whites had emerged out of their barbarism, having learned from and improved upon the cultures of earlier people. Blacks would then learn and improve upon that which they inherited from whites and would represent the nexus in the ever-improving state of humankind. With this worldview, Cooper and Crummell could accept Western culture as the model of civilization. For Cooper and Crummell this position carried no contradictions; they acknowledged no inconsistency in claiming the superiority of Western culture while concurrently challenging claims of white superiority.

The writings of Cooper and Crummell illustrate the difficulty encountered when one attempts to read the ideologies of the talented tenth into clear ideological camps. While Cooper and Crummell clearly show an Anglocentric grounding in their cultural views, they are nevertheless believers in the inevitable greatness of blacks. They measure that greatness by Anglocentric cultural markers, but their writings also reveal that theirs was not a philosophy rooted in simple acquiescence to a white worldview. Cooper and Crummell represent a tradition in African American literature of appropriating the dominant discourse and shaping it into a rhetoric of African American humanity and import. In an era marked by overwhelming antiblack sentiment, leading African American activists and scholars searched for a language to legitimize and validate a black presence in a world of whiteness. Cooper and Crummell undertook this task, not by overturning the dominant cultural rhetoric but rather by manipulating that rhetoric into a discourse of equality and inclusion. Their writings represent a black

elite who, though aware of the destitution and drudgery common to black female experience, chose a rhetoric of female domesticity and gentility to construct black female identity. This seeming dismissal of black female experience is sometimes interpreted as the acquiescence of the black elite to white authority.

Often overlooked, however, is the weighty mission of answering public scorn that many of these activists undertook in their writings. While leading white female writers and activists were calling for equality of the sexes and woman's suffrage, Cooper and her black female contemporaries had to negotiate desires for sexual equality with their mission to counter a public rhetoric that marked black women as sexually loose and socially unrefined. In *A Voice from the South*, Cooper's dialogue with Crummell clearly illustrates the tenuous place of black women scholars who felt compelled to answer the public scorn of white America as well as the rising rhetoric of black male patriarchy that was constructing an icon of black womanhood from the blueprint of middle-class white womanhood. Cooper critiques black male patriarchy, but she ultimately submits to a male-dominant rhetoric that binds woman to a subordinate relationship with man. Notwithstanding her indictment of man's historical degradation of woman and her call for the education and improvement of women, in the end Cooper lays it all at the altar of female domesticity. In her essays that clearly undertake a dialogue with Crummell, Cooper exposes the shortcomings of his rhetoric, but she also restores him to the patriarchal helm. This is again particularly evident in the essay "Womanhood," where she challenges Crummell's self-appointed guardianship of black women, but she ultimately both confirms him as guardian and validates his view. It is no light matter that a black woman leader and activist with Cooper's professional and personal accomplishments yielded to a rhetoric that she so clearly questioned. Cooper's rhetorical acquiescence hints at the influence of a dominating male presence among the talented tenth.

While Crummell and his black male contemporaries may have been motivated by the highest of intentions, the Cooper-Crummell dialogue reveals how black women's voices were stifled and reshaped until they were oftentimes undistinguishable from the exclusionary dominant rhetoric of womanhood as well as the imposing rhetoric of a black patriarchal elite. The Cooper-Crummell dialogue represents a struggle for black female subjectivity; this is evident in Cooper's contrasting and conflicting images of womanhood as well as the tightrope she negotiates as she both praises and admonishes the gender rhetoric of one of the leading black voices of late-nineteenth-century America.

Crummell's patriarchal rhetoric looms like an overhanging storm cloud in the midst of Cooper's would-be feminist declarations. With Crummell as the guiding light for her emerging race rhetoric, Cooper becomes bound by the limitations of her mentor's vision. Crummell's longstanding deference to a Western worldview leaves little room for African American experience and cultural ideals. As a senior and esteemed figure among black leaders at the close of the nineteenth century, Crummell left a legacy of conflict and contradiction. Cooper and DuBois would be among the black elite leadership that would inherit the vision of black nationalism shaped by Crummell, but it would prove a vision of race unity and progress clouded by their subjugation of black experience and ideology to a dominant white bourgeois rhetoric. The inextricable connection they drew between womanhood and nation would reverberate well into the next century.

As highlighted in the Cooper-Crummell dialogue, the central place of the black woman in race work was not a contested point between black male and female leaders. The tensions in the rhetoric originate in conflicting visions of woman's specific place and in the attempt to conflate the reality of black female experience with a racialized rhetoric of universal womanhood. Crummell's writings reveal the instability of black elite ideals of womanhood. Even a staunch conservative like Crummell could not remain constant in his gender rhetoric. While he emphatically believed in the primacy of woman's domestic role, he could not ignore the reality that many black women did not have the opportunity to choose a life of domesticity and dependence. He would nevertheless stand firm in his vision of a black domestic female icon, and he found concurrence from a black elite that also embraced this gender construct. Crummell's rhetoric of womanhood and nationhood echoed throughout the closing decades of the nineteenth century and would not be seriously challenged until the dawn of the Harlem Renaissance, which ushered in a philosophy of race identity that validated an African American worldview. The black-centered worldview that blossomed during this period would effectively displace Crummell and his conservative ideologies, relegating him to near obscurity for more than half a century.

Notes

1. See Henry Louis Gates's *The Signifying Monkey* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) for a more thorough discussion of this African American language play.
2. See Wilson Moses's 1989 biography, *Alexander Crummell*, for a detailed account of Crummell's troubles with his white superiors in Liberia.
3. See Floris Barnett Cash's discussion on the female talented tenth in her work

African American Women and Social Action: The Clubwomen and Volunteerism from Jim Crow to the New Deal, 1896-1936 (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001).

4. Cooper's use of "race" here represents the nineteenth-century discourse that had not firmly established white as a race. Works such as Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness* and Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* are among a number of scholarly works that trace the construction of whiteness as a race in American society.

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