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- 1 The nation is a woman. This is true in the sense that in many languages the nation, as an abstract entity, is inflected in the feminine gender. Far from being merely a linguistic fluke, this persistent gendering of the nation in language codifies an ideology of the nation's femininity. As a speech act, making a woman of the nation is a linguistic trick. Everything we know about the nation-state, nationalist ideology and identity, and the violence of the nationalist imperative proves that, as far as *realpolitik* is concerned, the nation is the contrary of the feminine. Thus, this linguistic trick works to camouflage the extent to which the nation—as material, political, economic, social creature—is an embattled, blood-soaked territory whose protection and profit have been commandeered by elite men. The material bases of nationalism, territorial boundaries, have been maintained solely through the manly arts of warfare and diplomacy, always the former when the latter necessarily fails. The political machinery of statecraft—whether tribal, feudal, monarchical, republican, totalitarian, or communist in nature—is itself a kind of warfare, which has been maneuvered predominantly by men. “Economy” derives from a Greek word meaning the management of a household, a role in most cultures across history conventionally reserved for the woman of the house, with or without her retinue of servants.<sup>1</sup> The woman manages the house so that the patriarch can manage the affairs of state. With the emergence of the modern nation-state out of *laissez-faire* mercantile capitalism, the meaning of “economy” increasingly shifts during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from being the province of wifely obligation to being identified with the exclusively masculine prerogative of managing the nation's prosperity, manipulated through its apparatuses of taxation, trade, finance, expenditure, speculation, and accounting. If society is ordered like a patriarchal family, if the nation is the household of the people, then the husbanding of its money is too important to be left to housewives, whose natural skill for ordering the private home falls away immediately on crossing the threshold into the public sphere.

- 2 Although in the everyday muck of political chicanery and monetary speculation the nation is run by men, when it is abstracted into an impossible ideal defined by natural boundaries (which nonetheless must be defended), unified by bonds of kin across kind (which must be disciplined and policed), enriched by a self-regulating economy (that must be constantly monitored), and overseen by heroic patriarchs (whose self-interest is the nation's interest), the nation magically transubstantiates into a woman. This catachrestic practice, whereby the messily manhandled nation is softened into the abstract feminine, may make some sense in terms of the logic at work in men's traffic in women: if the nation is an embattled territory that men must compete to conquer and control, then surely she must be at best a lady, desirous of being wooed, at worst a concubine, rapaciously penetrated. If in the abstract, the nation is referenced through its projected femininity, when men attempt to concretize this abstraction, to insist that the nation can have an imaginable body, a single body that can represent the unimaginable whole, then the nation's womanliness is made if not of flesh, then at least of marble or bronze, copper or steel, versified imagery or oil pigment. Beyond the linguistic trick of the abstracted feminine, the very body of the nation is anatomically female. Although we are rarely privy to her private parts, we know that she is biologically female because of her outward womanliness, a femaleness so hyperbolic—with mammoth nurturing breasts, a statuesque posture and stance, a phallic armature of draped clothing—that she cannot be feminine in the conventional sense. Again, we see the seeming illogic materialized, whereby the desire to womanize the ideal of the nation contradicts the desire to represent the nation's patriarchal machination as political fiat.
- 3 It should come as no surprise that the most powerful concrete embodiments (in statuary, painting, verse, and music) of the national ideal have arisen from the most powerful nations. Great Britain's Britannia, for instance, must be quite a mannish woman to rule the waves as she does. This embodiment of Great Britain emerges in the late seventeenth century, is popularized in the early eighteenth after the fusing of England and Wales with Scotland, and becomes an hegemonic icon in the heyday of the Empire under Victoria, whose own memorialization as a monstrous female ponderously seated upright on the throne in statuary all over England and the Commonwealth is an adaptation of Britannia. Sometimes seated on a throne with the stylized sea waves obediently tamed beneath her feet, sometimes standing in the erect posture typical of such iconic monstrous women, Britannia holds in her right hand a shield emblazoned with the Union Jack, in her left a trident, representing her conquest of the seas, and on her head she bears a Roman helmet, a belligerent crown that signals the national will to power as simultaneously an inherited imperialist venture.<sup>2</sup> The only sign that she is an anatomical female resides in the classical garments that drape her erect body. The gender catachresis of this embodiment is echoed in the lyrics of James Thomson's "Rule Britannia" (1740), the military march and unofficial national anthem that verbally and musically matches the statuary icon:
- Still more majestic shalt thou rise,  
More dreadful from each foreign stroke;  
As the loud blast that tears the skies,  
Serves but to root thy native oak.
- 4 On the one hand, Britannia is a shrewish female, fiercely untamable by the warriors of other countries and taming distant seas and lands to her imperial might. "Thee haughty tyrants ne'er shall tame,/All their attempts to bend thee down." On the other hand, she is a vision of queenly majesty and beauty, untouchable but touching:

The Muses, still with freedom found,  
 Shall to thy happy coast repair;  
 Blest Isle! With matchless beauty crowned,  
 And manly hearts to guide the fair.

- 5 Despite Britannia's massive strength to put down single-handedly all her foes, she needs, like every "fair" lady, "manly hearts" to guide her, to navigate her ship of state. In Britannia the British seek to embody, and thus to mythologize, the notion of a national dispensation whose island boundaries bind so naturally that the nation can be expanded without the ruin of warfare or revolution, the myth of the 1689 "bloodless revolution" and of the *United Kingdom*, a myth that obviously serves to repress historically the mutual violence exchanged between English factions as well between England and Scotland over the centuries, and the ongoing unilateral imperialist violence of the most brutal kind being carried out against Ireland at the very moment of the 1707 bloodless union with Scotland.
- 6 If Britain's monstrous woman appears as rooted to her throne as its "native oak" is to its island soil, so France's is befittingly a revolutionary woman of action. The concretized ideal of the republican nation resorts to monstrous womanhood no less than Britain's commemoration of its expansive monarchically chartered state. Eugène Delacroix's famous 1830 painting "Liberty Leading the People" captures the cross-gendering that occurs when the abstract notion of the republican national spirit is concretized in bodily form. Liberty, bare-breasted, is not so much nurturing the nation like a woman as she is goading the revolutionary troops like a great military commander. Her muscular right arm hoists the tricolor while her right hand grasps a musket. Even though she is so determined on forward motion that she appears to be about to burst through the painting's frame as she towers over the male soldiers on the battlefield, she is also gigantically fixed to the ground that she treads, Herculean and immovable. The cause and source of all invasive movement forward for national republicanism, she steps across the dead and dying untroubled by the slightest hint of sentiment, much less hysteria or horror. As a monstrous woman fit for a nation that styles itself a revolutionary republic, Delacroix's Liberty iconographically harkens back to Jeanne d'Arc, that other monstrous French maiden whose re-embodiment in phallic statuary sublimates the chaste and chastening feminine into the bloodless she-man with a heart constituting the nation's armor. Delacroix's representation also draws on the rich iconographic history of the first revolution as *La République*, embodied as a female nicknamed Marianne, and as Lynn Hunt points out, in "collective memory" this name "first given Liberty—the Republic—in derision by opponents of the Revolution soon became a familiar nickname of affection."<sup>3</sup> The source of the anti-revolutionary derision resides in the intuitive illogic of this cross-gendering iconography, for what better way to trivialize *La République* than to tag it with the name of an ordinary peasant woman, rather than see it as the legitimate progeny of elite great men.
- 7 Of course, the supreme example of a monstrous female embodying the powerful nation-state is Frederic Auguste Bartholdi's gargantuan copper sculpture "Statue of Liberty" (1884). How ironic that the United States, the gun-toting loner cowboy nation, should take as its embodiment a French-concocted monstrous she-man. She is, of course, reminiscent of Delacroix's Liberty, but displacing the tricolor and the gun, she holds the lit torch of liberty in her uplifted right hand and cradles a tablet (representing law) in her left arm. Mythologized as a welcoming totem—a beacon, the cliché goes—for the millions of European immigrants who, yearning to be free, traversed the Atlantic, Liberty also

presents a bellicose front, massive, unyielding, and decidedly unfeminine, a phalanx fleshed in 312,000 pounds of copper and steel bearing down on a concrete pedestal of 54,000,000 pounds. She guards the eastern shore of America with a sternly frowning, ugly visage, capped with a treacherous spiked crown.

- 8 The twisted logic of cross-gendered iconography makes sense to the extent that these she-mannish icons represent nationalism's ideology of patriarchal procreativity. On the one hand, these monumental women are *impregnable*, projecting to everything outside its borders that the nation is, like a chaste woman, impenetrable. On the other hand, the nation must be embodied as woman, whose womb, though never pregnant, or at least never "showing," forever remains an eager receptacle of *impregnation*, not only by the leading patriarchs' seminal influence but also by the will and desire of the people themselves. A male icon representing the abstract idealization of the national spirit would produce a far queerer figure, and thus a more exposed logic of national vulnerability, for the penetrable man as an icon of national identity would invite not only the stigma of homosexualization but also the absurdity of a nation's nonprocreative impotence.<sup>4</sup> (We shall see that this disturbing trope of penetrability is especially germane for the construction of a black "nation within a nation" during the Black Power movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s.) While the gargantuan character of these female icons of nationhood is intended to communicate the impermeability and permanence of the great nation-state, their womanliness at the same time encodes a vulnerability to enemy invasion demanding men's zealous self-guardianship and a vulnerability to temporality scripted in progress-narratives of self-birthing, always about-to-come apogees, and anxieties of decline that must always be pre-empted. National consciousness, as Benedict Anderson has theorized, produces clockable shared time, "in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar."<sup>5</sup> The temporality of nationalism is cross-timed in another sense as well, related to the necessary attempt to figure through cross-gendering the singleness and singularity of the nation as both birthed in the accidents of history and yet also always imaginable beyond the frailties of time; as both a made creature subject to history's ruination and a transcendent ideal impervious to time. This is why these she-male icons must be so massively cast in the hardest stones and metals, unless, like Percy Shelley's *Ozymandias*, they fragment into "the decay/Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare." But even when they remain ensconced in oil, folklore, verse, origin narratives, and school textbooks without the benefit of stone and steel, they embed themselves so familiarly that their cross-gendering illogic becomes invisible, a queer frame of reference that makes what appears within the frame—the national subjectivity and its coercive imaginary—seem both socially normal and ideologically normative.
- 9 These monstrous female icons of national identity, in other words, always serve to enshrine a grand national history; they are pedagogical figures in that they rehearse, commemorate, emblemize, and teach (in the most laconic, condensed fashion imaginable) the dominant narrative of national origins, climaxes, and aims. These mass and massive icons seek to obliterate the proliferation and confusion of stories necessarily contradictory to this one hegemonically didactic and exhortatory narrative. National subjects must be constantly re-educated to see the nation itself as impertransible, for it must be seen as impregnable as the wills of the generations of men who rule it in the interest of the men and women subjected to its sway. Otherwise, who would submit

themselves to its dictates? At the same time, it must be seen as fragilely poised, like a wife whose chastity must be protected from marauding rapists. Otherwise, who would sacrifice their lives to defend it?

- 10 The transcendentalizing function of the monstrous female icons serves to claim the nation's ever-present tense of the now, the idea that it forever reproduces itself anew: "While *thou* shalt flourish great and free," Thomson addresses Britannia as the untouchable beloved. While projecting an eternal now, an always directly addressable *thou*, fully present in the moment, the monstrous female as iconic identity of the nation ironically also commemorates the origin myth of a nation's self-birth and destined progress toward greatness. In the dominant narratives of national origins, the founders, habitually male, seem to give birth to the nation, without women or their wombs, as though, like Zeus birthing Athena full-blown from his head, the nation-state can be a phallogentric virgin-birth sown patrimonially from the thoughts and actions of great men. As recent feminist scholarship on the early American and French revolutionary republics indicate, however, motherhood is crucial to republican notions of national origin mythology.<sup>6</sup> The Republican Mother tutors the next generation of citizens, prepares them for a leadership grounded in liberty and equality, while herself being excluded from the privileges and rights she nurtures in her male children. Like the Republican Mother—whose exclusion from the nastiness of political, economic, and social power makes her the idealizable nurturer of civic virtue for young male citizens—these monstrous female icons can be made to materialize the nation as a singular figure *because* woman, as collective identity, is naturally excluded from the nationalist empowerment that she merely serves to purify through abstract allegorization of its ideal.
- 11 This practice of exploiting the female icon to materialize the national ideal may seem as though it is giving voice to women's civic aspirations within the power politics of the nation-state. Indeed, it could be argued that such cross-gendering iconicity reflects the struggle over how women are to be imagined as citizens from the moment of the emergence of the laissez-faire nation-state. This cross-gendering practice strikes me, however, more compellingly as an instance of the attempt to discipline and silence those ordinary women who could not even adequately serve as the sitters, the models upon whom the male artists could base the fantasy of these monumental female icons. Whether this occurs linguistically by gendering the nation-state in the feminine case (as in *la nation* and *La République*), or allegorically in verse (as in James Thomson's "Rule Britannia"), or through more literal-minded concrete iconography (such as the U.K.'s Britannia, France's Marianne, or the U.S.'s Statue of Liberty), the feminine form serves to purify, emblemize, collectivize, and memorialize—and thus to transcendentalize—concepts of rightful dis/empowerment that are otherwise fraught with cultural-historical strife. The apparently static nature of such imagery distances us from the historical contentiousness of the act of cross-gendering that occurs ideologically in the enunciation or re-erection of patriarchal power through an objectified, if celebrated, she/mannish icon.
- 12 When Ernest Gaines chooses a woman as the individual subject for collective memorialization and the iconic medium of racial memory in his 1971 novel, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, he participates in this long tradition of nationalist female iconography. This cross-gendering of the racial imaginary, introjecting a man's vision of racial collectivity and history through a female's person, though not exactly a form of cross-dressing, can be usefully analyzed as such. In fact, Gaines's novel is an especially loaded treasure-trove for understanding this phenomenon because the novel is

doubly invested in this cross-gendering practice: Gaines's masculine nationalist history is clothed in a woman's body, and yet the woman who is made to speak this nationalist narrative is herself but a cover for the male Messiah, the necessarily *male* race leader, whom she awaits, nurtures, memorializes, and mourns. Gaines chooses a female subject as the mouthpiece of the national history of African Americans, but ironically when she tells the story of the race, which is synecdoche for the U.S. nation itself, she also tends to absent herself from the story so that it becomes a messianic narrative about the missing male savior who must come to sacrifice himself in liberating the race, and thus fulfilling the promise of the American nation as a whole. There is in the narrative structure, then, a sort of gender double-crossing in that Miss Jane only *appears* to be the *subject* of national history, its performance and its enactment. In the course of the narrative, we discover that she is more appropriately a *witness*, *amanuensis*, *wet-nurse*, or most aptly a *mammy* to this narrative, a woman whose destiny it is to nourish and rear a masculine lineage not properly or wholly her own because seminal male subjects are the true motive, agency, and aim structuring that national history.

- 13 Like the female icons whose gigantism succors the idealized national history of powerful nation-states by abstracting us from the cultural contests and bloody wars that enable nation-formation, Miss Jane's womanly voice serves to idealize a heroic national black history by abstracting it from the ideologically embattled dangers of the Black Power present. As we shall see, Miss Jane is not a gigantic woman in the sense of her actual size (and in fact, Gaines makes her rather diminutive for reasons we shall turn to later), but she is decidedly monstrous in two other regards. She is abnormally long-lived at 110 years, a longevity intimately wedded to her feminine capacity to endure, to suffer, to observe from the relatively domesticated side of the threshold of historical action. She is, as well, metonymically allied with women who are super-sized both within the novel and, subliminally, from outside the novel's frame of reference: the female heroes from black history, like Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, whose legendary legacies of gargantuan courage sit in judgment over the actions of men who follow. That Miss Jane has lost the capacity to give birth, yet is preeminently the nurturer of others' boys, further enhances her iconic status as the abstracted voice of national black history. Like the monstrous female icons and Republican Mothers, her purpose is to prepare the next generation of young males by teaching them the virtue of the race/nation, a virtue that she is exceptionally fitted to inculcate and embody exactly because she is more a transcending witness to history than a participatory agent shaping its course directly. And like these iconic mothers of the nation, Miss Jane is a shrine enthroned to commemorate the male founders and warriors whose lives and deaths are transubstantiated into the lifeblood of the nation.
- 14 In addition to this double gender-crossing, Gaines's novel, which scripts itself as Miss Jane's historical memory virtually unmediated, also double-crosses black history in another peculiar sense. Miss Jane is an interlocutor who narrates African American history from enslavement to the novel's present (around 1962), ostensibly represented within the novel as the Civil Rights struggle to desegregate the U.S. South. But the novel's internal present is conveniently misrepresented in relation to the novel's external present. Given that Gaines writes and publishes the novel during the heyday of the Black Power movement (1962-1971), we have to ask why the novel's internal present is arrested at the moment of Civil Rights nonviolent resistance, just before the emergence of Black

Power as a rallying cry.<sup>7</sup> Could it be that the novel's cross-gendering dynamic is servicing a more fundamental double-cross related to its integrationist cross-racial agenda?

- 15 I think so. Like those revolutionary Republican Mothers, Miss Jane authenticates the history she remembers partly because as an old woman, a former slave, she narrates it for the pedagogy of future generations, black and white. The internal audience for her heroic history is clearly marked. The most immediate audience is the (racially unmarked but assumed to be black) young historian who has come to record her story. Within the narrative, the other unmediated audience is not so subtly encoded as the young black southern men who are downtrodden, brow-beaten, mealy-mouthed, and Jim Crowed within the novel's frame—the ones who necessarily fail to become the racial/national messiah. Outside the novel's frame, however, Gaines's female mouthpiece is indirectly aimed at two shadowing doubles. 1.) The racially ambiguous historian in the originating half-frame of the novel doubles for the white cross-over audience whose response will determine whether Miss Jane's story is authenticated and legitimized—and thus assimilated—within the heroic American national narrative. 2.) The novel's paralyzed young black men on the plantation double for, and thus serve to displace, the defiant young black men, the new breed of militant, gun-toting, rape-talking, cop-stalking, camera-savvy black nationalists who pick up Robert F. Williams's motto, "Negroes with Guns" and turn it into a national movement of Black Panthers for Self-Defense. Except for a slight gesture made in the minor character of the unnamed "long-head boy," whom we shall examine later, the black nationalist militant haunts the novel from its edges, as Gaines decidedly excludes him from Miss Jane's nationalist history of the black race. This exclusion serves to consolidate an *American* nationalist history, rejecting the rising current of black nationalist fervor contemporaneous with the novel by silencing it as a continuous mode of black agency across and within U.S. history, while at the same time borrowing from its violent imaginary of militant self-defense and racial autonomy. Without Miss Jane as his cross-gendered female raconteur, Gaines could not so effectively conduct this racial double-cross, whereby the "black" in nationalism is placed under erasure for the re-erection of a desegregated cross-racially constituted (black)American nationalism.
- 16 Before we turn to the novel to observe how Gaines effects this cross-gendered, cross-racial double-cross of black nationalism, we must consider how the novel shares with black nationalist ideology a deep ambivalence toward the traditional—one might even say reactionary—practice of cross-gendering the abstracted power of the patriarchal nation-state in the form of a monstrous woman. This deeply shared ambivalence toward the gigantic woman as the fittest icon of national identity will help to index to what extent Gaines is subliminally indebted to the black nationalist impulses of the Black Power movement, even as he self-consciously works to suppress black nationalist history from Miss Jane's recounting of national black history.<sup>8</sup> Although black nationalism constitutes a revolutionary movement in itself, like the African, Cuban, and Asian anti-colonial independence movements on which it was modeled, the idea of the black nation is heavily indebted to the traditional, often imperialist, imagining of nationalism formulated by powerful nation-states like Britain, France, and the United States. Unlike these powerful white-identified nation-states, however, black nationalists are very skittish about figuring the black nation through the giganticized body of an iconic woman.<sup>9</sup> This skittishness certainly derives from the patriarchal (sexist and homophobic) strains within black nationalism that have been productively analyzed by a number of writers.<sup>10</sup>



- 17 Intensifying this deviation from the white nationalist norm, however, are two interrelated factors peculiar to black nationalism. First, unlike white-identified nation-states, the black nation is more a cultural prophecy and political demand than an established political formation with material boundaries, economic superstructures, civil institutions, and state bureaucratic apparatuses. The institutionalized patriarchy of white nation-states gives them the luxury of capitalizing on monstrous female icons as a pedagogy of abstraction and purification. The black nation does not have such a luxury. Second, given the ways in which black men have been represented as deprived of patriarchal status within their own households, much less within the civil public sphere, the idea of the black nation is riddled with anxiety where women's leadership role is concerned. This anxiety is most frequently manifested as a desire to discipline the so-called black matriarch as possessing too much influence within the home and within the public sphere not only in black nationalist discourse of the 1960s and '70s but also in assimilationist discourse seeking to normalize the African American family by reclaiming the black male as proper head of the house and legitimate head of the racial family.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the notion that the black matriarch supplants the proper role of the black man as the proper head of the house and the legitimate head of the race grows out of the 1930s sociological work of E. Franklin Frazier, is codified as national policy by the infamous Moynihan report of 1965, and then ironically becomes foundational to revolutionary black nationalist thought.<sup>12</sup> Whereas Frazier and Moynihan were concerned that the nonconforming gender arrangements within African American communities prevented social and economic assimilation into the American national norm, the black nationalists were concerned that black women's visible roles in helping to lead the race disrupted the potential for black men to contest in hand-to-hand combat the white male rulers over the territorial boundaries, symbolic and actual, of the black nation-in-waiting.
- 18 In comparison with white women, black women historically were at the forefront of the public image and public work of leading the race not only as mothers and managers of - the household and of culture but also as activists, politicians, breadwinners, intellectuals, educators, lawyers, and armed warriors. In trying to domesticate the "strong black woman," black nationalists were also attempting to revise the heroic narrative of black nation-making by demoting and diminishing the presence of celebrated race heroes like Phillis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman (the first female American military commander), Anna Julia Cooper, Madame C. J. Walker (first black and first female American millionaire), Maggie Walker (first American woman to own a bank), Ida B. Wells-Barnett (anti-lynching leader and one of the first individuals to litigate against segregated railway transportation), Mary Church Terrell, Mary McLeod Bethune, Ella Baker, Daisy Bates, Constance Baker Motley (who argued the *Brown v. Board of Education* case before the Supreme Court), Fannie Lou Hamer, and Shirley Chisholm (first black and first woman to run for U.S. president). Although such women represented a long tradition of relatively more equal public race leadership, increasingly across the 1960s black nationalists were alarmed by the implications of this black matriarchy, an alarm amplified by the emergence of the women's liberation movement simultaneously with Black Power. Michele Wallace perfectly sums up this masculine panic over the black matriarchy during this period in her classic *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*:
- She was too domineering, too strong, too aggressive, too outspoken, too castrating, too masculine. She was one of the main reasons the black man had never been properly able to take hold of his situation in this country. The black man had troubles and he would have to fight the white man to get them solved but how

would he ever have the strength if his own house was not in proper order, if his wife, his woman, his mother, his sisters, who should have been his faithful servants, were undermining him at every opportunity.<sup>13</sup>

- 19 In other words, the matriarch was a monstrous woman, but not an iconic one made merely of stone and steel, oil strokes and versified imagery, but instead one made of flesh and bone. Because she had been so visible on the frontlines of the race war historically, the heroic black woman could represent and embody the race, and thus the black nation, not just allegorically in the manner of a cross-gendering monument, but in the day-to-day struggles and legendary battles over racial autonomy and equality on the ground.
- 20 If the black matriarch was too “real” a presence for black men to follow the customary white nationalist practice of cross-gendering the collective memory through her abstract iconization, it was also the case that the practical impact of her race work materially, socially, economically, intellectually, and politically was too influential to be purged or repressed. Lacking the economic resources for such a luxury of patriarchal imagination in oversized steel and stone on the scale of the Statue of Liberty or the Queen Victoria statue, black nationalist practice most frequently resorted to more figurative embodiments of the gigantic feminine in art, poetry, song, and dance. Ironically, at the very moment when black nationalist ideologues were trying to diminish her heroic resonance among African Americans, the reverence for the image of the “strong black woman” intensified along with the conflicted ambivalence toward her as a fitting icon of black people’s historical triumph. The paradoxical logic of black nationalism is that even as black men needed to domesticate the black matriarch—to put her in her historical place behind and protected by the warring men—they also needed to monumentalize the notion of the strong mother of the black nation. If the black nationalist man was to bear the wounds of frontline battle, she was to bear the womb that would birth and rear future race warriors. Although black nationalists aimed to discipline and domesticate her for the purposes of procreative nationalism, the actual image of the black mother of the nation ironically was a double for the black matriarch: an over-sized woman, with ample thighs and hips for birthing black warriors, voluptuous breasts for nursing the nation, and a full head of militantly natural hair to connect the black nation to the motherland, Mother Africa.
- 21 The gigantic black woman—legendary, monumental, matriarchal—proliferated across the Black Power decade in dance, art, theater, literature, music, posters, political leaflets, Blacksploitation movies, and commercial advertising. As black women adopted the “natural” or “Afro” style, the big hair grew emblematically to fit the size of their monstrous visibility in every conceivable medium. In her 1976 collection of verse, *how i got ovah*, Carolyn Rodgers perfectly captures this sense of the Afro’s giganticizing effect on the black woman’s individual and collective psyche and social image:
- told my sweet mama  
to leave me alone  
about my wild free knotty and nappy  
hair  
cause i was gon lay back  
and let it grow so high  
it could reroute its roots  
and highjack the sky!<sup>14</sup>
- 22 As black male nationalists worried over the black matriarch’s highjacking of the conventional masculine obligations of nation-founding and -building, warmongering and

negotiating, they also could not help but fantasize these mothers of the nation as Amazonian breeders. We see this image in Melvin Van Peebles's wildly popular revolutionary black nationalist film, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971), which appeared the same year as *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*.<sup>15</sup> The young Sweetback, an orphan, is taken in by a brothel of full-bodied matriarchs. In the classic scene that starts the movie, Van Peebles focuses the camera on the women's ample breasts encircling the young boy, the revolutionary-in-the-making, as they feed the scrawny boy with heaping bowls of food. Then we see the boy (played by Mario van Peebles, Melvin's son) being initiated into sex with one of these women. As the little boy is placed atop the large woman, she climaxes over the course of a camera trick that enables us in a few seconds to observe the boy grow into the adult Sweetback (played by Melvin Van Peebles), who, grown to full size, redresses the gender imbalance, as he now, a big top man, appropriately dominates and masters the prostitute as he pleases her sexually.

- 23 As mother of the black nation, fecund and nourishing, the black nationalist icon sexualizes the black woman while attempting to redress, revenge, and repudiate the idea that he has failed as a true race warrior in allowing his women to be raped by the slave master. The poet Rolland Snellings captures this sentiment in his 1968 poem, "Earth," dedicated to "Mrs. Mary Bethune and the African and Afro-American women:" "Where are the warriors, the young men?/Who guards the women's quarters—the burnt-haired/women's quarters –/and hears their broken sobbing in the night?"<sup>16</sup> Ostensibly addressed to Mrs. Bethune and all black women metonymically apostrophized as "Mother of the World," by the closure of the poem, the rhetorical question has been redirected to the young black men who must take up the challenge of protecting the women:

Fecund, Beating Heart!  
Enduring Earth!  
*Only you remain!*  
Where are the warriors, the young men?  
Who guards the women's quarters?... (italics and ellipses in original)

- 24 In structure, this poem performs the same cross-gender double-cross as Gaines's *AMJP*, but toward the aim of a black nationalist armed defense against the white nationalist rulers. By placing the black male warrior squarely between the fecund black woman and the raping white master, black male nationalists hoped to keep the monumental black woman as icon of mothering nationhood while banishing the myth of her sexual complicity by pre-empting her historical role as an unprotected body penetrable by white nationalist men.
- 25 As much as black nationalist men needed the oversized black mother of the nation as a memorializing icon to birth, rear, and mourn future black male warriors, black women ambivalently played to this script and fiercely resisted it at the same time. A female contributor to the same 1968 *Black Fire* anthology where Snellings's poem appeared, Odaro ("Barbara Jones, slave name") pens the poem "Alafia," in which she answers the black male's call for a companionable, desirable woman ready to please. Her poem begins self-consciously and seemingly subserviently to the wishes of the leading black men: "I am writing at the request of/Larry Neal, Ed Spriggs and Harold Foster/Who seem to think that you/Might be interested in my/Poetry" (*Black Fire* 356). The poem concludes with a touch of ambiguity concerning the woman's secondary place: "Black Woman, Queen of the World." Similarly, when the artist Betye Saar produces her mixed-media painting, *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972), she alludes to the notion of black female complicity when

she includes an inset of a light-skinned mammy holding a white baby.<sup>17</sup> Imposed on the complicit mammy, however, is a black fist, blocking the mammy's womb. Rising above the inset mammy is a massive, dark-skinned image of the handkerchief-headed Aunt Jemima, her ample breasts appearing to flow over the inset portrait of the light-skinned mammy. Dupliciously, the over-sized Aunt Jemima holds in her right hand a broom, but like Delacroix's *Liberty*, she subverts her femininity and fulfills her phallic potential by holding at the same time a handgun propped against the broom, and in her left hand a rifle. Reclaiming the legendary soldiering of Harriet Tubman in the same frame as the minstrel image, Saar refuses to banish or suppress the positive aggression of the black matriarch as a race woman fit for warring leadership.

- 26 As "Mother of the World" and "Mother Africa," the black nationalist image of gigantic womanhood was so embattled in the late 1960s and early '70s that even a novel like *AMJP* that attempts to banish this gender controversy from its narrative frame cannot fully succeed in shutting it out. The criticism on *AMJP* constantly refers to this odd gender-crossing. Valerie Melissa Babb's chapter on the novel, for instance, is entitled, "From History to Her-story," but characteristic of the work on Gaines, she celebrates this technique as giving an unmediated voice to black women's history.<sup>18</sup> Applauding the novel as history lesson, Mary Ellen Doyle also notices, in passing, that its structure and themes are anchored in Gaines's "exploration of manhood."<sup>19</sup> Contradicting herself in viewing the novel as "essentially the story of one woman," Doyle goes on to observe that Gaines was "frankly searching for the definition and practice of manhood in a racially conditioned world. In the four men of the novel, he continued that search and projected some conclusions" (152). Karen Carmean puts it more forthrightly when she writes, "Another way of viewing the book's structure is in seeing it centered not only around Jane but also around the four men in her life: Ned, Joe Pittman, Tee Bob, and Jimmy."<sup>20</sup> Carmean, though, sees this structure as ultimately redounding to the authenticity of Miss Jane's feminine perspective. Although she does not see the implications of her observation, Carmean connects the character of Miss Jane directly to Gaines's exclusion of black nationalist ideology: "By now the spirit of a 110-year-old woman had taken over his imagination, and, undeterred by the unsettled politics of the late 1960s, Gaines would shut out the voices of protest to listen to Miss Jane Pittman" (8). Like many other critics, Carmean connects Gaines's canonization directly to *AMJP*, a novel that "secured for him a firm place in American literature" because, no longer to be categorized as a "black' author," wiser critics understand "how this novel—and its author—transcended limiting categories" (9). Gaines's novel achieves its cherished status in the integrated American nationalist canon through this cross-gendering maneuver, whereby Miss Jane's voice serves to contain and suppress a messier history of cross- and intra-racial division.<sup>21</sup>
- 27 Gaines's portrait of Miss Jane is based on his great-aunt, Miss Augusteen Jefferson, who, according to Gaines, "did not walk a day in her life but who taught me the importance of standing."<sup>22</sup> Gaines continues, "Well, this is the kind of courage that I tried to give Miss Jane in the book." Alongside her courage, Gaines admires Miss Augusteen for her longsuffering. Unable to walk, "[s]he'd crawl over the floor as a child six or seven months might crawl" (56), and he "never heard her complaining about her problems" (56-57). Like Miss Augusteen, Miss Jane's predominant characteristic is a courage that comes from her long suffering. Although Miss Jane has spunk, she is a small, slight woman. When she discovers that she is barren, the doctor suggests that whatever happened to her as a girl probably also stunted her growth (*AMJP* 80). It is crucial that Miss Jane does not fit the

mold of the big black matriarch. Gaines instead invests her capacity to embody black history in her age, her voice, and her barrenness. Her age provides continuity to the narrative from enslavement to Civil Rights. Her voice indicates Jane's modesty, her circumspection. She must be coached into telling her own story, and even then the story is not about her. She is no back-talking, sassy woman. Like Rosa Parks, the Mother of the Civil Rights movement, to whom she is compared in the novel, she is respectful, humble, soft-spoken, but proud. Her barrenness fits her more perfectly for rearing others' children, the white offspring of her masters. Technically, Jane is a mammy. Rather than Saar's massive black Aunt Jemima with a gun in each hand, Jane is more like the inset portrait, the light-skinned mammy carrying a white baby and whose womb is blocked by the Black Power fist. Because she has worked for so long in the master's house, tending to the master's youth, as Jane ages, she becomes an intermediary, the "auntie" respected among whites because she is respectful, hardworking, and non-threatening. Relieved of the burden—and the joy—of her own biological children, Miss Jane's barren womb also becomes a repository not only for the black past but also for the black future, the hope for a messiah. She is destined to rear these potential messiahs, and also to mourn them in the inevitable eventuality of their being lynched.

- 28 Although Jane is not a big black matriarch, she is identified with a series of such, each brought into the frame of the narrative briefly only to be expunged by death or banishment. Miss Jane's own mother is just such a phallic woman. When the overseer tries to whip Jane's mother, she defies him: "You might try and whip me, but nobody say you go'n succeed." When the overseer tells her to pull up her dress, she responds: "You the big man, you pull it up" (29). When he tries to strike her, she tries to choke him. It is a brutal battle, reminiscent of Frederick Douglass's with the slave-breaker Covey, a fight that Douglass wins, a triumph that enables his famous quip, "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man."<sup>23</sup> Despite her sass and her strength, Miss Jane's mother is not allowed this triumphant experience of being transformed from a slave into a (wo)man. Her gender monstrosity, on the one hand, makes her defiance possible, but the same feature, ironically, seals her fate in an early death. And she is not quite a martyr, for this role is saved for the lynched male messiahs.
- 29 The first monstrous matriarch identified with Miss Jane is Big Laura, an amalgamation of Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. Big Laura takes over the leadership of the emancipated party headed northward with a booming, "Move out the way." Miss Jane describes this she-man thus: "She was big just like her name say, and she was tough as any man I ever seen. She could plow, chop wood, cut and load much cane as any man on the place" (17). Big Laura is killed in the massacre, but only after taking one of the patrollers to his death. Unlike Big Laura and her own mother, Miss Jane is not a monstrous female who talks back and strikes back at the overseer. Instead, she is destined to survive, for it is only the survivor who can become the first-hand narrator, and it is only the survivor who can mourn those like Big Laura, her own mother, and her adopted sons, whose aggressive self-respect must end in violent death.
- 30 Big Laura serves as a foil to Miss Jane, but the logic of the narrative dictates that she be expunged, to rebalance the excess of her female monstrosity with the restraint of Jane's more accommodating survivalist ethos. Another monstrous matriarch who makes a cameo appearance is "Black Harriet," an oversized woman whose mannish excess more clearly induces gender panic, and upon her defeat, pity. "She didn't have all her faculties, but still she was queen of the field. She was tall, straight, tough, and blue-black. Could

pick more cotton, chop more cotton than anybody out there. Cut more cane than anybody out there, man or women, except for Toby Lewis” (137). When challenged by another woman, Black Harriet goes berserk, destroying the cotton in a frenzy of excessive chopping. When the overseer begins to beat her mercilessly, “Harriet was just laying there laughing and talking in that Singalee tongue. Looking at us with her eyes all big and white one second, then say something in that Singalee tongue the next second, then all of a sudden just bust out laughing” (139). In *Black Harriet*, Gaines embodies the big black matriarch as threat not only to the planter’s demand for fast work but also to the other black laborers, who root for Harriet’s challenger. Black Harriet’s mannish excesses turn her at once into a minstrel Aunt Jemima and a hysterical madwoman. Just as the black nationalists experienced panic over the black matriarch, stigmatizing her as a gender monster who must be disciplined or banished, so Gaines banishes Black Harriet from the novel’s frame. An incident extraneous to the novel’s plot, Black Harriet’s experience of going berserk and getting beaten is nonetheless crucial to the novel’s gender dynamic. It reinforces Miss Jane’s iconic status as barren mammy, circumscribed witness, and accommodating voice, a Clio who inspires black history without exciting a panic identified with the alarming violence, defiance, and autonomy projected onto Black Power by the dominant discourse as a form of anger that ignites racial madness.

- 31 If Miss Jane is metonymically related to the monstrous matriarch through studied negation—a winnowing of her person and voice into a frail, barren, ancient presence—she is even more related to the promise of the black male messiah. After Big Laura’s death, Miss Jane takes on the obligation of rearing the she-man’s son, Ned. Once he is grown, Ned leaves for the frontier, then returns to build a school on the plantation. Miss Jane’s intermediary role is best captured in her relationship to Albert Cluveau, the Cajun who has performed many racial killings for the white male rulers, and the man who has been commanded to take her adopted son’s life. On the one hand, Miss Jane rears the defiant young man who seeks black autonomy. On the other hand, she goes fishing with the man hired to perform his lynching. Beyond Ned, the narrative moves toward Jimmy, who, from his birth is nominated as “the One.” When Jimmy returns to the plantation to plan a desegregation march to the whites’ only water fountain, he becomes to Miss Jane as Martin Luther King, Jr. was to Rosa Parks. “They had picked out a girl to drink from the white people’s fountain. (This was their Miss Rosa Parks)” (246). After Jimmy’s lynching, it is Miss Jane Pittman who determines to take the girl’s place. At first sight, it might appear that Miss Jane has become not a witness or a repository but instead a maker and leader of the black nation. More precisely, she is needed *because* of her intermediary mammy role. What white man will beat a humble old woman, even when she’s drinking from the white fountain? According to Jimmy’s plan, it must be a female who drinks from the fountain. “The reason they didn’t choose a boy, they was afraid that loon up there might beat the boy and not arrest him. They wanted somebody in jail because they wanted to march on the courthouse the next Monday” (246). Even in her culminating act of courage, Miss Jane is a substitute, a diminutive body to hold back the white lyncher’s violence, a symbol of racial restraint.
- 32 There is a sense in which Miss Jane’s march to the fountain—not pictured in the novel but made the climax of the 1974 made-for-T.V. movie—displaces the potential for a more revolutionary image of black female resistance, an image proliferating all over the U.S. in the early 1970s and one that the white media were eager to counter. Miss Jane’s march further displaces the more conventional image of black nationalist male defiance that

alarmed the authorities, black and white, all across America at this moment. The closest we come to such a representation in the novel is not Jimmy, the level-headed messiah blessed by Reverend King, but instead Jimmy's unnamed friend, a smart-assed, disrespectful young man to whom Miss Jane immediately takes a strong disliking. This "long head boy," as she calls him, stands in as a pale double for the black nationalist menace that FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover calls America's number one enemy. The "long head boy" hot-headedly insists on Miss Jane's leading the march: "With her leading us on, multitudes will follow." Miss Jane refuses to even look at him, instead looking at her messiah. "Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy. The people, Jimmy? You listening to that thing that boy call re-trick [rhetoric] and counting on the people?" (248). Miss Jane voices the doubts about "the people" interwoven into this narrative scripted in the illiterate folk voice of one of the people. In having Miss Jane so decisively dismiss the "long head boy," his "re-trick," and his naive faith in "the people," Gaines is able to dismiss *within* the narrative those black nationalists who have been banished from the novel's frame. What frames the novel—or more precisely, half-frames it, is the young historian's Introduction.<sup>24</sup> In telling the black story to him, rather than the wild-eyed black nationalists, she entrusts it to responsible hands. Through his professional skills, the young male historian will ensure that the narrative is interwoven into the American national history. And it has been, as *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, novel and film, is one of the most popular texts on slavery taught in schools, frequently taught as though it is history, rather than fiction.

- 33 The novel's cross-racial success is scripted in its cross-gendered voice. Gaines erects Miss Jane as a feminine icon who prophesies the integrated, interracial, harmonious United States nation that emerges ironically out of black folk's capacity to endure and transcend an entrenched history of state-endorsed racial violence and abjection. He chooses a woman as his medium/subject both to envelop and contain the image of the gigantic black matriarch as ambivalent black nationalist icon and to counter that image in favor of a conscientious black folk eager to join the white nation—the black (wo)man as the purifying conscience of the historically compromised American nation-state. On the one hand, Gaines's iconography has the benefit of disturbing and subverting the normatively masculine stance of black nationalism by figuring a woman whose cross-gendering is less aggressively patriarchal in size and intent, more ambivalently feminine in spirit and form. On the other hand, it has the effect of "softening" and thus blunting the militant agency of a defiant black collective conscience and consciousness.

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## NOTES

1. Management of the household does not necessarily mean control of the finances, which were typically the province of the male head of house.
2. The Roman allusion is common in British nationalism, which ordains its Empire the proper descendant of Roman imperialism. Once conquered by Rome, Britain now stands ready to conquer the same world Rome once ruled. In some versions, Britannia proffers

an olive branch in her left hand, while the shield is in her right and the trident is balanced in the crook of her bent right elbow.

3. Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1984), 62.

4. On the normative logic stigmatizing male anal penetration, see Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*, ed. Douglas Crimp (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988, 1996), 197-222. When male figures are used to allegorize some aspect of the nation-state, they seem to be exploited more for self-divided domestic consumption than the purpose of representing the whole to itself and to outsiders. For instance, John Bull represents not quite the spirit of the whole nation as an institution but instead almost its opposite, the rambunctious, stolid, commonsense average Briton, "the people," as opposed to the monarchy, aristocracy, Parliament, and government ministry. The U.S. figure of "Uncle Sam" emerges within the late 18<sup>th</sup>- and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century popular press, often as a way either of endearing citizens to its government far distant in Washington, D.C. or frequently of lampooning that government. During World War I, this figure is expropriated for the purposes of recruiting young men into the military.

5. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 1983, 1991), 24.

6. See, for instance, Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 11-12, 73-113; Rosemarie Zagari, "Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother," *American Quarterly* 44.2 (June 1992), 192-215; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980, 1996), 243-255; and Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), especially 89-124.

7. Although the emergence of Black Power is usually dated from 1966, when SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) is usually credited with forging "Black Power" as a rallying cry, I have chosen to date it according to the publication of Robert F. Williams's influential 1962 text, *Negroes with Guns*, which documented and rationalized the Monroe, North Carolina movement of men and women who, against the policy of the national NAACP, adopted armed self-defense as the only Civil Rights strategy capable of dealing with the unyielding reactionary violence of the local KKK. This dating is crucial because it denies the customary distinction separating the Martin Luther King, Jr.-led nonviolent movement of the rural South versus the militant black nationalist temper of the urban north. See Williams, *Negroes with Guns*, with a foreword by Gloria House, introduction by Timothy B. Tyson (1962; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

8. By "black nationalist history," I mean a history of autonomous blackness devoted to the concept of the African American people as a separate nation within an oppressive American nation-state. By "national black history," I mean a more assimilationist history of black people as deserving an integrated, if distinguishable, role within the heroic American nationalist narrative. The relationship between Black Power and black nationalism is extremely complex, far too much so to indicate this complexity here in my analysis. Although I tend to conflate the two, I am very much aware that Black Power and black nationalism should not be fully equated. The former labels a cluster of organizations and movements (including the Organization of Afro-American Unity, the Deacons for Defense and Justice, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam, the Black Arts movement, US, The Republic of New



Africa, and the Revolutionary Action Movement, to name the most noted ones), whereas black nationalism takes many forms and degrees of commitment to a nationalist project across these various groups and movements. On the history and meanings of Black Power and black nationalism, see William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1967, 1992).

9. For shorthand, I'll call these traditional European-derived patriarchal nation-states "white nations," though, of course, the racial tag tends to silence the highly contested racial imaginaries and economies of these countries historically and currently.

10. See, for instance, Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 311-335; Cheryl Clarke, "The Failure to Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), 197-208; Charles I. Nero, "Toward a Black Gay Aesthetic: Signifying in Contemporary Black Gay Literature," in *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men*, ed. Essex Hemphill (Boston: Alyson, 1991), especially 243-246; Joyce Hope Scott, "From Foreground to Margin: Female Configuration and Masculine Self-Representation in Black Nationalist Fiction," in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, ed. Andrew Parker et. al. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 296-312; Robert Reid-Pharr, "Tearing the Goat's Flesh: Homosexuality, Abjection, and the Production of a Late-Twentieth-Century Black Masculinity," in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 353-376; Madhu Dubey, *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 14-32; Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 48-59; and Robert Carr, *Black Nationalism in the New World: Reading the African-American and West Indian Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 186-224.

11. On the gender logic of the integrationist model, see Marlon B. Ross, *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), especially 21-89.

12. Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932); and *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939). Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965).

13. Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (London: Verso, 1978), 91.

14. Rodgers, *how i got ovah* (Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday, 1976), 1.

15. Gaines, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971).

Hereafter cited as *AMJP*. I'm grateful to Deborah McDowell for pointing out in a conversation how the procreative image of the voluptuous mother of the nation also embeds a black male fantasy to be mothered, to be nurtured and taken care of.

16. Snellings, "Earth," in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, ed. LeRoi Jones and Larry Neal (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1968), 327.

17. For a reproduction and good commentary on this painting, see Sharon Patton, *African-American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 200-202.

18. Babb, *Ernest Gaines* (Boston: Twayne/G. K. Hall, 1991), 76-96. Babb writes: "It is noteworthy that Gaines invents a female narrator. Rarely has American history been chronicled through the perspective of a black woman, and to allow a black woman's voice to recall history is a striking act of fictional revision" (77).

19. Doyle, *Voices from the Quarters: The Fiction of Ernest J. Gaines* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 153. In “*The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman as a Fictional Edited Autobiography*,” Doyle asks, “Is this a man’s book, a masculine manipulation of Miss Jane’s viewpoint,” as though Miss Jane is a real historical person, rather than a fictive construction. She continues, “The novel is a man’s rendition of a woman’s experience, and thus a man’s concerns are reflected in the text. Yet the edited text is not therefore, unauthentic.” See *Critical Reflections on the Fiction of Ernest J. Gaines*, ed. by David C. Estes (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 102-103.
20. Carmean, *Ernest J. Gaines, A Critical Companion* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 62.
21. Gaines has to work hard not only in the novel but also in interviews to chart his lineage as one modeled on William Faulkner’s southern-drenched universalism, as opposed to, for instance, Richard Wright’s black protest tradition. See, for instance, Gaines’s comments on *Native Son* in Marcia Gaudet and Carl Wooton, *Porch Talk with Ernest Gaines: Conversations on the Writer’s Craft* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 36-37. For commentary on Gaines’s self-framing of his patrilineage away from black male writers, see Keith Clark, *Black Manhood in James Baldwin, Ernest J. Gaines, and August Wilson* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 65-93.
22. Ruth Laney, “A Conversation with Ernest Gaines,” in *Conversations with Ernest Gaines*, ed. by John Lowe (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1995), 56.
23. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845; New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 107.
24. In the made-for-T.V. movie, the young historian is played by a white actor—a decision that is very telling.

## RÉSUMÉS

When Ernest Gaines chooses a woman as the individual subject for collective memorialization and the ideal medium of racial memory in his 1971 novel, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, he participates in a significant but overlooked genre of black masculine discourse, the composition of black authorship as historical/national authority through the voice and viewpoint of a female protagonist. This cross-gendering of the racial imaginary, introjecting a male vision of racial collectivity and history through a female’s frame of reference, though not exactly a form of cross-dressing, can be usefully analyzed as such. Erecting a feminine monument to emblemize and materialize highly abstract notions like nationhood, justice, peace, warfare, virtue, democracy, pro/creativity, and truth has a long history in many cultures across the globe. It is a long-standing practice within many patriarchal cultures, in other words, to project highly abstract masculine visions of established power onto a female form, draped in feminine attire. Whether this occurs metaphorically, as in the case of gendering the nation-state as feminine (Britannia for the United Kingdom, Columbia for the United States, St. Joan for France, etc.), or through more literal iconography, such as the Statue of Liberty, the feminine form serves to purify, emblemize, and collectivize—and thus to transcendentalize—concepts of rightful dis/empowerment that are otherwise fraught with cultural-historical strife. The static nature of such

imagery distances us from the contentiousness of the act of cross-gendering that occurs ideologically in the enunciation or re-erection of patriarchal power through an objectified, if celebrated, feminine icon.

We can find evidence of this conventionally patriarchal kind of feminine iconography in black cultural practice. For instance, in black nationalist discourse of the 1960s and '70s (whether in the Black Power movement in the United States or the post-colonial movements in the West Indies and Africa), there is a tendency to emblemize the rising black nation as a fecund black mother, frequently figured more transcendently as “Mother Africa” herself, even as the battle for and leadership of these emerging nations is assumed to be the purview of militant big men. Ironically, to index the greatness of the emerging nation, and the bigness of the male freedom fighters and founders, both figuratively and materially the female icon must be giganticized, making her a presence so massive as to become a queer she-male—masculine in size and intent, feminine in spirit and form. In European-American iconography, there is a drive to materialize this gigantic feminine figure not only by super-sizing her but also by casting her in the hardest stones—again the Statue of Liberty providing a perfect instance. Lacking the economic resources for such a luxury of patriarchal imagination, black nationalist practice most frequently resorts to more figurative embodiments of the gigantic feminine in art, poetry, song, and dance.

Gaines’s gigantic female who voices and embodies black American epochal and epical history, Miss Jane Pittman, is cast as novel and film (1974) at the height of the black nationalist moment, when metaphorical she/males emblemizing the masculine heroism of black nation-building are proliferating all over the place in black popular culture. This paper analyzes Miss Jane Pittman in this historical context of the black nationalist gigantic female icon. I argue that while Gaines draws on this black nationalist image as context and subtext, he diverts attention away from this militant and often violent black nationalist iconography of cross-gendering to figure instead a strong, enduring black woman as a pacifying emblem of cross-racial American nation-building. Opting to follow the lead of other black male cross-gendering writers—most notably James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Walter White, and Wallace Thurman—Gaines erects Miss Jane as a she/male icon who prophesies the integrated, interracial, harmonious United States nation that emerges ironically out of black folk’s capacity to endure and transcend an entrenched history of state-endorsed racial violence and abjection. Gaines chooses a woman as his medium/subject both to envelope the image of the gigantic black feminine as black nationalist icon and to counter that image in favor of a conscientious black nation within a bloody white nation, the black (wo)man as the purifying conscience of the historically compromised American nation-state. On the one hand, Gaines’s iconography has the benefit of disturbing and subverting the normatively masculine stance of black nationalism by figuring a she/male whose cross-gendering is less aggressively patriarchal in size and intent, more ambivalently feminine in spirit and form. On the other hand, it has the effect of “softening” and thus blunting the militant agency of a defiant black collective conscience and consciousness.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés :** mémoire, collectif, conscience, féminin monstrueux, féminisme, histoire américaine, icône, icônographie, idéologie, interracialité, matriarcat noir, militantisme, nationalisme noir, patriarcat, transgenrer

**Keywords :** memory, Gaines Ernest J., violence, nation, American nationalist history, black matriarchy, black Nationalism, collectivity, consciousness, cross-genderization, Feminism, gender monstrosity, icon, iconography, ideology, interraciality, militancy, patriarchy

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