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SEEKING THE ANCESTORS

Forging a Black Feminist Tradition in Anthropology



What would Black women anthropologists who have passed on, such as Caroline Bond Day, Zora Neale Hurston, Vera Green, and Irene Diggs, or the elders who are still among us, such as Katherine Dunham, say about being included in a discussion of Black feminist anthropology? More likely than not, they would remind us that we cannot make the historical record say what it does not—nor can we make them say what they have not. Although each of these women clearly understood her situation as a woman, not all of them interpreted that experience as one of “domination”; rather, some saw being a woman as *difference* in its most mild form, or as

a practice of social asymmetry, with each gender playing a traditional role.

In this day of women and gender studies programs, such a perspective is untenable. Yet, the historical record tells us that for some women, in particular Black women, gender oppression has not placed high in their list of priorities, neither has it always served as the focal point of their scholarship and their activism. Despite this historical gender-neutral stance, the experiences and plights of these Black women anthropologists have been the seeds from which the current Black feminist tradition in anthropology has germinated. Further, whether or not they acknowledge themselves to be our intellectual forebears, those of us who consider ourselves Black feminist anthropologists have found inspiration and solace in their scholarship, and in the compromises and contradictions with which they were confronted for daring to declare themselves “Black” or “Negro” women anthropologists.

A SEED IS PLANTED

For almost as long as there have been graduates of anthropology departments, there have been Black women who studied this field of inquiry. Most have yet to be acknowledged in the most recent canon-setting texts of the discipline,¹ and few are recognized by the field—notwithstanding the election of the Black woman anthropologist Yolanda Moses in 1995 as president of the American Anthropological Association. The existence of a cadre of Black women in American academic anthropology in the early part of the twentieth century is a “thrice-told tale” of social relations.²

So-called American anthropology developed in the antebellum period (1840s) and evolved into an academic discipline during the 1880s. From then until the 1980s, the number of Black women in the discipline has not moved beyond the low double digits. Despite being few in number, Black women have been an integral part of the intellectual and knowledge production traditions of American anthropology, contributing innovations in innumerable ways. This chapter illustrates how Black women anthropologists contributed to the discipline through service to the profession, while con-

Before the 1980s, the presence of Black women in anthropology could be viewed as underscoring the liberal agenda of the field in general and the academy at large. This agenda contained enough symbolic land mines, however, to make most departments and institutions unhealthy places for these early pioneers.³ Their very presence raised havoc in a number of ways throughout departments across the country. What makes their story most poignant, though, is their silencing in the ways that "count."

What counts in the academy includes having one's work and scholarship valued and cited by colleagues, receiving financial support, and generally being referred to as a scholar in a positive manner. In this system of academic accounting, Black women's intellectual work was often torn apart, devalued, or ignored, and rarely was it supported financially.⁴ Given this history of often being unwelcomed and unwanted, the question of "What calls Black women to anthropology?" is truly a profound one. Further, with the emergence of feminist anthropology in the 1970s, how has this positionality as unwelcomed guest or "outsider within" become a useful tool for the development of a Black feminist anthropology?⁵ Finally, what might our Black women anthropologist ancestors say about all of this?

A THRICE-TOLD TALE

This historical exploration of female intellectual ancestors and the emergence of a Black feminist anthropology is traced through three "tales." The first is an exploration of the intersection of anthropology and the African American intellectual tradition. Using a historical framework allows me to situate Black women in the field of anthropology and pose the question "Why anthropology?"

The second "tale" of this chapter traces the development of a Black feminist anthropology. I look at Black feminisms and the matrices of domination that are used by Black women anthropologists, both on a personal level and as a tool of analysis to conduct research on and write about particular populations or communities.⁶ Finally, in the third "tale," I examine the lived experiences of the four women ancestors and one elder. My goal is to analyze and offer my own exegesis of what the ancestors might have

thought and what the elders do think about the confluence of being Black, female, and anthropologist and where, if at all, being a feminist fits into their identity formulations.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS

In trying to answer the question "Why anthropology?" I turn to Francille Rusan Wilson, an African American feminist who studies the history of Black intellectuals. She observes that most Black women working on academic advanced degrees in the first half of the twentieth century were primarily centered in sociology programs.⁷ Most, emulating the dictates of middle-class decorum, often married and, following the history of Black women as an integral part of the U.S. labor force, continued to work professionally. They usually became social workers or teachers but rarely completed their doctorates. It is Leith Mullings who asserts that the "esoteric nature of anthropology made it difficult for anyone to envision it as a viable vehicle through which one concerned with the racial progress, a major goal of the day for the Black middle-classes, intellectuals, and elites, in particular, could achieve specific goals."⁸ As Mullings also reminds us, those goals were (and still are) (1) the charge of uplifting the race, (2) dealing with the social and material conditions of the race, and (3) finding "a cure for inequality."⁹

Because anthropology's origins lay in the developing world and served at that time as a true tool of the colonial world, the discipline did not lend itself to understanding social relations within the United States. Despite its inauspicious, and to some a seemingly recondite, legacy, anthropology was viewed by the handful of Black women who studied the discipline from about 1915 through the 1950s as a tool to locate the sources of inequality, and in some instances, as a place where one could participate in finding the "cure."

Although considered by many today to be "the child of imperialism," anthropology has the ability to serve as a positive social force for advancing equality among people.¹⁰ This capacity is to be found in the way in which anthropology proceeds. Contrary to most academic disciplines concerned with disciplinary purity and

boundary maintenance, anthropology luxuriates in its own eclecticism. Because anthropology derives much of its perspective from a fusion of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, some dimension of it is usually attractive to all and of value to many. Its uniqueness is in its point of view, which is at once holistic, comparative, particularistic, and general. Individual anthropologists describe and analyze the world they encounter in a variety of forms emanating from the four classical areas of anthropological study: archaeology and biological/physical, linguistic, and social-cultural anthropology. At the core of each of these approaches lies some concept of culture, which provides the social arena in which all else occurs. While culture is the axis upon which the discipline rotates, the methods employed by anthropologists to illustrate culture as phenomena are diverse.¹¹ It is this eclecticism of anthropology and its overarching concern with the human condition that align it with the historic goals of the African American intellectual tradition, out of which comes the perspective called African American anthropology. The African American intellectual tradition can be seen as most often corrective, meaning that Black intellectuals are compelled to expend tremendous energies answering "stupid questions posed by others; striving often with no more success than Sisyphus, to push the paradigms steeped in racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, and cold contempt."¹² In the course of correcting these dominant paradigms, African American scholars focus on accurate descriptions and a reclamation of a history of cultures constructed under, at best, hostile circumstances. "Setting the story straight," Mullings notes,¹³ requires not only lauding the accomplishments and victories over domination but also understanding and giving meaning to the structures of oppression that frame and underscore the creativity and history of an oppressed people. It is this synergy that eloquently responds to the question of "Why anthropology?" for Black intellectuals.

One of the most prominent Black anthropologists, president emerita of Spelman College, Johnnetta Betsch Cole, has described how she was captivated by anthropology during her first year at Oberlin College.¹⁴ Cole recalls listening to a white man (George Eaton Simpson) not only give information about a part of Black

culture but describe it so poetically that he inspired her realization that one could study culture—one's own or that of others—and represent it truly and eloquently rather than use the stance of an objective observer as a way to dominate others. Mullings aptly defines this as "the possibilities of anthropology."¹⁵ This approach to anthropology enables nonmainstream anthropologists who are racially identifiable or of marked ethnicities (and a few unmarked ones as well) to follow intellectual guidelines for responsible research that provide an opportunity for exchange, increase accuracy, foster mutual respect, and create a sharing of civic responsibility between the researcher and those they study.¹⁶

Because racism and the omnipresence of oppression are significant factors in the lived experiences and identity formations of female and male African American anthropologists, the "fit" or synergism of the discipline and the African American intellectual tradition was, and still is, comfortable. Further, whatever the mandates of anthropology may be to study the "Other," almost to a person the research of African American anthropologists has had as its focus Africans or African-descended people at home and abroad.

FORGING A TRADITION

The first Black person to earn a graduate degree in anthropology was a woman, Caroline Bond Day. She graduated in the class of 1919 from Harvard/Radcliffe and received her Master of Science degree from there in 1932.¹⁷ Beginning a tradition of working on topics germane to the Black intellectual tradition, she wrote her thesis on race crossing, and color and intelligence among mulatto Black Americans in Atlanta and Washington, D.C. Although Day's work used the prevailing theoretical and interpretive frameworks of physical and cultural anthropology of her time, she attempted to argue against eugenics.¹⁸ However, her book, *A Study of Some Negro-White Families in the United States*, also included a foreword and notes by Earnest A. Hooton, an anthropometric who professed that physical inheritance explained mental and cultural differences between the races.¹⁹ Although Day's research argued against such biologizing of racial differences, Hooton, her adviser, ironically

considered her "a credit to her race" because, in his estimation, as a light-skinned colored woman, she physically and intellectually proved his thesis.

From this modest beginning to the present, African American anthropologists have produced works on race, ethnicity, inequality, expressive cultural ways, self-validating rituals, and the political, economic, and social practices of people in Africa and the African Diaspora. Moreover, they have written about how these accomplishments frequently have occurred in environments of adversity.²⁰ This scholarship not only reflected their use of esoteric anthropological traditions but was and is clearly involved in the traditional aims of the Black intellectual tradition—racial uplifting, analysis of the social and material conditions of the race, and locating sites of inequality.

Despite some long-standing and innovative contributions, particularly in the area of urban and American anthropology, which only in the late 1960s were brought into the fold of "real" anthropology, the African American anthropological tradition is neither valued nor lauded by the academy. This can be attributed primarily to its devotion to discerning and analyzing the nonwhite American domestic scene and/or to its devout antiracist agenda. As a result of the applied focus of their work and as a consequence of being ignored by mainstream anthropology, only a few Black anthropologists have worked in the academy, and mostly on the periphery, at historically Black colleges or universities (e.g., Irene Diggs). Others have found themselves devalued and invisible in mainstream academic settings (e.g., Vera Green). Suffice it to say, uncategorically, that despite significant intellectual contributions, the works of Black anthropologists are rarely recorded or acknowledged.²¹

Neither St. Clair Drake (1911–1990) nor Allison Davis (1902–1983) received in life the recognition or appreciation they deserved from their colleagues in the discipline; moreover, what praise they have been granted posthumously seems to have been conferred begrudgingly.²² Both Zora Neale Hurston and Katherine Dunham must be counted among some of the true innovators in cultural anthropology—Hurston for her reflexive ethnographic method used decades before it was embraced by anthropologists or post-

modernists, and Katherine Dunham for creating the field of dance anthropology. Although both women are now recognized by a wider audience, neither are included as contributors in the current borderless discourses of postmodern and postcolonial theories and practices.²³ And significantly, rarely are they discussed in conventional histories of the field of anthropology.²⁴

Zora Neale Hurston in the literary world, like the resurrected Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, is now deified and has become the token representative of the misbegotten "before her time" temperamental, tormented artist. Unlike Kahlo, however, whose paintings, drawings, and other works are carefully and critically examined in the art world by feminist scholars such as Evelyn Beck,²⁵ Hurston has yet to be critically analyzed "as an anthropologist" in the same manner by someone in the discipline. Most works on Hurston seem preoccupied with her personality and literary production, giving little attention to a deep analysis of her ethnographic work and her alternative research methods.²⁶

From my own count, by 1967 only eight Black women held a Ph.D. in anthropology. They are Irene Diggs (1944, Havana); Manet Fowler (1954, Cornell); Diane Lewis (1965, Cornell); Audrey Smedely (1965, Victoria University of Manchester, England); Vera Green (1967, Arizona); Johnnetta Betsch Cole (1967, Northwestern); Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (1967, University of California, Berkeley); and Niara Sudarkasa (née Gloria Marshall) (1967, Columbia).²⁷

Surveying the institutions at which these women earned their degrees establishes that these Black women received outstanding graduate educations at predominately white institutions of higher learning. The racial and classist undertones embedded in the phrase "predominately white institutions" should not be lost on anyone. Predominantly white institutions maintained exclusionary admissions practices (particularly for graduate programs), based on notions of social incompatibility, and other academic criteria that were suspect at best, invalid at worst, and rooted in the presumed intellectual inferiority of Blacks. In practice, these institutions carefully guarded their gates and limited those who applied, were accepted, matriculated, and graduated. Anthropology itself, although a liberal discipline, was not ready for "the natives" to study themselves or anyone else. And while today the numbers of Black graduate

students may be growing, "native anthropology" is still disdained, and the notion of Black anthropologists studying themselves is generally discouraged.²⁸

For these women and their predecessors, being Black and female compounded their situation in the academy. If in the 1920s the discipline did not know what to do with a Margaret Mead going into the field, it could not even imagine a Black woman anthropologist embarking on fieldwork. For most of these women, isolation as the only person of color and an inattentive adviser were the rule rather than the exception. Of course, a few lucky ones found caring advisers who supported them, made sure that the appropriate jobs were lined up, and wrote glowing letters of recommendation. In these instances, anthropological liberalism operated as a double-edged sword.

Such liberal advisers practiced the "pet Negro" syndrome, as Zora Neale Hurston called it. They relied on Black students to reaffirm their liberal tendencies, yet withheld the amount or type of resources that would ensure their students' transformation into professional anthropologists.²⁹ For example, before the late 1950s, Black anthropology graduate students were constrained from conducting research in Africa. Melville Herskovits, one of the leading figures in Africanist and Caribbeanist anthropology, believed that Black Americans could not be objective in their studies of African societies.³⁰ His gatekeeping policies affected the graduate careers of St. Clair Drake and later his own student, Johnnetta B. Cole.³¹ Hurston's struggles to find funding for the fieldwork that gave birth to *Mules and Men* is one of the more famous examples of Black scholars having to subject themselves to alternate and sometimes demeaning—as in the case of Hurston's benefactress—circumstances to acquire funding for their intellectual work.³²

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL TRADITION AND FEMINISMS: AWKWARD COMPANIONS

By the early 1970s, feminist anthropology was in full swing. As an approach within anthropology, it moved beyond the mere inclusion of women as suitable subjects for anthropological inquiry toward the development of a goal of understanding social relations

of power, women's individual and collective identities, and the fabric of meaning and value in society relative to sex roles.³³

The impact and growing influence of women in anthropology are exemplified by the way in which standard textbooks and curricula have been modified to include gender, the incorporation of discussions of women's roles and gender-related issues in all areas of anthropology, the increased proportion of women in the profession, and the prominence of women in leadership positions in the discipline's main professional societies.³⁴ Some "old boys" argue that the "feminization" of anthropology is eroding the core of the discipline.

Despite the enormous advances of women in anthropology over the last two decades, Black women remain invisible and silenced where it counts,³⁵ although many have been active participants in the wide-ranging debates and discussions that helped shape feminist anthropology.³⁶ Ironically, mainstream feminist anthropology continues the practice of the discipline.³⁷ That is, it too follows the classic liberal agenda when it comes to including nonmainstream (i.e., racially identifiable, marked and unmarked ethnic) anthropologists. When we are called on to speak, it is usually in the context of a multicultural format: one Asian, one African American, one lesbian (usually Euro-American), one Latina, and so forth.³⁸ This exclusion of Black American feminist anthropologists (who comprise the largest minority) makes little sense, given that they have been making a way for themselves in anthropology since the 1960s. Moreover, their scholarly visibility is impressive; for example, in 1995–1997 alone, Black American feminist anthropologists published almost a dozen books (e.g., *Sister Jamaica* and *We Paid Our Dues* by A. Lynn Bolles; *Women of Belize* by Irma McClaurin; *African Feminisms* by Gwendolyn Mikell; *On Our Own Terms* by Leith Mullings; *Colonial Inscriptions* by Carolyn Martin Shaw; and *Racism in a Racial Democracy* by France Winddance Twine).³⁹ We have authored numerous refereed articles that have appeared in such mainstream journals as *Anthropology and Educational Quarterly* ("African American Anthropology and the Pedagogy of Activist Community Research" by Cheryl Rodriguez), *Annual Review of Anthropology* ("The Persistent Power of 'Race' in the Cultural and Political Economy of Racism" by Faye Harrison), and *Ameri-*

can Anthropologist ("Black Male Imagery and Media Containment of African American Men" by Helán Page).⁴⁰ Black feminist anthropologist Brackette Williams was awarded a MacArthur genius prize in 1999, and others have served as presidents of the American Anthropological Association (Yolanda Moses, 1995–1997), the African Studies Association (Gwendolyn Mikell, 1996–1997), and the Caribbean Studies Association (A. Lynn Bolles, 1997–1998). The achievements of Black women anthropologists also extend beyond the conventional domain of scholarship as they assume key leadership positions as presidents and top administrators of a wide range of institutions of higher learning: Johnnetta Betsch Cole (president emerita of Spelman College), Niara Sudarkasa (president of Lincoln University, Pennsylvania), Yolanda T. Moses (a former president of CUNY), and Claudia Mitchell-Kiernan (dean/vice chancellor of academic affairs at UCLA).

The intersection of the African American anthropological tradition and feminism has matured in the rather sophisticated way often fostered by oppression, and it is out of the ensuing tension that Black feminist anthropology has grown. In effect, Black women in anthropology came to feminism not because of what they found there, but because of what they felt they could contribute to the analysis of gender inequality. Most often this meant paying greater attention to the interactiveness and simultaneity of race, class, and gender.⁴¹ As products of the 1960s, and often as political workers inside and outside of the academy, Black feminists constructed an approach to race, class, and gender that brought it all home—linking anthropologists in a more integral way to the communities in which they worked and inviting the communities to speak back to anthropology. Mullings asserts that it was her search for child care that brought class, race, and gender issues together in a very personal way, while for Johnnetta Cole it was conducting research in Cuba, where because institutional racism was outlawed, she was able to see sexism operating in more blatant, fundamental ways.⁴²

The thread that connects Black feminist theorizing both inside and outside anthropology is the concept of "the simultaneity of oppression." That is, race, class, gender are conceptualized as combining in various ways that are always historical and contextual.⁴³ Following Rose Brewer's lead and the "simultaneity of oppression"

model, I suggest that to theorize about the simultaneity of oppression and struggle leads to an understanding of the embeddedness and relationality of race, class, and gender in a synergistic way. Furthermore, the analysis and description of the lived experiences, historical positioning, cultural perceptions, and social construction of Black women (who are enmeshed in and whose ideas emerge out of that experience) result in a feminism whose organizing principle is one firmly rooted in class, culture, gender, and race interacting. Black feminism, then, is an anthropologist's theoretical dream come true.

Contributing to this synergistic approach—yet complicating it too—is the fact that the researcher and those under study often have much in common as a result of these matrices of domination. Conducting fieldwork, especially with other Black or nonwhite women, demands that the Black feminist anthropologist be simultaneously analytical, political, and reflexive. Patricia Hill Collins's work on Black women's standpoint theory provides the necessary context for understanding this type of interaction between the Black feminist anthropologist researcher and the women she encounters in the fieldwork situation.⁴⁴ It is in the synthesis of the Black feminist concept of the simultaneity of oppression with the African American anthropological tradition that the foundation for contemporary Black feminist anthropology becomes evident. However, the time prior to the articulation of this gendered theoretical perspective is the entry point for Black women ancestors and elders. Trying to derive some meaning out of and some understanding of why they failed to prioritize gender or study sexual inequality enables us to historicize how theoretical perspectives are sometimes born out of omissions and silences.

WOMEN ANCESTORS: RECLAIMING OUR PAST

In the 1994 edition of *Island Possessed*, while reflecting back on her entrance into the field of anthropology, Katherine Dunham recalls:

Harold Courlander had been there and Melville Herskovits had just published the first serious and sympathetic study of the people and their social structure. They were white and male, these writers. Of my kind I was a first—a lone young woman easy to place in the clean-cut American dichotomy of color, harder to place in

the complexity of Caribbean color classifications; a mulatto when occasion called for, an in-between, or "griffon" actually, I suppose; or as "noir"—not exactly the color black, but the quality of belonging with or being at ease with black people.⁴⁵

In this moment, Dunham positions herself in opposition to the anthropologist of the day—she is the "perspiring student" of "dance and anthropology" ready to begin her study of kinetic expressions among the "real Haitian people." She is cognizant that no one expects a visiting researcher to be female, a U.S. citizen, a student, *and* to be of African descent. In one human package, Dunham breaks all of the rules.

Looking at the careers of three deceased anthropologists, Zora Neale Hurston, Vera Green, and Irene Diggs, and one living elder, Katherine Dunham, we see the commonalties but also the differences among these women forebears. All of them chose anthropology because of the incredible power of the concept of culture, which enabled them to capture and embrace the contributions of Creole and Africa in the New World. Three of them—Hurston, Dunham, and Diggs—worked in the areas of expressive culture: oral literatures, music, and dance. At that time, great importance was placed on finding and demonstrating retentions encoded in the expressive culture that enabled a people to maintain its history through performance and artistry. Green analyzed the impact of race and ethnicity in family life and the ways variation in forms of social inequality influenced social mobility. The early work of all four of these anthropologists was located in the Caribbean—Haiti, Cuba, Aruba, and Jamaica.

Each had a personal understanding of the meaning of racism, how it affected their lives, and what the people at home, and the people with whom they worked, did to adapt to and negotiate this oppression. In terms of social class, Dunham was of middle-class origins, while Vera Green characterized her Chicago parents and family as being members of "the rented-room poor."⁴⁶ Irene Diggs was raised in a small town in southern Illinois with an even smaller working-class Black population. Her mother and father were considered "hard-working people." Like Diggs, Zora Neale Hurston came from a working-class background; she grew up in Eatonville, Florida, one of a very few Black townships in the state (not just

the Black side of a white town). All of these women won scholarships to pursue their undergraduate degrees. All were dependent on grants and prizes to make ends meet. Their economic situations could at best be described as precarious during the height of the Depression; at times, Hurston was compelled to assume jobs as a manicurist and maid to finance her education.

Each of these women worked closely with people considered important intellectual leaders in the African American community or the field of anthropology. For example, Irene Diggs spent eleven years as W.E.B. Du Bois's research assistant at Atlanta University.⁴⁷ She earned the first master's degree in sociology from Atlanta University, and when she traveled to Cuba on holiday, she vowed to return to the island and continue her exploration of another black culture that was not her own. At the University of Havana, Diggs became a student of Fernando Ortiz.⁴⁸ In the pre-Revolutionary racial climate of Cuba, Diggs, whose status as a student implied that she was middle class, found her phenotype socially "lightened." While in Cuba, she collected songs, poetry, and recorded the music and dance of Afro-Cubans in the western part of the country for her dissertation. Later, after a year of study in Argentina and Uruguay, Diggs returned to the United States and never again conducted fieldwork outside of the country; instead, she taught sociology and anthropology at Morgan State for almost thirty years.⁴⁹

Vera Green's engagement with anthropology began as a child, when she used to criticize Hollywood's portrayals of Native Americans in the movies she watched on Saturday afternoons in Chicago. Her early undergraduate mentor at Roosevelt University in Chicago was St. Clair Drake,⁵⁰ who encouraged her to pursue her education at Columbia University in New York. Green worked for a number of years as a social worker in the Cabrini-Green housing projects in Chicago to save for her graduate school tuition. At Columbia, she studied with Charles Wagley, Elena Padilla, and Gene Weltfish.⁵¹ It was while working with Padilla in East Harlem that Green found the topic for her own research.

Her master's thesis was on romantic love and familial responsibility among new Puerto Rican migrants in El Barrio (East Harlem). At the midpoint of her master's work, Green was strongly discouraged (politely denied advanced candidacy) from entering the doctorate

program at Columbia, and she terminated her studies with a master's degree in 1955. Turning back to social work, Green joined a UNESCO community development team in Mexico and lived there for a number of years. She also was a UNESCO community worker in India. After her return to the United States in 1963, Oscar Lewis persuaded Green to become his research assistant for his work in San Juan. Material collected in the project was the basis for Oscar Lewis's 1966 National Book Award volume and most controversial book, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York*.⁵² Lewis recognized the value and sensitivity of Green's fieldwork in El Barrio with Padilla and her UNESCO training. After the Puerto Rico project was completed, Lewis gave Green the mentoring nudge to finish her doctorate at the University of Arizona. Continuing her work on migration and community, Green focused her dissertation on migrants to Aruba and the relationships between ethnicity, poverty, and family life. Demonstrating a great facility with languages (she spoke Spanish, French, Papiamentu, Dutch, German, and Urdu), Vera Green developed a scholarly career researching and writing about the issues of ethnicity, poverty, and family life in the United States and the Caribbean. Green, a firm believer in social networks, served on the executive board of the American Anthropological Association, a position that represented the highest elected post held by a Black until the election of Yolanda Moses as president in 1995. Green was the first president of the Association of Black Anthropologists (1977–1978).

Zora Neale Hurston is perhaps the best known of the ancestors, although she is usually cited for her contributions to literature rather than anthropology. As a student of Franz Boas (or Papa Boas, as she called him),⁵³ she participated in his study of cranial capacity and national origins in the late 1920s. This research was Boas's critique and refutation of the anthropometric tendencies that still had some credence in the discipline.⁵⁴ Hurston quickly gained a reputation in Harlem for her "random selection techniques" of human subjects: walking up and down one of New York's major thoroughfares, Harlem's 125th Street, Hurston would simply stop people, measure their heads, foreheads, breadth of nose, and so forth, and then just keep on going.

Hurston also skillfully used her gift of storytelling to further her anthropological research. She trained her ear to listen well and took seriously the value of the insider's (emic) perspective well before it was popular in anthropology. Believing that the wisdom held by the common Black man and woman was valuable, Hurston recorded folktales in Florida, New Orleans, Jamaica, the Bahamas, Haiti, and Harlem. Her association with the Harlem Renaissance literary world and her benefactor are well documented.⁵⁵ It is likely that the tension between the pull of social science and the push of fiction writing was responsible for Hurston's reluctance to accept university teaching as a career option.⁵⁶ The academy required total allegiance—something Hurston was unable to give.

Although Hurston is often cited for her contributions to folklore (especially in terms of the quality of the data she collected and her fieldwork ethics and interactions), she should also be acknowledged for her development of alternative research methods. The best example of these can be found in her ethnography, *Tell My Horse*.⁵⁷ During a period in anthropology when positivist, scientific approaches were the order of the day, Hurston's ethnography provides a sharp contrast. It is self-reflexive, community-masking, and genre-bending—in fact, the reader is hard pressed to distinguish between what is fiction and what is social science analysis.⁵⁸

It is this dimension of Hurston's contributions that has been appropriated, but without proper acknowledgment of its origin. Everyone speaks of the wonderful "content" of Hurston's work, but rarely is she acknowledged as an innovator of theory and method—yet she clearly was. An exception is Gwendolyn Mikell, who, in her chapter on Hurston in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, focuses on Hurston's training as an anthropologist, her research style, and her methods that mirrored the Boasian tradition of meticulous detail. Hurston's work took its own direction, and her development of alternative methods of collecting materials and new forms of interpretation proved unsatisfactory to the scientific community. More than likely it is this uncomfortable fit that propelled Hurston into producing literary works (novels, short stories, and plays) rather than continuing to interpret the cultural production of the folk as a social scientist.

With the exception of Zora Neale Hurston, none of these

women ancestors was known to work explicitly on women's issues. Although they included women in their analyses, they did not engage in a feminist or gender-based approach. In contrast, Zora Neale Hurston's gendered approach to understanding culture and society can be found in "Women in the Caribbean," a chapter in *Tell My Horse*. In this chapter, Hurston describes how women are excluded from vast areas of culture and do not receive the advantage of education. Looking at poor Black women in Jamaica, Hurston writes, "women get no bonus just for being female down here. She can do the same labor as a man or a mule and nobody says anything about it."⁵⁹ Hurston also argues that while mulatto/middle-class Jamaican women are assured of marrying men from their own social class, they, like their working-class counterparts, are subjected to the male whims of a sexual double standard.

Hurston's avowedly "feminist" perspective was unique for the times, but all of these ancestors were concerned with issues that were the order of the day for African American intellectuals. They wanted to correct the story about African Americans, to describe accurately their lived experiences, and to create new paradigms with which to dismantle the existing racial hierarchy. In interviews, both Diggs and Green characterized feminism as another way for whites to claim what was commonly assigned to Black people—oppression.⁶⁰ They saw the women's liberation movement as a distraction from the Black liberation movement. When asked specifically about feminism, Irene Diggs remarked that "those were not my issues." As far as she was concerned, feminism and women's studies was by and for women of European descent. Vera Green's sentiments were clearly demonstrated by her lack of enthusiasm for the women's studies program at Rutgers. In the late 1970s, the push to fund women's studies at the university was perceived by Green as a call to decrease the funds available to African and Latin American studies. As director of Latin American studies, Vera Green provided space for feminist events on campus, but she did so in the name of scholarly exchange rather than as a supporter of feminism.⁶¹

In the lived experience of ancestors such as Green, racism was the primary enemy, not sexism. As Black women, they certainly felt the reality of both racism and sexism, and they must have experienced the connection between the two, but they failed to rec-

ognize the simultaneous nature of race, class, and gender oppression. Even Katherine Dunham, who has spoken about the varying nature of domination, sees race as paramount, followed by class status.⁶² For our ancestors—those women who have passed on—and the elders who remain, the color line was and still is the issue for the twenty-first century.⁶³

ONWARD AND UPWARD INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The call to anthropology was heeded by the five ancestors and the elder, who were drawn by the discipline's framework and its grounding of culture, history, and social practice. As Black intellectuals, this group recognized the possibilities of anthropology to provide the cure, or the method, to discover some answers to why racism continued as a fundamental element in social inequality.⁶⁴ All of these women followed St. Clair Drake's idea of vindicationist praxis in their work.⁶⁵ Grounded in the African American intellectual pattern of the time, their scholarship also included the following elements: research was to be conceived and conducted as a form of activism; historical and comparative methods were emphasized; racism was viewed as a central problem in the contemporary world; race was believed to intersect with class on both national and international levels; and alternative methods and theories were to be employed or examined.⁶⁶ With this history in mind, the critical question is how can we today claim these women as foremothers of a Black feminist anthropological tradition when a gendered approach, save for Hurston, was not on their agenda?

One thing that can be said about history is that it does not always cooperate. Trying to extract a feminist past from these women may seem like an impossible task, for although they all might have agreed with the concept of simultaneous oppression, it is unlikely that they would have made use of this approach in their own scholarship. Yet, despite their unwillingness to position themselves within a feminist perspective, I argue that they can and should be claimed as predecessors to the existing Black feminist anthropology tradition that is alive and well in the discipline today. In claiming them, however, I realize that I risk accusations of revisionist history—but history is, after all, a matter of interpretations.

Nineteenth-century Black women public speakers and writers such as Ida B. Wells and Victoria Earle Matthews worked as individuals and leaders in the Black clubwomen movements, expressing their own personal sentiments about being Black and female.⁶⁷ The next generation of Black women anthropologists heard the call to feminism—a personal and political stance—because of the circumstances of their own lives or as a result of fieldwork experience.⁶⁸

What is unique about the Black feminist perspective is its collective expression, which first surfaced in the early 1970s with Toni Cade Bambara's classic, *The Black Woman*. This anthology of writings by artists, social scientists, and activists examined how the Civil Rights movement was responsible for a heightened racial consciousness while the women's movement raised gender consciousness. As Blacks and as women, the contributors brought a new level of personal and political awareness to the forefront of thinking and activism.

In a chapter of her volume *Conversations*, aptly titled "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: On Being Black and a Woman," Cole provides observations, analyses, and specific reasons for how feminism can be understood within a Black American cultural context.⁶⁹ Weaving together ideas rooted in history, popular culture, and sociocultural beliefs, Cole provides a useful framework for why feminism should not be viewed solely as a white woman's issue but rather as an ideology capable of encapsulating the experiences of Black women and other women of color. She posits that the issues addressed by feminist groups are ones that contribute to the welfare of all women. Commenting on the merits of the term *womanist*, coined by novelist Alice Walker,⁷⁰ Cole argues that the word has cultural roots that make it more embraceable by Black women than the term *feminist*.

What separates the two terms is not the common goal of enhancing women's lives but the social and historical realities that differentiate Black women's and white women's lives. These differences do not make the task of finding a cure for racism and sexism any less difficult, but they do require different strategies. When Black women describe and analyze cultures and societies with a gendered approach, using the variety of tools, methods, and theories at their disposal, the differing realities of women and men sur-

face.⁷¹ When the scholarship, lives, and experiences of Black women who are also anthropologists are examined using similar gendered understandings, the personal does become political. It is in the intensity and determination that these ancestors and elder directed toward finding a cure for racism that their work becomes a personal political act. When they entered a room, not only did the entire race enter but so did their womanhood and their anthropological expertise.

Women ancestors such as Day, Diggs, Dunham, Green, and Hurston can be claimed by those of us forging a Black feminist anthropology tradition because they had to contend with sexism as well as racism. Whether they chose to make the eradication of sexism a part of their activist scholarship is unimportant, given the historical period in which they lived and worked. Rather, what is most valuable is that even in the silence to which they were relegated by the discipline, the fact of their presence unlocked the door for subsequent generations of Black women intellectuals, trained as anthropologists and following in the African American vindicationist intellectual tradition, to enter the room and create their own place.

NOTES

I express my deep appreciation for the comments and opinions expressed by Black women anthropologists during interviews or in social settings, while I was gathering material for this chapter. Thanks also to the University of Maryland women's studies graduate assistants Suzanne J. Spoor and Claudia A. Rector, whose interest and technical talent made this work possible.

1. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), and Micaela Di Leonardo, *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) are good examples of recent "comprehensive" texts that make little mention of Black women anthropologists.
2. Margery Wolf, *A Thrice-Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism, and Ethnographic Responsibility* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992). Wolf uses three perspectives to explore methodological issues.
3. The very presence of one nonwhite woman changed group dynamics, because most anthropologists were white males. The changes in the gender and racial dynamics were disruptive in departments and in universities in general.
4. Catherine Lutz, "The Erasure of Women's Writing in Sociocultural Anthropology," *American Ethnologist* 17, 4 (1991): 611–617. Lutz focuses on Euro-American women's scholarship. Work on selected Black women's scholarship was documented in A. Lynn Bolles, "Faceless and Voiceless: African American Anthropologists and the Citation Wars," paper presented at the American Ethnological Society, Los Angeles, Calif., April 1994. Comparing citations found in the *Social Science Index*, Bolles found that Black anthropologists were not cited by other anthropologists but by academics outside of the discipline, for example, in American studies, family studies, urban planning, and so forth.

5. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990).
6. Johnnetta B. Cole, *Conversations: Straight Talk with America's Sister President*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993); Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*; Stanlie M. James and Abena P. A. Busia, *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn and Andrea Benton Rushing, *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: A Reader*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1996).
7. Francille Rusan Wilson, personal communication, 1998.
8. Leith Mullings, *On Our Own Terms: Race, Class, and Gender in the Lives of African American Women* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. xii.
9. Ibid.
10. Mina Caulfield Davis, "Culture and Imperialism: Proposing a New Dialectic," in *Reinventing Anthropology*, ed. Dell Hymes (New York: Vintage Press, 1974).
11. A. Lynn Bolles, "Anthropological Research Methods for the Study of Women in the Caribbean," in *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: A Reader*, 43–54.
12. Mullings, *On Our Own Terms*, xii.
13. Ibid.
14. Quoted in Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life* (New York: Plume Book, 1990), 63; Cole, *Conversations*, 19–20.
15. Mullings, *On Our Own Terms*, xiv.
16. An example of a nonmainstream text is Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935; reprint, Berkeley: Turtle Island Press, 1981), a study of rural, southern Black life in the 1930s. This ethnography is told through a compilation of folklore, personal narrative, and traditional medicinal remedies. Hurston was a true participant in her fieldwork, in contrast to the conventions of the time, which emphasized objective, scientific practice that placed the anthropologist at a distance from the people she studied.
17. Adele Logan Alexander, "Caroline Stewart Bond Day," in *Black Women in America* (New York: Carlson Publishers, 1993), 312.
18. St. Clair Drake, "Reflections on Anthropology and the Black Experience," *Black Scholar* 11, 7 (1980): 2–31.
19. Earnest A. Hooton, "Foreword," in Caroline Bond Day, *A Study of Some Negro-White Families in the United States* (Cambridge: Peabody Museum of Harvard University, 1932), iii–iv.; Lee D. Baker, in *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), examines how anthropologists have addressed the issues of race historically and how the discipline influenced public discourse and policy on racial categories from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Baker documents how science and law played leading roles in the formation and perception of U.S. racial categories.
20. For example, earlier in the century, Arthur A. Fauset wrote about the contributions of Black people to the larger fabric of American society. During the Depression, anthropologist Allison Davis studied the impact of social inequality in education and co-authored *Children of Bondage* (see below). Montagne Cobb, a physical anthropologist, published "Race and Runners," *Journal of Health and Physical Education* 7, 1 (1936): 1–9, during the furor over the Olympic triumph of Jesse Owens, as a counterargument to biological determinism. Louis E. King's 1927–1931 research on migration and Black intelligence—"Negro Life in a Rural Community" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1951)—was used to challenge segregation laws in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. See also Zora Neale Hurston's novels (e.g., *Their Eyes Were Watching God* [1937; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978]) and Katherine Dunham's dance performances, such as "Rites de Passage" (first performed in 1938). Contemporary contributions such as Johnnetta B. Cole's work as president of Spelman College (1987–1998); Ruth Wilson and Moses Pound's "AIDS in African-American Communities and the Public Health Response: An Overview," *Transforming Anthropology* 4, 1–2 (1993): 9–16; and Helán Page's "Black Male Imagery and Media Containment of African American Men," *American Anthropologist* 99, 1 (1997): 99–111, continue the tradition of scholarship-activism that unsettles the status quo. See also Allison Davis, John Dollard, and American Youth Commission, *Children of Bondage: The Personality Development of Negro Youth in the Urban South* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1940); and Arthur Huff Fauset, *For Freedom: A Biographical Story of the American Negro* (Philadelphia: Franklin Publishing, 1927).
21. Bolles, "Faceless and Voiceless: African American Anthropologists and the Citation Wars."
22. Ibid.; Faye V. Harrison, "Ethnography as Politics," in *Decolonizing Anthropology*, ed. F. V. Harrison (1991; reprint, Arlington, Va.: Association of Black Anthropologists and American Anthropological Association, 1997), 88–109; Ira E. Harrison and Faye V. Harrison, *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). Ira Harrison and Faye V. Harrison, in their introduction to *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, present this argument in much greater detail. Of importance in all three of these works is that the authors are African American anthropologists and therefore citing and analyzing members of their own group, because no one else does.
23. Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*.
24. Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture* (New York: Crowell, 1968); George W. Stocking, *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992). For example, Stocking's book is a collection of historiographical self-reflective essays on ethnography since the 1960s; the ethnography of Africa and African Americans is mentioned, but only in terms of anthropologists (read: Caucasians) who did the scholarship. Only one African American anthropologist is listed in the bibliography. Harris's classic, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, also practices this trend.
25. Evelyn Beck, "Frida Kahlo," entry in *Lesbian Histories and Cultures*, vol. 1, of *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, 2nd ed., ed. Bonnie Zimmerman (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000). There has been a tremendous surge in interest in the work of Frida Kahlo, the renowned avant-garde Mexican artist and wife of muralist Diego Rivera. Kahlo's modernist, self-revealing work had been overlooked and much of the attention she received focused on her "bohemian" lifestyle, bisexuality, and radical politics.
26. For exceptions, see Deborah Gordon, "The Politics of Ethnographic Authority: Race and Writing in the Ethnography of Margaret Mead and Zora Neale Hurston," in *Modernist Anthropology*, ed. M. Manganaro (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 146–162; Graciela Hernandez, "Multiple Subjectivities and Strategic Positionality: Zora Neale Hurston's Experimental Ethnographies," in *Women Writing Culture*, ed. Ruth Behar and D. Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 148–165; and Gwendolyn Mikell, "Feminism and Black Culture in the Ethnography of Zora Neale Hurston," in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, 51–69.
27. Patsy Evans, a former staff director of minority affairs for the American Anthropological Association, confirms this list.
28. See Faye V. Harrison, "The Persistent Power of 'Race' in the Cultural and Political Economy of Racism," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 47–74.
29. A. Lynn Bolles, field notes, n.d.
30. Harrison and Harrison, *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, 27–28.
31. During a life storytelling session on January 15, 1986, Johnnetta B. Cole explained that Herskovits did not approve of Black students conducting fieldwork in Africa. In his opinion, African Americans would not be objective enough to accomplish that work because they were "too close to the cultures." Herskovits gave blanket endorsement of her accompanying Robert Cole (her husband at the time), a white graduate student in economics and also affiliated with the African studies program that Herskovits directed. The couple went to Liberia, each collecting materials for their respective dissertations.
32. Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 105–107.
33. Sandra Morgen, *Gender and Anthropology: Critical Reviews for Research and Teaching* (Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1989), 1.
34. Comparisons can be made between early and later editions of certain introductory anthropology textbooks. There are significant differences between the 1974 edition of Conrad Kottack's *Culture Anthropology* (New York: Random House) and the 8th edition (2000); or between the 1975 edition of John D. Haviland's *Cultural Anthropology* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Harcourt, Brace) and the 9th edition (1999). For an exception, see Johnnetta B. Cole, *Anthropology for the Nineties* (New York: The Free Press, 1988).
35. Lutz, *The Erasure of Women's Writing*. According to Lutz, recognition is demonstrated

- when one's work is cited by others in the field and when students use that work during graduate education as a reputable resource.
36. Since the mid-1980s, the Association of Black Anthropologists and the Association for Feminist Anthropology have co-organized and presented workshops and panels on teaching and research as ways of understanding the mutual interests of the multiple layers of racial, gender, and other differences.
 37. Bolles, "Anthropological Research Methods."
 38. For example, the Commission on the Status of Women in Anthropology of the American Anthropological Association sponsored a panel titled "Ethnocentrism Within: Women of Color, Lesbians and Women with Disabilities" (November 23, 1996, in San Francisco) which included in the aforementioned format a woman with a disability.
 39. A. Lynn Bolles, *Sister Jamaica: A Study of Women, Work, and Households in Kingston* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1996); idem, *We Paid Our Dues: Women Trade Union Leaders of the Caribbean* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1996); Irma McClaurin, *Women of Belize: Gender and Change in Central America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Gwendolyn Mikell, *African Feminisms* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Mullings, *On Our Own Terms*; Carolyn Martin Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions: Race, Sex, and Class in Kenya* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); and Frances Winddance Twine, *Racism in a Racial Democracy: The Cultural Politics of Everyday Racism in Rural Brazil* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998).
 40. Cheryl Rodriguez, "African American Anthropology and the Pedagogy of Activist Community Research," *Anthropology and Educational Quarterly* 27, 3 (1996): 414-431; Harrison, "The Persistent Power of 'Race' in the Cultural and Political Economy of Racism"; and Page, "Black Male Imagery and Media Containment of African American Men."
 41. Notable to this scholarship are Irma McClaurin-Allen, "Incongruities: Dissonances and Contradictions in the Life of a Black Middle Class Woman," in *Uncertain Terms: Negotiating Gender in America Culture*, ed. Faye Ginsburg and Anna Tsing (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 315-333; Johnnetta B. Cole, ed., *All American Women: Lines That Divide, Ties That Bind* (New York and London: Free Press and Collier Macmillan, 1986); Mullings, *On Our Own Terms*; Evelyn C. Barbee and Marilyn Little, "Health, Social Class and African American Women," in *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, ed. Stanlie M. James and Abena P. A. Busia (New York: Routledge, 1993).
 42. Mullings, *On Our Own Terms*; Bateson, *Composing a Life*, 45.
 43. Rose M. Brewer, "Theorizing Race, Class and Gender: The New Scholarship of Black Feminist Intellectuals and Black Women's Labor," in *Theorizing Black Feminisms*, 13-30.
 44. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.
 45. Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed* (1969; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 4. *Island Possessed* is Dunham's account of the first of her many decades of research, observation, and admiration of the peoples of Haiti, beginning with her first encounters in Haiti in 1936.
 46. A. Lynn Bolles and Yolanda Moses, "Vera Mae Green," in *Women Anthropologists*, ed. Ute Gacs (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 127-132.
 47. W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the most preeminent scholars of the century, was a professor of economics, history, and sociology at Atlanta University. He wrote what is considered his masterpiece, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1885* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1935), and with Diggs cofounded *Phylon: A Review of Race and Culture*, the first social science journal with articles by Black scholars about Black people.
 48. A. Lynn Bolles, "Ellen Irene Diggs: Coming of Age in Atlanta, Havana and Baltimore," in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, 160. Fernando Ortiz, a British-trained ethnographer, focused on Cuban culture, and particularly African influences in that society. He interpreted Cuba's transculturalism as a balancing act among cultural components of European, African, and indigenous origins, maintained by colonial and neocolonial formations firmly grounded in a historical framework. His seminal work, *Cuban Counterpoint* (first American edition, New York: A. A. Knopf, 1947), used sugar and tobacco as symbols of societal interplay between cultural forms and material conditions, to suggest creolization as a fluid process.
 49. Although Diggs never voiced regrets, it appears that lack of funding was a major obstacle to continuing her field research. See Bolles, "Ellen Irene Diggs."
 50. St. Clair Drake, the seminal historiographer of anthropology's relationship with Black intellectuals, was a major figure in African and African Diaspora studies. Among his publications are his historic ethnography about Black Chicago, co-written with Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945), and the landmark volumes *Black Folk Here and There*, vols. 1 and 2 (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, 1987 and 1990).
 51. Charles Wagley was a leading Latin Americanist of the day whose pioneering work in Brazil, Guatemala, and Plantation America are considered classics in anthropology. Elena Padilla, a Puerto Rican by birth, is a medical anthropologist interested in the influence of culture on health, illness, and health care delivery systems among urban Latino populations. Gene Weltfish specialized in Native American cultures and was a scholar activist concerned with social justice and inequality. Weltfish lost her job at Columbia during the McCarthy era for her supposed communist sympathizing. Vera Green led the student protest of the university's actions against Weltfish.
 52. Oscar Lewis, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York* (New York: Random House, 1966). Lewis used what has come to be called a life story methodology to describe and explain the perpetuation of poverty among the poor in Mexico and the United States. He is the source of the often-quoted phrase "the culture of poverty," and he constructed a checklist to note what constitutes poverty and the intergenerational aspects of poor families. *La Vida*, an ethnography written like a novel, sparked a storm of criticism from scholars in all branches of the social sciences, especially from those who saw other sources aside from culture as reasons for a peoples' impoverishment. A subsequent text, *A Study of Slum Culture: Backgrounds for La Vida* (New York: Random House, 1968), provided the scientific data to support the claims of *La Vida*, but the controversy continued. The culture of poverty is still the basis for public policy concerning poor families.
 53. Franz Boas, the "father" of American anthropology at Columbia, was convinced that important cultural knowledge was found in folklore and other customs. These customs had to be studied using a "new historical method," which would afford meaning along with an accurate understanding of what led to the customs in the first place. See Baker, *From Savage to Negro*, 105.
 54. Anthropometry was a theory that tried to show a correlation between sizes of the cranium and other physical features such as breadth of brow and nose; intelligence; and other aspects of culture such as religion and ethnicity.
 55. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston*. Hemenway's literary biography provides much detail of Hurston's position in this literary movement. See Alice Walker, ed., *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing . . . And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader* (New York: Feminist Press, 1979), which gives samples of Hurston's literary and social commentary on the period and its figures.
 56. According to letters from the Zora Neale Hurston collection at the University of Florida, she was offered academic positions but turned them down. Perhaps her unsatisfactory experience as a drama teacher (1939-1940) at North Carolina College for Negroes (now NCCU, North Carolina Central University) kept her away from the classroom. Her comments about her year at NCCU appeared in an essay titled "The Rise of the Begging Joints" in the March 1945 issue of *American Mercury*. In the article she took her revenge on the president of the college and referred to the institution as "a one horse religious school."
 57. Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*, with New Foreword by Ishmael Reed (1938; reprint, New York: Harper and Row, 1990).
 58. Hurston's *Mules and Men* addresses the reader in three voices—first person singular, first person plural, and third person—depending on the action and setting. For example, Hurston says, "Hello boys, I hailed them as I went in neutral" (p. 23). Later, when explaining a Hoodoo rite, Hurston places herself in the middle: "That night we held a ceremony in the altar room on the case. We took a red candle and burnt it just enough to consume the tip. Then it was cut into three parts and the short lengths of candle were put into a glass of holy water. Then we took the glass and went at midnight to the door of the woman's house and the Frizzly Rooster held the glass in his hands and said, 'In

- the name of the Father, in the name of the Son, in the name of the Holy Ghost" (p. 271).
59. Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 77–78.
 60. A. Lynn Bolles, interview with Irene Diggs, October 17, 1981; and idem, interview with Vera Green, December 1977.
 61. An example of Green's support was the "Women and Work" workshop at Rutgers University, held in spring 1978 and organized by Helen Safa, M. Fernandez Kelly, and Lynn Bolles at the Latin American Studies Center, the workshop's official host. Participants included Karen Brodtkin (Sacks), Dorothy Remy, and Louise Lamphere. See Dorothy Remy and Karen Brodtkin, *My Troubles Are Going to Have Trouble with Me: Everyday Trials and Triumphs of Women Workers*, Douglass Series on Women's Lives and the Meaning of Gender (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984).
 62. Joyce Aschenbrenner, "Katherine Dunham: Anthropologist, Artist, Humanist," in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, 147.
 63. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (1903; reprint, New York: Signet Classics, 1982), 54. Du Bois was prophetic in asserting that in the United States, the problem of the twentieth century was race relations. His analysis still holds true at the beginning of the twenty-first century.
 64. Mullings, *On Our Own Terms*, xiv.
 65. Drake, *Black Folk Here and There*, 191–212. Drake used the term *vindicationist* in *Black Folk Here and There* to identify Black scholars who study racist ideas and behavior. According to Willie Baker, a Drake biographer, vindicationists correct distorted interpretations of the African or African American past or they develop counter ideologies for coping with the present. They may also take direct action, for example, giving up an otherwise comfortable existence in the interest of destroying racist beliefs and behaviors. Willie Baker, "St. Clair Drake: Scholar and Activist," in *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, 193.
 66. Harrison and Harrison, *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology*, 13.
 67. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).
 68. Mullings, *On Our Own Terms*, xviii; Bateson, *Composing a Life*, 45 (quoting Johnnetta B. Cole).
 69. Johnnetta B. Cole, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: On Being Black and a Woman," in *Conversations*, 81–108.
 70. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1983), 10.
 71. For example, there is a tendency to shift the center of authority from the inquiring anthropologist outside the culture to ordinary "drylongso," that is, the everyday, taken-for-granted people under study. See John Langston Gwaltney, *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1980). This is a classic ethnography of working-class, middle-class, and poor Black people of a town in New Jersey in the 1970s.

2

IRMA MCCLAURIN

THEORIZING A BLACK FEMINIST SELF IN ANTHROPOLOGY

Toward an Autoethnographic Approach



SELF AND THE "NEW" ANTHROPOLOGY

My entrance into the field of anthropology coincided with what George Marcus and Michael Fischer call an experimental moment.¹ Since that time, anthropology has expanded to include ethnographies of the particular,² "native" anthropology,³ ethnographies that record lives and challenge borders,⁴ ethnographies that seek to be truly reflexive, dialogic, and polyvocal,⁵ "ethnography without tears,"⁶ and "anthropology that makes you want to cry."⁷

Such changes speak well of the efforts of activist anthropologists—who are feminist, Black, progressive—to redirect the trajectory