dition of citizenship, as the novel imagines it. Harper’s critical tactic banishes white Americans from the utopian political imaginary activity of this text. The initial loss of white status is performed, however, not as an effect of African American rage, but rather as an act of white political rationality. A general in the Northern army, encountering the tragedy of Iola’s specific history and the detritus of the war, disavows his own identification as an American. He thinks, “Could it be possible that this young and beautiful girl had been a chattel, with no power to protect herself from the highest insults that lawless brutality could inflict upon innocent and defenseless womanhood? Could he ever again glory in his American citizenship, when any white man, no matter how coarse, cruel, or brutal, could buy or sell her for the basest purposes? Was it not true that the cause of a hapless people had become entangled with the lightnings of heaven, and dragged down retribution upon the land?” (39). This repudiation envelops national, racial, and gendered self-disenfranchisement, and clears the way for a postpatriarchal, postracist, Christian commonwealth. Its ethical aura hovers over the novel’s postwar narrative as well: Iola’s experience of racism and misogyny in the metropolitan and commercial spaces of the North induces more pronouncements by whites about the unworthiness of white people to lead America in official and everyday life, since it is white national culture that has transformed the country from a space of enlightenment to a place of what she calls shadows and foreshadowing.

Such political self-impeachments by whites make it possible for Harper to reinvent a truly African American-centered American citizenship. In this sense race in Iola Leroy is not solely a negative disciplinary category of national culture but becomes an archive of speech and life activities recast as a political arsenal. The originary form for African American insurgent community-building derives from the subversive vernacular practices of slave life—from, as the first chapter title suggests, “The Mystery of Market Speech and Prayer Meetings.” The narrative opens in the marketplace, where the slaves are shown to use an allegorical language to communicate and to gossip illegally about the progress of freedom during the Civil War. Just as the white masters travel, “talking politics in . . . State and National capitals” (7), slaves converse about the freshness of butter, eggs, and fish, but these ordinary words turn out to contain covert communication from the battlefield (7–8). In addition to exploiting the commercial space, the slave community performs its political identity at prayer meetings, where more illegal communication
about the war and everyday life under slavery also transpires in allegory and secrecy.

The internal communications and interpretations of the community became public and instrumental in a different way after the war, when the place where the community met to pray to God and for freedom is transformed into a site where families dispersed by slavery might recombine. "They had come to break bread with each other, relate their experiences, and tell of their hopes of heaven. In that meeting were remnants of broken families—mothers who had been separated from their children before the war, husbands who had not met their wives for years" (179). These stories demonstrating kinship locate it not, however, in memories of shared lives or blood genealogies but rather in common memories of the violence of familial separation and dispersal. Under the conditions of legal impersonality which had governed slave personhood, the repetition of personal narratives of loss is the only currency of personhood the slaves can exchange. The collective tactic here after slavery is to circulate self-descriptions in the hope that they will be repeated as gossip and heard by relatives, who will then come to the next convention and recite their own autobiographies in the hope that the rumor was true, that their stories had echoes in someone else’s life.

The collective storytelling about the diasporic forces of slavery is reinvented after the migration north, in salons where what Harper calls conversazione takes place. Habermas and Landes have described the central role of the salon in building a public sphere. Its function was to make the public sphere performatively democratic, more permeable by women and the ethnic and class subjects who had been left out of aristocratic privilege and who learn there to construct a personal and collective identity through the oral sharing of a diversity of written ideas. Harper explains at great length how conventions and conversazione transformed what counted as "personal" testimony in the black community: the chapter "Friends in Council," for example, details papers and contentious conversations about them entitled "Negro Emigration," "Patriotism," "Education of Mothers," "Moral Progress of the Race," and a poem written by Harper herself entitled "Rallying Cry." All of these speeches and the conversations about them focus on uplifting the race and rethinking history, and the conditions of uplifting require imagining a just America, an America where neither race nor sexuality exists as a mode of domination. As Iola's friend Miss Delaney says, "I want my pupils to do all in their power to make this country worthy of their
deepest devotion and loftiest patriotism" (251). Finally, after these face-
to-face communities of African Americans seeking to transform their
enslaved identities into powerful cultural and political coalitions are es-
tablished, a literary tradition becomes possible: Iola herself is asked to
serve the race by writing the novel of her life that is this novel. Harper, in
the afterword to the novel, imagines a new African American literature,
"glowing with the fervor of the tropics and enriched by the luxuriance of
the Orient." This revisionary aesthetic will, in her view, fulfill the African
American "quota of good citizenship" and thus "add to the solution of
our unsolved American problem" (282). In sum, the transmission of
personal narrative, inscribed into the interiority of a community, be-
comes a vehicle for social transformation in *Iola Leroy*, recombining
into a multicultural, though not multiracial, public sphere of collective
knowledge. In reconstructing through mass-circulated literature the
meaning of collective personhood, and in so insisting on a "quota sys-
tem" of good citizenship based not on racial assimilation but on a na-
tional ethics, the African American community Harper imagines solves
the problem of America for itself.

The Strange Case of Clarence and Anita

When you are born into a national symbolic order that explicitly marks
your person as illegitimate, far beyond the horizon of proper citizenship,
and when your body also becomes a site of privileged fantasy property
and of sexual contact that the law explicitly proscribes but privately
entitles, you inhabit the mulatta's genealogy, a genealogy of national
experience. The national body is ambiguous because its norms of priv-
ilege require a universalizing logic of disembodiment, while its local,
corporeal practices are simultaneously informed by that legal privilege
and—when considered personal, if not private—are protected by the
law's general proximity. The African American women of this narrative
understood that only a perversely "un-American" but nationally ad-
dressed text written from the history of a national subculture could
shock white citizens into knowing how compromised citizenship has
been as a category of experience and fantasy, not least for the chastised
American classes.

This question of sexual harassment is thus not just a "woman's" ques-
tion. A charged repertoire of private domination and erotic theatricality
was licensed by American law and custom to encounter the African
American women of whom I have written here, and many others, whose locations in hierarchies of racism, homophobia, and misogyny will require precisely and passionately written counterhistories. In twentieth-century America, anyone coded as “low,” embodied, or subculturally “specific” continues to experience, with banal regularity, the corporeal sensation of nationality as a sensation over which she/he has no control. This, in the broadest sense, is sexual harassment. These texts break the sanitizing silences of sexual privacy in order to create national publics trained to think, and thus to think differently, about the corporeal conditions of citizenship. One of these conditions was the evacuation of erotic or sexual or even sensational life itself as a possible ground of personal dignity for African American women in America. As the rational, antipassional logic of Incidents and Iola Leroy shows, the desire to become national seems to call for a release from sensuality—this is the cost, indeed the promise, of citizenship.

It is this phantasmatic body that the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas hearings brought to us in the delusional week before the vote. It was alluded to in the corporeality of Thomas himself: in his alleged exploitation of personal collegiality in federal workspaces; in the racist fantasies that he evoked to account for his victimization by Hill and on the Hill; in the aura of the minority stereotype that black authority represents as a “token” on the Supreme Court. The national body is signified in Hill’s own body as well, which displayed all of the decorums of bourgeois national polity while transgressing the veil between official and private behavior that grounds the erotic power of the state. Finally, the body of the nation was configured in the images of senators sitting in judgment and in the experts they brought in to testify to the law and to issues of “character” and “appearance.”

What I want to focus on is a displaced mediation of the national embodiment Hill and Thomas produced, in a television sitcom about the activities of a white- and female-owned southern business: the episode of Designing Women entitled “The Strange Case of Clarence and Anita” that aired shortly after the Senate vote. In many ways, this episode reproduces the legitimacy of masculine speech over feminine embodiment in the political public sphere, most notably by contrasting news clips of powerful men who are speaking to clips that represent Hill only in tableau moments of demure silence before the Senate Judiciary Committee. Thus the show’s stifling of Hill reproduces a version of the imperial fantasy Gayatri Spivak describes, one in which white women
“heroically” save brown women from brown and white men. But while Hill herself demonstrated respect for national decorums and conservative ideologies of authority, her case substantially disrupted norms of embodiment of the national space and, indeed, revealed and produced disturbances in what counts as the national space itself.

In this episode, the characters share private opinions about Thomas and Hill, along with painful personal memories of sexual harassment; but under the pressure of historical circumstance, the ordinary space of intimacy they share comes into contact with a media frenzy: T-shirts they buy at the mall that say “He did it?” or “She Lied” turn their bodies into billboards, which they flash angrily at each other; opinion polls that register the microfluctuations of “public sentiment” generate conversation about linguistic bias and motivate assertions of their own superiority to the numerically represented “people”; CNN, reinstated as the source of national identity, transforms the undifferentiated stream of opinions from all over the country into national data as “official” as that emanating from Washington itself; the television set focuses the collective gaze, such that domestic and public spheres become merged, as do news and entertainment (the character Julia Sugarbaker, for example, suggests that Thomas belongs not on the Supreme Court, but in the National Repertory Theater; their friend Bernice calls Senator Alan Simpson “Bart Simpson” and confuses Hill with Anita Bryant); and in the climactic moment, a local television reporter taping an interview with Suzanne Sugarbaker, a Thomas supporter, and Mary Jo Shively, a self-described “feminist,” right in their living room. What’s striking about the condensation of these media forms and forms of embodied political intimacy is how close so many different and overlapping American publics become—and in the context not of a soap opera, but of a situation comedy that refuses, this time, to contain the “situation” within the frame of its half hour. Judge Thomas and Professor Hill turn into “Clarence” and “Anita” in this situation, like TV neighbors having a domestic row, and the diverse, incorrect, passionate, and cynical opinions that flow from viewers in the room take on the status of personal and political gossip. This is not just gossip about judges or licentious senators but about the intimate details of national identity.

At one point Mary Jo explodes in rage at Senator John Danforth’s claim, shown on CNN, that Anita Hill suffered from a delusional disease, “erotomania,” which made her project her own desire for power onto Thomas himself, misinterpreting his professional patronage as sexual
desire. Hearing Danforth’s pleasure in this pop-psych diagnosis rouses Mary Jo to call his office in Washington. But she is frustrated in this desire, because the line is busy. I myself wanted to call Washington during Hill’s testimony or to testify in any way to my own banal/expert knowledge of the nonconsensual erotics of power we code as “harassment.” The desire for contact sometimes took the phantasmatic form of a private letter to a senator, or one to a newspaper, sometimes a phone encounter, sometimes a fantasy that a reporter from the national news or Nightline would accost me randomly on the street and that my impromptu eloquence would instantly transport me to the televiual realm of a Robert Bork, where my voice and body would be loud, personal, national, and valorized.

In my view this ache to be an American diva was not about persuasion. It derived from a desire to enter a senator’s body and to dominate it through an orifice he was incapable of fully closing, an ear or an eye. This intimate fantasy communication aimed to provoke sensations in him for which he was unprepared, those in that perverse space between empathy and pornography that Karen Sanchez-Eppler has isolated as constitutive of white Americans’ interest in slaves, slave narratives, and other testimonials of the oppressed. And in appealing to a senator’s authority over the terms in which I experience my (theoretically impossible) sexualized national being, I imagined making him so full and so sick with knowledge of what he has never experienced officially that he would lose, perhaps gratefully, his sensual innocence about, not the power of his own sexuality, but the sexuality of his own power, and...

This is where my fantasy of swearing out a female complaint would falter, stop knowing itself and what it wanted. The desire to go public, to exploit the dispersed media of national life, became my way of approximating the power of official nationality to dominate bodies—a motive which, in a relation of overidentification, I and many others had mapped onto Hill. The final narrative image of Designing Women also takes up this desire to sustain Hill’s Diva Citizenship into the practices of everyday life, merging a radical embodied feminist politics with the aura of the star system. Annie Potts, who plays Mary Jo Shively, wears Bette Davis drag. Dixie Carter, who plays Julia Sugarbaker, masquerades as Joan Crawford. Having come directly from a dress rehearsal of a local theatrical adaptation of What Ever Happened to Baby Jane? they sit on the couch, exhausted. They are not exhausted from the rehearsal, but from the rage they have expended on what they call this “day of [national] infamy.”
Meanwhile, their friends slow-dance the night away, like kids at a slumber party. Bette asks Joan to dance with her. They get up and look at each other. “Who should lead?” asks Bette Davis. “Well, Bette,” says Joan Crawford, “considering who we are, I think we both should.” And who are they? As Joan says to Bette in an earlier moment, “two of the toughest talking big-shouldered broads ever to live in this country.”

The fantasy of addressing the nation directly, of violating the citizen’s proper silence about the sensations of citizenship, is a fantasy that many Americans live. The bodily distortions and sensual intimacy of national media degrade and swell representations of political agency so extremely that diva manipulations of publicity might always bleed into a space of surprise where anything can happen, including political experiments in reimagining agency and critical practice that burn through citizenship’s anesthesia. Yet these queenly gestures and impulses toward freedom, with their fabulous and parodic irrelevance to anything remotely transgressive, remind us that the horizon of critical national possibility lies neither in a technological solution—orchestrating mass culture and mass nationality through the intimate forms of celebrity—nor in the pseudoimmediacy of “electronic town halls” or cyberculture, as currently offered everywhere as a solution to the impersonality of power in the United States. These media forms, like the diva form itself, reproduce the utter privacy that constitutes the conservative imaginary of citizenship in contemporary national life: privacy, a sacred zone where democracy’s intimate failures are constantly performed, played out, and minimized, made so miniaturized and banal as to seem “obviously” not of the public interest. But what is the public interest in a nation where optimism about collective life can only seem to be sustained by sanitized images of intimacy?

On the Limits of Personal Testimony and the Pedagogy of Failed Teaching

For many readers of Harriet Jacobs, the political uncanniness of Anita Hill has been a somber and illuminating experience. To summarize, these cases intersect at several points: at the experience of being sexually violated by powerful men in their places of work; at the experience of feeling shame and physical pain from living with humiliation; at the use of “going public” to refuse their reduction to sexual meaning, even after the “fact” of such reduction; and at being African American women
whose most organized community of support treated gender as the sign and structure of all subordinations to rank in America, such that other considerations—of race, class, and political ideology—became both muted and insubordinate. In these cases, and in their public reception, claims for justice against racism and claims for justice against both patriarchal and heterosexual privileges were made to compete with each other: this competition among harmed collectivities remains one of the major spectator sports of the American public sphere. It says volumes about the continued and linked virulence of racism, misogyny, heterosexism, economic privilege, and politics in the United States.

In addition to what we might call these strangely nonanachronistic structural echoes and political continuities, the cases of Hill and Jacobs expose unsettled and unsettling relations of sexuality and U.S. citizenship—two closely related sites of subjectivity, sensation, affect, law, and agency. I close with long excerpts from Harper's novel, Jacobs's narrative, and Hill's testimony. Although interpretive norms of production, consumption, and style differ among these texts, each author went public in the most national medium available to her. For this and other reasons, the rhetorical gestures that rhyme among these passages provide material for linking the politics of sex and the public sphere in America to the history of nationality itself, now read as a domain of sensation and sensationalism, and of a yet unrealized potential for fashioning "the poetry of the future" from the domains where citizens register citizenship, along with other feelings.

[Iola Leroy] 'I was sold from State to State as an article of merchandise. I had outrages heaped on me which might well crimson the cheek of honest womanhood with shame, but I never fell into the clutches of an owner for whom I did not feel the utmost loathing and intensest horror' . . .

[Dr. Gresham] 'But, Iola, you must not blame all for what a few have done.'

[Iola] 'A few have done? Did not the whole nation consent to our abasement?' (Frances E. W. Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 115–16)

I have not written my experiences in order to attract attention to myself; on the contrary, it would have been more pleasant to me to have been silent about my own history. Neither do I care to excite sympathy for my own sufferings. But I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two
millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse. . . . [My] bill of sale is on record, and future generations will learn from it that women were articles of traffic in New York, late in the nineteenth century of the Christian religion. It may hereafter prove a useful document to antiquaries, who are seeking to measure the progress of civilization in the United States. (Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 1)

It is only after a great deal of agonizing consideration that I am able to talk of these unpleasant matters to anyone but my closest friends. . . . As I’ve said before, these last few days have been very trying and very hard for me and it hasn’t just been the last few days this week.

It has actually been over a month now that I have been under the strain of this issue. Telling the world is the most difficult experience of my life, but it is very close to having to live through the experience that occasioned this meeting. . . . The only personal benefit that I have received from this experience is that I have had an opportunity to serve my country. I was raised to do what is right and can now explain to my students first hand that despite the high costs that may be involved, it is worth having the truth emerge. (Anita Hill, *New York Times* 12 October 1991, sec. 1: 1; 15 October 1991, sec. 1: 1)

When Hill, Jacobs, and Harper’s Iola Leroy speak in public about the national scandal of their private shame, they bring incommensurate fields of identity into explosive conjunction. Speaking as private subjects about sexual activities that transpired within the politically charged spaces of everyday life, their testimony remains itself personal, specifically about them, their sensations and subjectivity. We hear about “my experiences,” “my own suffering,” “unpleasant matters”; we hear of desires to return to silence, and of longings to be relieved of the drive to consign this material to public life, which requires the speaker to reexperience on her body what her rhetoric describes. But as their speech turns “incidents” of sexuality into opportunities for reconstructing what counts as national data—that is, since each of these sexual autobiographies aims to attain the status of a finding, an official expert narrative about national protocols—the authors must make themselves represen-
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...tative and must make the specific sensational details of their violation exemplary of collective life. It is always the autobiographer's task to negotiate her specificity into a spectacular interiority worthy of public notice. But the minority subject who circulates in a majoritarian public sphere occupies a specific contradiction: insofar as she is exemplary, she has distinguished herself from the collective stereotype; and at the same time, she is also read as a kind of foreign national, an exotic representative of her alien "people" who reports to the dominant culture about collective life in the crevices of national existence. This warp in the circulation of identity is central to the public history of African American women, for whom coerced sexualization has been a constitutive relay between national experience and particular bodies.

Hence the specifically juridical inflection of "personal testimony." This hybrid form demarcates a collectively experienced set of strains and contradictions in the meaning of sexual knowledge in America: sexual knowledge derives from private experiences on the body and yet operates as a register for systemic relations of power; sexual knowledge stands for a kind of political counterintelligence, a challenge to the norms of credibility, rationality, and expertise that generally organize political culture; and yet, as an archive of injury and of private sensation, sexual knowledge can have the paradoxical effect of delegitimizing the very experts who can represent it as a form of experience. These three women produced vital public testimony about the conditions of sexuality and citizenship in America. Their representations of how nationality became embodied and intimate to them involve fantasies of what America is, where it is, and how it reaches individuals. This requires them to develop a national pedagogy of failed teaching. Emerging from the pseudoprivate spaces where many kinds of power are condensed into personal relations, they detail how they were forced to deploy persuasion to fight for sexual dignity, and how they lost that fight. They take their individual losses as exemplary of larger ones, in particular the failure of the law and the nation to protect the sexual dignity of women from the hybrid body of white, patriarchal official and sexual privilege. They insist on representing the continuous shifting of perspectives that constitute the incommensurate experience of power where national and sexual affect meet. They resist, in sum, further submission to a national sexuality that blurs the line between the disembodied entitlements of liberal citizenship and the places where bodies experience
the sensation of being dominated. For all these verbs of resistance, the women represent their deployment of publicity as an act made under duress, an act thus representing and performing unfreedom in America. And in manifesting their previous failures to secure sexual jurisdiction over their bodies, they challenge Americans to take up politically what the strongest divas were unable, individually, to achieve.
Notes to Chapter Six

60 See Cosmetics and Toiletries 109, no. 2: 75; Ethnic Marketing 18 January 1993: 11.
61 On Singin' in the Rain and "Black or White," see Clover, "Dancin' in the Rain."
62 "Black or White" cites Risky Business (dir. Paul Brickman, 1983) in its frame narrative, which is also a part of the recorded song. In this scene, Macaulay Culkin gyrates and plays air guitar in his bedroom, like Tom Cruise in Risky Business, to libidinously pulsating rock and roll. Berated by his father (George Wendt) for playing the music too loud, Culkin retaliates with an electric guitar blast so loud that his father explodes, still in his armchair, out of his house and to the other side of the world (Africa). The phrase Culkin uses as he shoots his father is "Eat this." Culkin's body is thus deployed here to link white, male pubescent rock-and-roll excess to masturbation, awakening masculine heterosexuality, Oedipal rage, generational identity, commodity attachment, and a desire to inhabit the publics in which he feels himself at his happiest.
63 These two aesthetic horizons of possibility for a nationally minor literature are predicted by Deleuze and Guattari, "What Is a Minor Literature?"
64 A few weeks later (18 July 1994), Time no doubt unconsciously returned to the theme of racial/class passing in its cover story on "attention deficit disorder": it is illustrated by a caricature that looks uncannily like O.J.'s distorted icon, now the poster face both for distorted subjectivity and white despair over the alterity of darker faces.
66 Gillespie and Schellbass, Contracts with America; Moore, Restoring the Dream; Contracts with the American Family.
67 Brincklow, Alien Nation, 11, 274.

6 The Queen of America Goes to Washington City:
Notes on Diva Citizenship

Special thanks to Gordon Hutner, Carla Kaplan, Miriam Hansen, audiences at Rutgers, the University of North Carolina, Chicago State, and MLA for their insightful and impassioned critical responses.
1 The strategy/tactics distinction is taken from Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life.
2 On "intersectionality" and the traffic in national and subcultural identities in the United States, see Matsuda, Words That Wound.
3 For reading the dialectical image in contexts created through critical theorizing and historicizing, see Tausig, Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man, 366–92; and Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture."
4 Roberto Ungar comments on politics and psychoanalysis "in the rich countries of the contemporary Western world": "where politics are a narrow exercise in bargaining and drift, where the possibility that society might be deeply transformed through collective action is made to look like a revolutionary reverie, where permanent cultural revolution coexists with permanent political deadlock, and where the privileged devote themselves to the expensive, selfish, and impotent cultivation of subjectivity" (Passion, 298). This scenario of subjectification surely cuts across class divisions, although the forms of withdrawal from the political vary enormously according to the possession of cultural and economic capital.
5 "Abjection" is currently an important keyword for describing marginalized political
subjectivity in Western political contexts. Two important interlocutors for my thinking about this process are Butler, *Bodies That Matter*; and *The Abject, America*, a special issue of *Lusitania* 1, no. 4 (n.d.). Abjection is generally thought to be the symbolic and institutionally supported aura of pollution and prohibition associated with a devalued population or type of social person. *The Abject, America* uses the work of Georges Bataille and Slavoj Žižek to read the way the intensified, incoherent hegemonic processes of states reflect themselves in the overcoherent representations of order that seem to organize dominant institutions and normative subjectivities; Butler derives from Žižek and Julia Kristeva a notion of abjection that specifically locates sexually Othered identities.

My thinking about abjection differs from these in a few ways, which have to do with tracking the political specificity of abjection's double process: as a kind of social identity and as a kind of effect some people have on others. Kristeva actually talks about abjection as a structure of *deobjectification*—in which "ordinary" subjects lose a sense of their rationality or legitimacy as subjects in everyday and national life in response to negatively invested social phenomena. She calls these abjected people "dejects": faced with a substance or phenomenon that unsettles the constitutive rules of order in their horizon of life expectation, dejects become shaken, aversive, incompetent to *subjectivity*. They feel a traumatic loss—of themselves.

As I have argued throughout the book, in the contemporary United States abjection is a social descriptor that is assumed by people at many different junctures of privilege/powerlessness, across the hierarchies that organize national culture and national politics. Backlash politics is a politics of hegemonic abjection: but dominant feelings of abjection would not be imaginable in the typical theoretical use of this term. Meanwhile, insofar as citizens who consider themselves "normal" experience *abjection* in proximity to socially marginal people and populations, marginal subjects are indeed abject. But this is evident only in their effect on others who have some definitional power in mass society. In addition, it would be hasty to assume that subjects who create abjecting effects are abject to themselves, have abject *identities*: people are not identical with the most negative versions of themselves that circulate in the (national) public sphere. This suggests the need for greater critical skepticism about the hierarchical clarity of a center/margin taxonomy in U.S. culture, and more flexibility and rigorous description in the construction of political subjectivity, for understanding the strange career of normative powerlessness and social abjection at the present time. See also Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1–31.

6 This worry, that changes in forms of subjectivity, norms of identification, and performances of rhetoric will seem merely to equal changes in the material conditions of social life, distinguishes much Marxist/materialist social theory. See, for example, Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse*; Lazarus, "Doubting the New World Order."

9 Harper, *Iola Leroy*, 75. Subsequent references will be noted parenthetically in the text.
10 I focus here on the analogy Harper seems to make between Esther’s complicated
ethnic masquerade and Marie’s racial one, and the conditions for political speech that
ensued. The Book of Esther as a whole tells a far more complex story. On the one
hand, it might have provided Harper, and us, with a less patriarchalized model of
feminine power: Queen Vashti, whose refusal to display her royal beauty to a banquet
of drunken courtiers provoked Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s *The Woman’s Bible* to name her
“the first woman recorded whose self-respect and courage enabled her to act
contrary to the will of her husband . . . [in] the first exhibition of individual
sovereignty of woman on record . . . true to the Divine aspirations of her nature” (86–
88). On the other hand, the Book of Esther is a story about holocausts, a Jewish one
averted, and a Macedonian one revengefully executed by the Jews themselves.
11 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 44. Subsequent references will be noted
parenthetically in the text.
13 Anita Hill, *On to Minutes*.
14 For the myriad transformations in legal theory and practical juridical norms regulating
what counts as “injury” and “harm” to women see Fineman and Thomadsen, *At the Boundaries of Law*; and Bartlett and Kennedy, *Feminist Legal Theory*.
15 There is a large outstanding bibliography on this subject. It includes Carby, *Reconstrcuting Womanhood*; Foreman, “The Spoken and the Silenced in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and Our Nig*,” Gaines, “White Privilege and Looking Relations”; Spillers, “Notes on an Alternative Model—Neither/Not” and “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.”
16 See Valerie Smith, “‘Loopholes of Retreat.’”
17 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.
18 See Yellin, “Written by Herself.”
19 I adapt this notion of “theft” from Harriette Mullen’s work on orality and writing in
*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. See “Runaway Tongue.”
20 On the counternational politics of gender and kinship in *Incidents*, see Spillers,
“Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.”
21 To place *Iola Leroy* in the context of Harper’s complex political activities, see Carby,
*Reconstructing Womanhood*, 63–94. Carby’s chapter on Harper emphasizes the race/gender axis of her concerns, and provides crucial support to my thinking about
nationality. See also Frances Smith Foster’s introduction to *A Brighter Coming Day*.
22 Harper, “Duty to Dependent Races.”
24 The argument that nationality can overcome the fractures of race operates through-
out Harper’s speeches and poems as well. Perhaps the most condensed and eloquent of
those was delivered at the Columbian Exposition. See “Woman’s Political Future,”
26 See especially Wandesma Lubiano, “Black Ladies, Welfare Queens, and State Min-
strels: Ideological War by Narrative Means,” in Morrison, *Race-ing Justice, En-
gendering Power*, 323–63.
The original sentence, describing the mentality of "imperialist subject-production," is
"White men are saving brown women from brown men." Spivak, "Can the Subaltern
Speak?" 296.

Sánchez-Eppler, "Bodily Bonds."

The fantasy of diminishing the scale of America to make the nation a place one might
encounter has a long history in American letters. See Berlant, The Anatomy of National
Fantasy; Berland, "Angels Dancing;" and Caughie, "Playing at Being American."

The most incisive overview of the feminist, as opposed to class- and race-based,
interpretations of the Hill/Thomas events is by Nancy Fraser, in "Sex, Lies, and the
Public Sphere." Fraser sees this event as a symptom of transformations of and contesta-
tions over definitions of public and private, publicity and privacy. See also Rose-
mary L. Bray, "Taking Sides Against Ourselves," New York Times Magazine 17 No-
vember 1991: 56–97. Two volumes have recently emerged that perform repeatedly
the adjustments between gender, race, class, and ideological identity categories. I am
describing here, with much emphasis on the "problem" of articulating "gender" not
only with "race" but also with the political movements that make these categories
contested and unstable ones in the political public sphere. The Black Scholar has
assembled Chrisman and Allen, Court of Appeal, the following essays from which
are directly germane: Calvin Herndon, "Breaking Silences," 86–91; June Jordan,
"Can I Get a Witness?" 120–24; Barbara Smith, "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me
Morrison's edited volume Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power, see especially Kimber-
lé Crenshaw, "Whose Story Is It Anyway? Feminist and Anti-Racist Appropriations
of Anita Hill," 402–40; Christine Stansell, "White Feminists and Black Realities: The
Politics of Authenticity," 251–68; Cornel West, "Black Leadership and the Pitfalls of

The word "experience" is important in the texts I am addressing and the one I am
writing here, and requires some explication. The category "experience" is not meant
to refer to self-evident autobiographical data over which the experiencing person has
control: the experience of being dominated, for example, is subjective, and therefore
incompatible descriptions of it might engender legitimate contestation. I take ex-
perience here more fundamentally to be something produced in the moment when an
activity becomes framed as an event, such that the subject enters the empire of quo-
atation marks, anecdote, self-reflection, memory. More than a category of authenticity,
"experience" in this context refers to something someone "has," in aggregate mo-
mements of self-estrangement. Jacobs, Harper, and Hill are aware of the unreliability of
experience as data both in their own perceptions and in their drives to produce
convincing evidence to buttress their arguments for social change or informed con-
sciousness. For a strong summary of the current historicist argument over the eviden-
tiary use of experience, see Scott, "The Evidence of Experience"; and, more critically,
Zavazadeh and Morton, "Theory Pedagogy Politics: The Crisis of The Subject" in the
Humanities," in their collection Theory/Pedagogy/Politics, 1–32; and Chris
Weedon, "Post-Structuralist Feminist Practice," in the same volume, 47–63. The
phrase "the poetry of the future" comes, famously, from Karl Marx, The 18th Brumaire
of Napoleon Bonaparte.