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Sisters, Rivals, and Citizens:
Venus and Serena Williams as a Case Study of American Identity

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An abstract of
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Abstract

Sisters, Rivals, and Citizens: Venus and Serena Williams as a Case Study of American Identity

By Michelle S. Hite

The four chapters of this dissertation focus on tennis players Venus and Serena Williams as figures for an examination into American identity in this moment of late capitalism. An essential aspect of the Williams sisters' figuration in my work is the way they are symbolically understood to be anarchic women. As such, they function for the national community similar to the way that pariah women function in the local communities of Toni Morrison's fiction. This interdisciplinary work draws on diverse yet often mutually informing theoretical discourses such as literary theory, sports history, (black) feminist studies, disability studies, and cultural studies to engage the following core questions: 1.) What role does the representation of black women as anarchic figures play in clarifying the boundaries and bounty of citizenship in this late capitalist moment? 2.) In what ways are young black women athletes transforming political discourses of migration, travel, style, and the body? What are the implications of these changes? 3.) How do the mechanics of race and gender operate so as to simultaneously enable censure and celebrity? What utility can this insight have on the conceptualization of market versus civic relations? 4.) How can this specific case of the Williams sisters render less abstract the role of fraternity (if not sorority) for democracy?

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I once knew a girl who said that after she read an author's acknowledgements she would write her name on the page. She said she liked to imagine that the author included her name among those who helped make the work possible. I can't say why I remember that story but it was important to me to know someone who, like me, always read a work's acknowledgements. I hope my acknowledgements find a reader like the girl I once knew; in other words, someone inspired enough to include your name in case I run out of room.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

This dissertation seeks to take measure of American identity through the lens of African American subjectivity as represented in the public careers of tennis players Venus and Serena Williams. Using Venus and Serena Williams for this study showcases the changes that historian Thomas Holt ascribes to race and racism in contemporary America. As he explains, "[t]here are *new* anomalies, *new* ambiguities, and a *new* ambivalence in contemporary life that our standard definitions of race and racism simply cannot account for, and which even render them somewhat anachronistic" (Holt 5). Associating the "*new* anomalies, *new* ambiguities, and a *new* ambivalence in contemporary life" that underscore race and racism in the twenty-first century with the Williams sisters and thus with bodies and gendered expectations that differ from black male bodies challenges the sole authority of black masculinity in defining racial experience during this late capitalist moment.

Late capitalism indicates the development of capitalism during the twentieth century and it highlights the transformations within the social, economic, and cultural landscape since the conclusion of World War II. Fredric Jameson's insights regarding postmodernism and late capitalism illuminate significant changes in the organization of imperial and colonial power as well as it emphasizes the emergence of novel forms of business organization. Moreover, Jameson asserts that the features of late capitalism:

> include the new international division of labor, a vertiginous new dynamic in international banking and the stock exchanges (including the enormous Second and Third World debt), new forms of media interrelationship (very much including transportation systems such as containerization), computers and automation, the flight of production to

> advanced Third World areas, along with all the more familiar social consequences, including the crisis of traditional labor, the emergence of yuppies, and gentrification on a now-global scale. (xix)

Sociologists such as Elijah Anderson and Saskia Sassen examine the transformations that Jameson names through an examination of the city. In the United States, the effects of late capitalism have had a profound effect on the labor and the organization of cities. Others have seen sport as fertile ground for exploring the features of late capitalism. In this examination, Michael Jordan has loomed large.

As Walter LaFeber explains, Jordan's rise as a basketball player occurred just as satellite television was emerging. Jordan's skills and fortunate good looks made him a projectable commodity that corporations could market on a global scale. A significant shift in racial understanding occurred as blackness was not a liability to Jordan; despite his dark skin, Jordan appeared to be a very likeable, thus marketable, man. Race did not appear to block Jordan's access to financial success as his image was marketed and consumed globally.

Contributing to Jordan's likability was his firm commitment to the separation of sports and politics. Famously, Jordan avoided political commentary and endorsements. When Harvey Gantt, the first African American mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina challenged Republican Jesse Helms for a seat in the United States Senate, citizens called on Jordan, a North Carolina native and University of North Carolina graduate, to support Gantt against the ultra-conservative Helms. Helms had been a Democrat when the party represented racial conservatism and as a Republican, he opposed feminism, gay rights, civil rights, and affirmative action. During his 1990 senate campaign against Gantt, Helms ran an attack ad showing white hands tearing a rejection notice from a

company that gave the job to a "less qualified minority." Jordan avoided campaigning or publicly supporting Gantt, instead Jordan publicly took the position that "Republicans buy tennis shoes, too" (Araton). For Jordan, corporate affiliation held primacy over civic activism. Jordan further dramatized this position during the Barcelona Olympic Games. Reebok was the official sponsor of the U.S. team, yet Jordan found this sponsorship to be at odds with his role as Nike spokesman. When the U.S. men's basketball team won Olympic gold, Jordan led the effort to obscure Reebok's sponsorship by draping an American flag over the Reebok logo.

The careers of the Williams sisters enhance an understanding of identity, sport, celebrity and globalization routinely mapped onto Jordan's career. The Williams sisters mark a shift away from a certain connection between race, an unsavory temperament, and corporate success. Though committed corporate sycophants, the sisters have a very different public character than Jordan. Unlike Jordan, Venus and Serena Williams were generally not embraced as likeable subjects. Journalists and players described them as arrogant; their family, especially their father, Richard Williams, often made overt claims about racism in tennis thereby ensuring that Venus and Serena would be politicized subjects within their sport; the sisters' sartorial style did not conform to the expectations of the tennis establishment. In short, unlike Jordan, who was publicly adored, the Williams sisters appeared to have what sociologist Gary Alan Fine calls a "difficult reputation."

A "difficult reputation" refers to the "socially recognized persona" of a public figure that marks the obverse of the heroic or morally exemplary status of "positive figures" (Fine 2). Those with "difficult reputations" are villains. Fine contends that villains are worthy of study because, like heroes, they "contribute to nation building and

help society define itself [...] by drawing the boundaries between morality and immorality, the remembrance of infamous figures helps define moral boundaries" (24). Benedict Arnold, Fatty Arbuckle, and Warren Harding are among the villains that Fine studies.

The dynamics of Fine's analysis of "difficult reputations" involves a consideration of various kinds of "difficult reputations." "Difficult reputations" can be "negative, contested, or subcultural" (10). As "negative," a "difficult reputation" refers to the "consensually held reputation that attributes negative traits or characteristics to an individual, and implicitly to the historical matters that the individual represents" (10). Adolf Hitler exemplifies this type of "difficult reputation." A "contested" reputation refers to one in the process of being formed and to one without a clear consensus established. For Fine, Christopher Columbus exemplifies this kind of "difficult reputation" because an uneasy relationship exists between various constituencies concerning Columbus's achievements. Some situate Columbus's actions in "discovering" America as an act worthy of celebration and commemoration. Others contend that his "voyages of discovery were accompanied by brutality and genocide" and thus unworthy of commemoration (9). Finally, Fine defines "subcultural" reputations as those maintained by "conflicting subcultural groups" (11). Fine offers Richard Nixon as an example of someone whose reputation differs depending on one's political affiliation. Fine maintains that "Republicans praise Nixon far more than Democrats do" (11). Fine also includes Malcolm X as a figure whose reputation emerges through subcultural conflict. In locating Malcolm X within this group, Fine stipulates that Malcolm X is "viewed very differently by blacks and whites: it is almost as if two different persons are being described" (11).

Fine's description of Malcolm X's "difficult reputation" among blacks and whites oversimplifies race and racial identification through subcultural groups. Malcolm X serves as a subject of tension among African Americans who have historically disagreed about what political course was best for full civic participation. Alongside debates concerning the ideology of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., similar debates occurred regarding the ideology of W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Fine also oversimplifies white people's response to Malcolm X. Famously, Malcolm X notes in his *Autobiography* that a white woman questions him about how she can assist his efforts to establish social justice. Malcolm X describes first rejecting her offer and later regretting doing so. Fine's description of Malcolm X's reputation among blacks and whites points to a limitation in the conceptualization of "difficult reputations" as they are discussed in his treatment of them in his major work on the subject; namely, race and gender are not considered analytical factors impacting or animating "difficult reputations."

The contributors to the David C. Ogden and Joel Nathan Rosen edited collection *Reconstructing Fame: Sport, Race, and Evolving Reputations* offer a partial corrective to the analytical gap existing in Fine's discussion of "difficult reputations." The essays in this collection examine how evolving notions of racial understanding enables the recuperation of the reputations of athletes of color like Jackie Robinson, Roberto Clemente, Tommy Smith and John Carlos at one time believed to be villainous. The corrective here is limited because the contributors seek to understand the impact of race, not only on "difficult reputations," and in doing so providing insight into the historical process of constructing myth and legacy and yet, the essays ignore gender as a category of analysis—even in discussing masculinity. Though all of the essays included in the

collection take male athletes of color as case studies, none interrogates the intersection of masculinity and race to forge an analysis of "difficult reputations."

While Venus and Serena Williams appear to have "difficult reputations," the lack of a thorough consideration for the way that key features of identity might inform such an ascription makes it an imprecise categorization. A more precise way of describing them is as anarchic women. As Toni Morrison writes about the anarchic, it includes an analysis of both race and gender as aspects of identity providing a lens through which to examine national identity. Venus and Serena Williams then, are the living counterparts to the characters figuring prominently in Morrison's fiction as anarchic.

Toni Morrison, Anarchic Women, and the Williams sisters

Morrison's pariah women are "outlaw figures" who find themselves marginalized within their home communities because they dare to live against the familial, cultural, political, and general expectations of the majority (Houston 212-214). These very liberal women challenge the very conservative leanings of those who define the dominate ethos of the communities in which they live. *Paradise* is the best of Morrison's novels to exemplify this given in light of the exclusion of an examination of race in Fine's work because the novel centers on intraracial conflict. Within this context, the liberal, outlaw, pariah women living in the Convent challenge the views of the men in Ruby who believe they can cloister themselves away from the vices of the larger culture. The women who arrive at the Convent dressed in high heels and short skirts using foul language and without clearly respectable lineage are cited as the reason for the misfortunes befalling Ruby. Morrison writes:

> Outrages that had been accumulating all along took shape as evidence. A mother was knocked down the stairs by her cold-eyed daughter. Four

> damaged infants were born in one family. Daughters refused to get out of bed. Brides disappeared on their honeymoons. Two brothers shot each other on New Year's Day. Trips to Demby for VD shots common. And what went on at the Oven these days was not to be believed. So when nine men decided to meet there, they had to run everybody off the place with shotguns before they could sit in the beams of their flashlights to take matters into their own hands. The proof they had been collecting since the terrible discovery in the spring could not be denied: the one thing that connected all these catastrophes was in the Convent. And in the Convent were those women. (11)

Anarchic women do not have to use overtly violent or aggressive action to be interpreted as the cause of every misfortune present in Ruby; cause gets written onto their difference; instead, "body fictions" or the inventions projected onto the corporeal presence of another may influence judgment. For Morrison, the difference that emerges through anarchic women's creativity or imagination leads to an interpretation of pariah women as renegade figures, and her fiction reveals the ways that anarchic women can both agitate and edify. Here then, the Convent women, as anarchic women, may be seen as a means to bringing the men of Ruby together to develop a consensus and this effort strengthens the fraying ties between them as generational differences have begun to contest the supremacy of prior convention. Though at first the men collaborate and forge a consensus for a violent cause, this moment eventually becomes a defining one that forces the town's residents to openly confront their differences with one another; this gesture towards communion reflects anarchic women's possible utility.

In drawing on Morrison's fiction and the pariah women she explores there, my aim is to maintain the focus on the anarchic status of Venus and Serena Williams as a productive fiction for analyzing the shifting meaning of race and the changing character of American identity in this cultural moment. Associating the Williams sisters with Morrison is not an unlikely association for Karen Crouse of the *New York Times*.

2008 was a good year for Venus and Serena Williams. They played a fierce match in the finals at Wimbledon with Venus winning in an impressive showing. Serena Williams won the U.S. Open and in doing so recaptured the number one ranking in women's tennis after losing that position five years prior. In reporting on Serena's U.S. Open victory, Crouse reflected on Serena's appearance in the HBO documentary *The Black List*. Through her reflection, Crouse makes a connection between Toni Morrison's construction of place in writing as a "free space" and Serena Williams's construction of place on the tennis court. Crouse writes:

> Morrison talked about how writing was her only "free space," an unfiltered outlet for her expression. The tennis court is that place for Williams, an entertainer inexorably drawn to the spotlight. Her flair for drama makes each of her matches an improvisational play in two or three acts. (Crouse)

Crouse finds Morrison a likely match for Williams; Williams disagrees. According to Crouse, Williams identified with Colin Powell and claimed that she was "really struck by his story and everything he was saying" (Crouse). Crouse concludes that in identifying with Powell, Williams reveals much about her identity as a competitor:

> That is Williams in a sound bite, running around the obvious answer the way her opponents might a ball hit to their weak sides. In interview

> rooms, as on the court, Williams is famous for keeping her antagonists off balance. (Crouse)

For Crouse, the association between Morrison and Serena Williams is an obvious one.

While this relationship may not be obvious to most, it is certainly possible to use the ideas evident in Morrison's fiction to attempt to come to terms with the meaning of the Williams sisters as social actors. Drawing on Morrison in this way is in keeping with the practice of many scholars. Though Morrison is primarily a fiction writer, scholars have drawn on her ability to re-think the Black presence against the grain of a master narrative and discourse that have relied on the existence of Blackness yet denied its relevance. For example, sociologist, Paul Gilroy turns to Morrison to underscore the contributions of literature as an extension of other sites of Black expressive culture that have been important for re-thinking the Black presence in the modern world. For Gilroy, Morrison's imaginative excursions into the psychic and emotional experiences of Black slaves who confronted the rational, scientific practices of the Enlightenment, inform the practice and project of history. Based on interviews wherein Morrison has spoken about her work as well as on the writing itself, Gilroy contends that her work facilitates the re-conceptualization of modernity so that it necessarily includes racial slavery.

While Morrison has engaged in cultural analysis and criticism, has edited works such as *Race-ing Justice, Engendering Power* and *Birth of a Nation 'hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O.J. Simpson Case*, her fiction has remained a primary source for advancing a cultural analysis. For instance, in her essay, "Memory and Mass Culture," Susan Willis contends that in *Song of Solomon*, Morrison offers a critique of consumer society. Willis writes:

> *Song of Solomon* is an inquiry into the process of recovering African-American histories through cultural practice. Using the antithetical characters Milkman and Hagar, Morrison questions the influence of consumer society on the possibility of recovering historical meanings. (186)

In addition to an invocation of Morrison's fiction as a commentary that opens up the possibility for reconsidering history and memory, Cornel West and bell hooks both point to ways that Morrison's fiction aids an understanding of the needs and longings of the black body.

Scholars consult Toni Morrison on matters ranging from Hip Hop to disenfranchisement. Michael Dyson sought out Morrison's input on the legitimacy and discursive value of rap for his work on the late rapper, Tupac Shakur. June Jordan also looked to Morrison as an important voice to consider and consult regarding happenings in national-political culture. In her essay, "The Invisible People: An Unsolicited Report on Black Rage," Jordan provocatively demonstrates parallels between the silenced Black voters in the 2000 presidential election and the fact that no one in the national media consulted the country's Nobel Laureate.

When T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting employed "Morrisonian theory" in her work, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French*, she primarily meant it to refer to the "American Africanism" Morrison theorizes in, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (5,10). In this text, Morrison identifies the "Africanist" presence as a trope within American literature that often enables an engagement with prominent themes within civic nationalism. My work equally draws on the mechanics and signifying function of the "Africanist" presence that Morrison details

in considering the role of "body fictions" informing the representations of the Williams sisters, while at the same time relying on the broader corpus of Morrison's novels to inform my understanding and utilization of "Morrisonian Theory."

As figures in popular culture, Venus and Serena Williams reflect the character of anarchic women that Morrison represents in her fiction. While the Williams sisters appear to have "difficult reputations," and this lens appears useful for thinking through their identity, this concept does not fully address race and gender identity. Making sense of these aspects of identity is crucial to the success of this project. Morrison's use of the anarchic in her fiction allows for an analysis of race and gender within the context of American history and culture.

Interpretations of the Williams sisters occur despite their self-understanding or self-presentations. As with anarchic women in general, there were those who interpreted the Williams sisters as arrogant and bad for tennis, yet people continued to watch them play in record numbers and paid careful attention to their careers. Despite having bad reputations in the press, the Williams sisters prospered financially. Thus, being anarchic did not prohibit them from succeeding. To this end, they mark a turn away from the path laid down by Michael Jordan. My dissertation analyzes this turn and its cultural work.

Chapter Descriptions

The four chapters contained here reflect an interdisciplinary effort that draws on diverse yet often mutually informing theoretical discourses such as literary theory, sports history, (black) feminist studies, disability studies, and cultural studies to engage the following core questions:

- What role does the representation of black women as anarchic figures play in clarifying the boundaries and bounty of citizenship in this late capitalist moment?
- In what ways are young black women athletes transforming political discourses of migration, travel, style, and the body? What are the implications of these changes?
- How do the mechanics of race and gender operate so as to simultaneously enable censure and celebrity? What utility can this insight have on the conceptualization of market versus civic relations?
- How can this specific case of the Williams sisters render less abstract the role of fraternity (if not sorority) for democracy?

Chapter one tackles the issue of anarchic identity and citizenship. Analyzing the trajectory of the Williams sisters' careers reveals the mutability of race and gender constructions as the profit motives of corporations in this late capitalist moment provides black women athletes' opportunities to re-write their public identities. These opportunities mark a distinct shift away from earlier experiences of black women athletes who were not given profitable corporate sponsorships that enabled them to easily enjoy competition as a profession. During Jim Crow, as seen through the career of Althea Gibson, through the late nineteen eighties, as seen through the career of Zina Garrison, black women athletes sat at the farthest point along the trajectory of anarchic identity. While being a sportswoman made female athletes in general anarchic--since perceptions of their athleticism set them in opposition to appropriate standards of femininity--access to corporate sponsorships that enabled white women athletes like Angela Buxton during the nineteen-fifties and white, lesbian athletes like Martina Navratilova during the nineteen-eighties to earn endorsement dollars, race is the factor that excluded black

sportswomen from these opportunities and shows them to be at the extremes of the gradients of repulsion comprising an anarchic identity. By the nineteen-nineties when Venus Williams enters the ranks of professional tennis, occupancy on the extremes of an anarchic identity does not over-determine black women athletes' chances to earn corporate sponsorships and thus to make a living as professional athletes.

Chapter two examines the movement of black athletic bodies from the 1940s through 2002. More specifically, the experiences of Jackie Robinson, Althea Gibson, Arthur Ashe, Zina Garrison, and the Williams sisters become a prism for evaluating the history of the raced athletic body as it travels throughout the United States and abroad. An historical evaluation reveals a notable shift in the way that black bodies needed to prepare themselves to cross territorial boundaries. The preparation involved reflected the climate of racial acceptance waiting to greet black people upon arrival. While oftentimes the struggle for black people to prepare themselves to be acceptable to a waiting white majority was in vain, the effort towards acceptability underscored a program of respectability operative among African Americans. Zina Garrison's career marks a departure away from a concern for the preparation of material body and a far greater concern and awareness of the circulation of the image of the self. Through Garrison, one witnesses the ascendency of the hyperreal in preparing public perception for black bodies. This shift does not announce an advance but rather, it reveals an alternative method of sustaining derision for black bodies crossing boundaries. This sustained derision occasioned a sense of bodily inadequacy in Garrison that also plagued Althea Gibson.

Venus and Serena Williams's athletic careers provide a prism through which to examine the relationship between hyperreal circulation and movement of the corporeal

body across geographic space. Unlike black athlete travelers whose experience preparing their bodies to cross boundaries mirrored the experience of most other black citizens, the Williams sisters experiences as travelers differs from most other black citizens. As contemporary celebrities, Venus and Serena Williams can make practical decisions in preparing their bodies to cross borders without a pressing concern for racial harassment and discrimination, which is an experience unlike black travelers in general. Despite Richard Williams's, Venus and Serena Williams's father, claims that racism exists in women's tennis and is often directed at his daughters, Venus and Serena Williams typically present themselves in interviews as if racial scorn does not exist and that racial history has no bearing on their bodies.[1] As a result, representations of them can be problematic—as their appearance in the *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue* highlights-- in the way that they sustain notions of black women as hypersexed; at the same time, however, they do not share the views of bodily inadequacy that plagued Althea Gibson and Zina Garrison.

Chapter three extends many of the insights from the previous chapter through an examination of the Williams sisters' sartorial choices. Early in the Williams sisters' careers they were *bricoleurs* of loaded sartorial choices. As a result, they came to figure an emerging political discourse on race, gender, family, and sports for their generation of

[1] For example, see "Father of tennis star Venus Williams charges racism during recent U.S. Open," *Jet*. 29 September 1997; "Off Court Distractions: Racism Charges Swirl as Williams Sisters Advance." *CNN/SportsIllustrated*. 27 March 2001. In general, the charges that Richard Williams makes regarding racism at the Indian Wells tournament and the way that Venus and Serena respond to questions regarding racism are illustrative. Both Venus and Serena Williams admit that racism exists as a general phenomenon but they refuse to directly or explicitly utter the charge though their father, Richard does. See: Joel Drucker. "What Happened at Indian Wells?" ESPN. 11 March 2009. 25 March 2009. http://sports.espn.go.com/sports/tennis/columns/story?columnist=drucker_joel&id=3952939. Their response to racism at Indian Wells exemplifies why I think their response to racism and racial history in terms of how they prepare and present their bodies follows a typical pattern. Since 2001, the Williams sisters have not participated in this tournament. Here, they may be seen offering a response to Richard Williams's allegations of racism at the tournament but publicly, they have not explicitly acknowledged it.

African American athletes. As they began to reach the highest levels of success in their sport, winning grand slam events, their style choices stalled conversations that may have advanced political discourse; instead, their choices re-cited previous discourse on the black female body, recalling history but not seemingly advancing it.

Focusing on the Williams sisters' sartorial choices and the attention paid to those choices in the media italicizes the lack of attention paid to them as significant figures in scholarship. Michael Jordan, Dion Sanders, Allen Iverson, and other black male athletes continue are the most prominent figures in scholarly discussions of race, sport, and the body. Gena Degal Caponi's edited collection *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture* does not include a single, extended discussion of a black female athlete even as it attempts to make a case for including sports in scholarly considerations of African American expressive culture. An examination of the Williams sisters' sartorial choices involves an investigation of the sartorial choices of other African American women athletes. The effort of this chapter serves as a corrective to the oversight in scholarship on race, sport, and African American expressive culture.

Three of the four chapters have topics that take up key aspects of black women's history or sports history to make an examination of American identity. As a case, the careers and representations of Venus and Serena Williams offer an examination of elements of black women's history and sports history or poses a corrective to this historiography. The fourth and final chapter explores black women's history and sports history through the uniqueness that the Williams sisters offer for examining the black family, rivalry, and the American Dream. Venus and Serena have battled one another on tennis courts at their sport's most competitive tournaments and for the most coveted prizes. These contests intensify typical sports rivalries between teams and even fearsome

competitors because fight involves sisters vying for the claim to being the best. The dynamics of their sisterhood and their rivalry provide a context for examining broader questions concerning national identity.

As rival sisters, Venus and Serena Williams offer a case that dramatizes a nation once at war with itself. The emotional toll that their competition takes on them and their family conjures the costs of the epic civil strife central to the national heritage of the United States. That they can reconcile after each of their contests contributes to them serving as a compelling spectacle. In this chapter, I examine the wreckage that the Williams sisters inspire a nation to contend with as well as the hope they inspire.

Anarchic Women and All-American Girls in the Age of Late Capitalism

This chapter takes up representations of Venus and Serena Williams as icons manufactured in the late capitalist economy in order to evaluate black women's capacity to interact with and possibly alter their public representations. As athletes participating in the production of their own images, the Williams sisters must negotiate the ascendancy of the hyperreal as subjects, as opposed to objects, of commodified racial history. As a result, they function as a prism through which to examine the intersection of race and gender identity across the axis of national culture thus testing the elasticity of the boundaries of civic inclusion in this late capitalist moment. Using the Williams sisters as a case enables an assessment of the ways that globalization, media, and transnational capital have informed gender and race politics so that exceptionally talented black women athletes may re-write their public identities as anarchic women. Given the profit-driven ambitions of major corporate enterprises, this opening chapter argues that Venus and Serena Williams have transitioned from being anarchic figures to "All-American girls" in American popular culture.

As anarchic women, the Williams sisters function for the national community similar to the way pariah women function in the local communities within Toni Morrison's works of fiction. In a recent discussion framing *Love*, Morrison described the fascination that her female characters held for her:

> The idea of a wanton woman is something I have inserted into almost all of my books…An outlaw figure who is disallowed in the community because of her imagination or authority or status-that kind of anarchic figure has always fascinated me. And the benefits they bring with them,

> in spite of the fact that they are either dismissed or upbraided-something about their presence is constructive in the long run. (Houston 212-214)

While there are certainly women who figure prominently in the social and historical record because they espouse unpopular political ideology--like Ida B. Wells in the first half of the twentieth century and Angela Y. Davis during the late 1960s and 1970s--Morrison's outlaw is not necessarily such an advocate. Instead, she is more like the bandits--primitive rebels--Eric Hobsbawm describes who lack a social programme, but who have strong personalities, are self-reliant and whose actions often represent the "tensions of their society" (29). Thus, the pariah figures in Morrison's texts function as outlaws within their communities though they do not themselves claim to be renegades, nor does Morrison claim feminism for them.[2] Journalist Devin Friedman acknowledges the Williams sisters' early anarchic identity when he reports that they had been deemed haughty, reticent, cocky, and disrespectful within tennis circles and amongst many followers of the sport. At the start of their careers in the late nineties, these traits and judgments rendered them outsiders. Friedman writes:

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[2] For example, in a Salon.com interview (http://archive.salon.com/books/int/1998/02/cov_si_02int.html) Morrison responds to questions regarding the status of *Paradise* as a feminist novel and her personal views regarding writing such works:

Interviewer: "Paradise" has been called a "feminist" novel. Would you agree with that?

Morrison: Not at all. I would never write any "ist." I don't write "ist" novels.

Interviewer: Why distance oneself from feminism?

Morrison: In order to be as free as I possibly can, in my own imagination, I can't take positions that are closed. Everything I've ever done, in the writing world, has been to expand articulation, rather than to close it, to open doors, sometimes, not even closing the book -- leaving the endings open for reinterpretation, re-visitation, a little ambiguity. I detest and loathe [those categories]. I think it's off-putting to some readers, who may feel that I'm involved in writing some kind of feminist tract. I don't subscribe to patriarchy, and I don't think it should be substituted with matriarchy. I think it's a question of equitable access, and opening doors to all sorts of things.

> They didn't learn the game at a country club and later hang out with all the other girls at junior tournaments; the Williamses are black in a sport where practically no one else is black; they are flamboyant in a sport where almost no one else is flamboyant; they're muscular and powerful and compelling in a thousand different ways that tennis has never seen. What's made them such contentious characters, though, is that whenever tennis has deigned to invite them to be like everyone else[…]the sisters have always declined. (99)

Crossing the threshold of a privileged world contributed to their anarchic identity; refusing to allow the other players to determine how they would dress, speak, or generally negotiate the terms of their belonging underscored it. In that same article, Friedman writes that those once anarchic women are no longer outsiders. "They're the new tennis establishment," writes Friedman, "and everyone else is going to have to start being like them" (105). In viewing the Williams sisters' shifting status in popular global media, Friedman's appraisal should be taken seriously.

Anarchic Women in the Age of Girl Power

Feminist scholar Susan Douglas recognizes the "I'm a feminist but…" construction as the "main motto" projected in the media of "twentysomething" women. As Douglas understands this provisional identification, the speaker, a woman usually born sometime after 1975:

> supports some combination of equal pay for equal work; reproductive freedom for women; equal access to the same educational, professional, and financial opportunities as men; expanded child-care facilities for working parents; more humane maternity and paternity leave policies;

> marriages in which husbands cook dinner and empty the diaper pail; and an end to--or even a slowing--of our national epidemic of violence against women of all ages. It also means that the speaker shaves her legs, bathes regularly, does not want to be thought of as a man-hater, a ball-buster, a witch, or a shrew, and maybe even wears mascara, blush-on, and a bra. Most of all, it means that the possibility of having, inside you, a unified, coherent self that always believes the same things at the same time is virtually zero. (272-273)

In other words, media presentations of contemporary feminists offer representations of young feminists who embrace the platform and some of the gains of second wave feminist activism but reject caricatures of feminists as ugly, hairy, demanding bitches. This rejection in no way interrogates or critiques the validity of these constructions; instead, popular feminism generally sustains the vilification of second wave feminism by uncritically defining themselves against caricatures advanced in the media.

At the same time that media representations of feminism threatened the movement's integrity, a set of practices, expectations, and representations emerged in the media that were both appealing to women and very much indebted to feminism: "girl power." The Spice Girls, a commercially successful all-female British pop group founded in the nineties, popularized "girl power" as a slogan meant to convey rebelliousness and to promote the idea of a girl who thinks and acts independently.[3] Thus, this is a girl far

[3] Though the Spice Girls popularized the "girl power" slogan, the Riot Grrls movement of "young feminist women in underground rock" (see Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald, "Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution and Women in Independent Rock, in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture*, eds. Andrew Ross & Tricia Rose. New York: Routledge.), 25.) are also associated with the phrase.

less concerned with external appraisal and judges herself by criteria she establishes for herself.[4]

Second wave feminism may be credited with laying the groundwork for the idea of "girl power" since it challenged conventional beliefs about women's constitutional weakness and men's inherent strength. As Sherrie A. Inness explains:

> Feminism questioned the notion that women are 'naturally' not aggressive, incapable of handling the same challenges as men. Feminism also taught women to question the gender status quo. What emerged were women who pursued many different roles previously held almost exclusively by men. In the workplace, women demonstrated that they could be tough and aggressive. They became soldiers, police officers, fire fighters, and construction workers--all jobs that had been considered too rough for 'ladies.' (5)

Inness rightly includes Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendment Act as an important aspect of feminist agitation that cleared the terrain for "girl power." Though the act was designed to extend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include educational institutions, sport has become the most visible, and arguably the most contested, area of Title IX. The act reads: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (quoted in Ware 3). Title IX has provided increased opportunities for women to compete and thus increased the opportunities for women to exhibit strength and toughness.

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[4] This is important in light of John Berger's ideas about women and self-surveillance.

By the mid-1990s when "girl power" emerged, "female athletes," according to Donna Lupiano, then executive director of the Women's Sports Foundation, had become "not the exception, but the rule" (Nelson XVI). While the history of the implementation of Title IX has been troubled with concerns over harm done to minor men's sports and budget concerns, "girl power" highlighted the potential profits that could accrue in sports by concentrating on women and girls. In 1997, Teen Research Unlimited found that girls between the ages of 12 and 19 spent $60 billion.[5] In addition to the money that young girls spent on clothing, cosmetics, films and related merchandising their mothers were the target market for the 1996 Olympics and sports marketing associated with the Games as well as women's general athletic participation.

According to scholar David L. Andrews, NBC Sports chairman Dick Ebersol identified women as an important target audience for the 1996 Olympic Games. Ebersol reasoned that men could be counted on to watch the Games regardless of how they were packaged but women were an entirely different matter. In order to generate a higher profit, the '96 Games were packaged as a women's event. As Andrews notes:

> NBC's representational strategy for the actual coverage of the Atlanta Games involved manufacturing a stereotypically 'feminine' Olympic spectacle. In creating this prime-time 'Oprah Olympics', NBC manufactured its own Olympic reality centered around events deemed appropriate to female viewers, and infused with sentiment intended to resonate with the female psyche. According to production executives, NBC's conscious manipulation of the content and structure of Olympic reality 'was based on a scientific campaign to shape their broadcasts to a

[5] Nadya Labi, Jeanne McDowell, and Alice Park, "Girl Power," in *Time*, vol. 151 Issue 25 (6/29/98).

> feminine sensibility.' NBC's crude interpretation of its Olympic audience research findings […] [reduced] the complexities of consumer motivations and predispositions to a binary and essentialist model of gender norms and differences. (*Sport-Commerce* 60)

The strategy worked. The ratings for the Games surpassed the Barcelona Games and NBC secured a $70 million profit (64).

The commercialization of women through sports and in sports has made some women's sports advocates, enthusiasts, and scholars uncomfortable with wholesale claims of progress in the field. Historian Susan Ware quotes a former president of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women succinctly expressing the concern over the evolution of women's sports: "Must the woman's rights movement demand for our girls a share in the things that are wrong in sports today as well as a share in the rights in order to fully prove equality?" (26) Rather than women's sports and women's involvement in sports (i.e. as spectators) being its own entity and maybe even serving as an alternative model to men's participation, the fear is that it has become or is becoming a reflection of men's sports.

Women's sports have provided a fertile milieu for political battles concerning equality, identity, gender, homophobia, race, and belonging. In the continuing effort to take measure of women's opportunities in sport and its relationship to women's roles in the broader culture, the "girl power"/"tough girl" discourse is useful for thinking through the commercialization of sport, limited aspects of historical change in sport, representation of women and girls in sport, as well as gender equity in sport. However, it falls short as a conceptual tool in calling attention to a richer pallet of theoretical concerns involving racial difference, hierarchy, exclusion, citizenship, and belonging as

these ideas bring together sport and the concerns of the new global economy. Alone, the "girl power" as "tough girl" discourse leans on the celebratory and also relies on conventional notions of glamour, sexiness, and beauty to appeal to girls and women as consumers.[6]

The "girl power"/"tough girl" discourse works well as a conceptual tool with a view of women as anarchic. The anarchic helps to set in relief the deep disdain and hostility felt towards women who challenge systems of domination. The representation of tough girls in popular culture distorts the unpleasantness that agitation occasions. In discussing the "collision" between gender and race politics in Black America from the nineteenth century through the Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas hearings, feminist scholars Johnnetta Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall show that "perennial struggles of people under siege" often occasion frustration and rancor as opposed to the sexiness of Hollywood myth making concerning opposition (72). For this reason, making the "girl power" discourse the companion to the anarchic better serves the ambitions of demystifying oppositional politics while at the same time treating its seduction.

The courage that it takes to face a mighty foe or to confront the loneliness of maintaining an alternative point of view can appear attractive. Sexiness is the most readily available visual grammar for articulating the allure of resistance. This grammar works when the emphasis on resistance focuses on ends as opposed to the slow, often isolated process of raising questions, researching them, making an analysis, and mounting a critique. The media portrayal of "twenthysomething" women's view of feminism that Douglas discusses reflects such an emphasis on ends. As an analytic

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[6] Here, I agree with sociologist Michael A. Messner's skepticism towards regarding sportswomen's expressions of overt sexuality in advertising and magazines as an unproblematized example of third wave feminism. I will discuss these representation of sportswomen in more detail in Chapter 2. See Michael A. Messner, *Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 105.

category, the anarchic offers a more nuanced way of articulating the costs of contestation while maintaining a view of the seduction of oppositional politics and practices. The wanton, lusty, thus anarchic women that Morrison is so fond of in her fiction call attention to the relationship between sex, seduction, and literacy acting as the subtext of popular feminism;[7] *Paradise* provides the most obvious example of this.

Exclusion and Paradise

Paradise tells the story of two all-black towns, Haven and Ruby. Haven's founding occurred when 158 freedmen set out from Mississippi prompted by the *Herald* headline "Come Prepared or Not at All" (13). They took encouragement from feeling more than prepared for the freedom entailed in living from their own labor on their own land. Though lured into hope, they had misread the headline. Neither their work ethic nor their destiny amounted to sufficient currency for homesteading in the all black towns that had ostensibly made the call to "come prepared." The freedman lacked adequate money as well as the light skin that served as currency to reside there. The subtext of the original headline, the shadow narrative of desirability, emerges as a tale of color and coin that writes over the identity of modest, dark skinned blacks so that the "[s]mart, strong, and eager" (13) became "people who preferred saloons and crap games to homes, churches and schools" (14). Their recognition of how they were written and read was a point of irritation and confusion marking a critical moment in their history. Deeply scarred by their rebuff, they isolate themselves from light skinned blacks and reverse the hierarchy of preference so that their dark skin and bloodlines determines beauty and significance.

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[7] For Morrison's brief mention of "lust" see "Interview with Ann Koenen" in *Conversations with Toni Morrison.*

Ruby's founders were the progeny of Haven. Certain that their forefathers lived lives worthy of preservation, Ruby's elders were uncertain about how to translate the practices of necessity in an era of desire. So while they were given a model of founding a haven, they were anxious about sustaining it. Thus, Ruby's founders struggled to live out the values of their forefathers in the modern world. They did not know whether to cook over an open flame or in a gas oven; they wonder whether to use paper towels or rags (89). The success of their forefather's coupled with the inventions of the modern world altered the landscape of possibilities for how to live freely.

The figure of the female stranger embodies the town's fear of corruption. These anarchic women become critical figures for taking measure of modernity in black life and society. How they are acknowledged or ignored, tolerated or rebuked reveals Ruby's social character. The violent social character of Ruby is unprecedented compared to the tolerance shown anarchic women residing in black societies of necessity, as depicted in *Sula*. War, industrialization, and desegregation destabilized Ruby's founding mission to preserve their socially engineered haven from the impinging world. Ruby's founding fathers used the Convent women as scapegoats for their failure to curtail modernity. Hostile to change, they were intolerant of the women whose proximity reminded them of their failure to secure their boundaries against the encroaching world. Thus for them, there was nothing mundane about the stranger.

In addition to acknowledging the prevalence of anarchic women in her work, Morrison has also addressed the way that these figures are tropes for the relationship between black society in white America:

> There are several levels of the pariah figure working in my writing. The black community is a pariah community. Black people are pariahs. The

> civilization of black people that lives apart from but in juxtaposition to other civilizations is a pariah relationship. In fact, the concept of the black in this country is almost always one of the pariah. (Claudia Tate 168)

The role that anarchic women play in black society parallels the pariah status of black people in American society in general. Thus, as Roberta Rubenstein's close reading of the anarchic figures in Morrison's novels posits, they emblematize "different levels and forms of exclusion" (154).

Exclusion focuses the analysis of race, gender, history, space, place, and reading as primary themes in *Paradise*. Several critics read *Paradise* through the lens of nation and nationalism. Scholars such as Katrina Dalsgard, Ana Maria Fraile-Marcos, and Carola Hilfrich show Morrison sharing Homi Bhabha's skepticism over the way historians declare the objective rank of the nation against the simultaneous transformations occurring within culture. Concerning this flawed notion of a nation as a stable entity as opposed to one in a continual process of becoming, Eric Hobsbawm writes that "we are trying to fit historically novel, merging, changing and, even today, far from universal entities into a framework of permanence and universality" (Nations 6). As Hilfrich and Dalsgard each place *Paradise* within this discussion, they mark Ruby's efforts to secure their history as descendants of Haven as representative. One can add to this Ruby's banning together as brothers to secure itself against a perceived foe, a willingness to kill for their ideas as evidence of what Benedict Anderson describes as unique about the idea of nationalism.

Candice M. Jenkins critically re-examines *Paradise* scholarship that addresses this broader theme of exclusion through the intraracial politics at work in the novel's

contiguous communities. According to her analysis, the work of Dalsgard and Fraile-Marcos becomes representative of an approach to *Paradise* that emphasizes the broader interracial historical narrative informing the exclusionary practices and hostility towards racial difference readily apparent among the town's founding families and their descendants. Though Jenkins accepts such historical awareness, her analysis calls attention to the problematic way that scholarship on the novel that addresses itself to the way that "(African) American exceptionalism" parodies American exceptionalism "re-centers whiteness while discussing a text from which representations of whiteness have largely been excluded" (274). Jenkins's work frustrates such privileging by examining the subject of racial authenticity through the intraracial politics of black society and through black nationalist discourse.

Jenkins's focus on black nationalist discourse enables a sustained engagement with the "complementary definitions of black nationalism" advanced by traditional urban, male identified sites and from more black feminist oriented positions thereby enriching the way that history may be understood in *Paradise* (Gilroy 212). Thus while Peter Widdowson's very thorough investigation of the novel takes up Morrison's attention to the grand themes, events, and critical moments presented in American history--for example, the Seven Years War, the Declaration of Independence, the American Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, Reconstruction, World War I, World War II, Vietnam, the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.--he does not focus his analysis so that black Americans are seen struggling with one another over the significance of these events; Jenkins's emphasis on black cultural nationalism, on the other hand, extends Susan Willis's contention that the "temporal focus" of Morrison's earliest novels "pinpoints strategic moments in black American history

during which social and cultural forms underwent disruption and transformation," to include *Paradise* (85). Given this focus, black nationalist politics and discourse at work in *Paradise* may be linked to a broader historical trajectory that privileges black nationalism over American nationalism. In the discussion that follows, I discuss some of the scholarship pertaining to black nationalism in order to establish the historical, political, and theoretical terms that play into reading *Paradise* through the lens of black nationalism.

Many scholars agree that the development of a nationalist consciousness relates in some way to land, territory, or more generally, space. The seizure of land, the denial of space, and the atrocities committed over territory facilitates collective discontent from ethnic minorities who simultaneously resist assimilation into the majority nationalist contingent. Will Kymlicka posits that people who have been colonized, conquered, or whose territory has been annexed often develop a distinct nationalist consciousness, even though they may be free to assimilate (132). Thus, there is an intimate relationship between people and space that Isiah Berlin describes as a *cry for room*.

While the formation of a collective nationalist consciousness characterized in part by discontent is connected to space, community can still emerge amongst those territorially dispersed. Kai Nielsen asserts that nations do mark "natural kinds" and can in fact refer to, nonterritorial nation--in other words, nations in a diaspora (122); black nationalism has historically existed as such an expression. Black nationalism, particularly as it pertains to U.S history, recognizes the community of black and brown people worldwide. Such recognition has initiated many attempts to build coalitions amongst the world's populations of color as well as to learn from and support their struggles for liberation. According to William Van Deburg, a common denominator of these (global)

nationalistic expressions is the high value placed on self-definition and self-determination. He also contends that essential groundwork for the development of black nationalist thought was laid whenever an unwilling exile began to (1) question then reject their presumed status and inferiority, (2) recognize the need for intraracial solidarity, (3) proclaim intellectual independence, (4) employ shared experiences with bondage, caste, and folk culture to shape countervisions of the racial future.

The African continent has functioned as a primary site of black nationalist engagement. Within black nationalist discourse Africa's importance derives from the understanding of the continent as the original site of black conception and displacement. Thus Africa comes to represent the birth mother and initial homescape. Furthermore, amidst the derogation of the continent and African ways of living, intellectual, and global contributions black nationalist leaders and proponents attempted some engagement with Africa through leadership, occupancy, study, and style.

Africa facilitates more than a sense of home and style though; it also marks a crucial difference between ethnic minorities and ethnic nationalists. For as Nielsen writes, "A nation as I am using the term, must 'be in aspiration (if not in fact) a political community.' It must aspire to be self-governing, to in some way control 'a chunk of the earth's surface' (122)." Being a nationalist then, requires territorial aspirations and the desire to be self-determining. Realizing nationalist aims with respect to Africa have differed throughout history. In the nineteenth century, for example, Martin Delany encouraged emigration to Africa as a way to "achieve meaningful freedom and to elevate their status" (Adeleke 47). In the twentieth century, Marcus Garvey's belief that "Africa should be for the black people of the world" (Stein 108) also expressed black people's desire for land and independence from white rule and dominance.

The desire to control one's land and to define one's own existence was not simply limited to reclaiming Africa. The building of black communities and towns historically indicates such a mission. The Nation of Islam's quest for self-determinancy and self definition in a U.S. context through the establishment of a black republic was deterred by the government's reluctance to concede U.S. territory. In lieu of being given this space, The Nation developed their own businesses, schools, rules of decorum, and dietary practices.

A great deal of dissension has historically surrounded black people's ambitions to control their own space. No example proves this better than the toppling of the Congress of African People's (CAP) plan for urban renewal in the early 1970s. Under the leadership of Imamu Amiri Baraka, CAP established a Project Area Committee (PAC) in Newark, New Jersey, that sought to transform a nearly 100-acre neighborhood. Unlike traditional urban renewal which functioned as an extension of white supremacy and thus the political, social, and economic control of black people and black neighborhoods, PAC understood itself as an organization capable of transforming the community for the betterment of black people socially, economically, and politically. The original plans for NJR-32--a government designated site for urban renewal--intended plans for comfortable and economically feasible housing for large low income families, an elderly complex, medical center, and educational facilities to supply the needs of the community. Unfortunately, governmental bureaucracy delayed the realization of these efforts. With the suspension of this project, CAP focused its efforts on a smaller housing project for approximately 200 families. The Kawaida Towers, like the larger NJR-32 project, incorporated cultural and artistic areas as well as social services, like day care, for its intended residents, this project was also met with resistance. White civil service workers

(off duty police officers), their wives, and other supporters were among the first to protest the housing development. After larger court battles regarding the zoning of the project brought to court by political leaders in the Italian community, the physical assault of black laborers on the project, and the larger bureaucratic entanglements led to the dismantling of the project.[8]

Of the critiques that have emerged concerning black nationalism, Tunde Adeleke's examination in *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* is one of the most surprising. The civilizing mission that reflected the imperialist ambitions of Europeans serves as the theoretical center of *UnAfrican Americans*. Europeans armed with the belief that their culture and religion were historically superior and that their socio-economic and political thriving evidenced this, they sought to spread their influence to the entire African continent. Adeleke's work argues that European imperialist ambitions affected the political consciousness of an American contingent widely regarded as its polar opposite--black nationalists. He asserts that the men that many scholars cast as the pioneers of Pan-Africanism, men like Martin Delany, Alexander Crummell, and Henry McNeal Turner, were so affected by the question of identity that their ambivalence engendered a political view of Africa that supported the imperialist aims of Europeans. While Adeleke would agree that these men held a strong commitment to Africa, he also maintains that they held an even stronger commitment to "becoming fully and beneficially American" (6). The strength of this attachment thus culminated in the support of European colonial endeavors in Africa.

Adeleke presents a very compelling case for the belief in European superiority held by Delany, Crummell, and Turner and their acceptance of the colonialist agenda.

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[8] See Komozi Woodard. *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999. 219-254.

For example, he uses documents attesting to Turner's acceptance of Western values wherein Turner states that, "the Negro was brought to this country in the providence of God to a heaven permitted, if not a divine-sanctioned manual laboring school, that he might have direct contact with 'the mightiest race that ever trod the face of the globe'" (106). Adeleke explains that early black nationalists appropriated the white American construction of slavery as a valuable and effective institution because of its civilizing potential. Doing so created the necessary distinction between black Africans and black Americans therefore allowing black Americans to serve as civilizing colonial agents in Africa.

There are two peak periods of black nationalist activity: 1.) Post WWI Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and 2.) Black Power from the mid-1960s-1970s. While the scholarship on *Paradise* focuses centrally on the second peak period, the novel's present tense occurs in 1976, the first black nationalist peak greatly informs the cultural mindset of the latter period and should be set forth.

Deborah Gray White's attention to the new era of American political culture centers on the significance of Marcus Garvey and his organization, UNIA, for the way that it impacted black consciousness and organizational politics. While Garvey's advancement of black pride inaugurated new ideas about beauty, it also advanced patriarchal ideas about masculinity. The UNIA's idea of redeemed black masculinity saw black men as breadwinners who could provide for black women. According to this calculus, once freed from wage labor, black women could then take care of their own families. The UNIA did not understand taking care of one's own family as the demanding and often under-appreciated work that it could be, even if it is one's own home. White posits that the life that the UNIA imagined for black women was at odds

with the independent, glamorous, educated New Woman that emerged during that era. Instead of the liberation that the era of the New Woman imagined, White contends that Garvey and the UNIA saw the future of black women tied to "the promise of protection, providership, and the pedestal" (122).

Attention to the UNIA is significant for a discussion of black nationalist discourse in *Paradise* because of Garvey's ideas concerning racial purity. According to White, "[f]or Garveyites, racial purity was the bedrock of the black nation" (122). From this perspective, mixed race folk threatened the mission of attaining a separate nation. Garveyite attitudes concerning racial purity challenged the leadership of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as well as the National Association of Colored Women in that they were organizations primarily represented by light-skinned African Americans.

As mentioned earlier, Garvey's ideas about beauty influenced black consciousness. His criticism of the moral taint of miscegenation that accompanied light-skin extended to an appraisal of it as a marker of beauty. Garvey advanced representations of dark-skinned women as paragons of beauty and virtue. Such attitudes about beauty and morality were situated in a context wherein Victorian ideas about virtue were being challenged in black and white America through consumer culture and in blues lyrics.

Drawing on the logic of Jenkins's reading of *Paradise*, Garveyite views about racial purity and beauty should play a critical role in examinations of the functioning of intraracial politics in the novel. The history of black nationalism also should be an important lens for examining patriarchy in the work. The most dominant readings, of which Dalsgard's is most representative, interrogates patriarchy through the lens of

"(African) American exceptionalism." Jenkins's work exemplifies the privileging of black nationalism.

Hilfrich takes the anarchic women residing in the convent as important for re-imagining alternative covenants; Dalsgard corroborates this view. For Dalsgard in particular, the Convent women counter Ruby's "(African) American exceptionalist" view of themselves as examples of God's favor. Sharing with the master narrative of America that cast itself in this role, Ruby's founding myth refuses to acknowledge the violence essential to its identity in order to see itself as pure. The Convent, while not an embodiment of paradise, approaches this ideal because of its ability to adapt to the needs of its occupants rather than force them into some transhistorical definition if itself.

Morrison's anarchic women also set in relief the representation of female desire as an enduring threat to the security of national borders. In identifying the Convent women as "bodacious black Eves unredeemed by Mary" Morrison shows the primacy of interpreting the nation through the lens of morality (18). Also important to acknowledge is the way that the story of Adam and Eve has shifted throughout the centuries. The use to which this story has been put greatly informs these shifts. As Elaine Pagels contends "moral choices often are political choices. An act of religious affirmation is always, in some sense, a practical and consequential act" (xxviii). In Ruby's case, the Convent women provide them with a way to interpret their misfortunes:

> Outrages that had been accumulating all along took shape as evidence. A mother was knocked down the stairs by her cold-eyed daughter. Four damaged infants were born in one family. Daughters refused to get out of bed. Brides disappeared on their honeymoons. Two brothers shot each other on New Year's Day. Trips to Demby for VD shots common.

> And what went on at the Oven these days was not to be believed [...]. The proof that had been collecting since the terrible discovery in the spring could not be denied: the one thing that connected all these catastrophes was in the Convent. And in the Convent were those women. (11)

For the men of Ruby, the Convent women gave them a way of explaining moral laxness and general imperfection without suffering individual or communal blame. As descendants of Eve, the Convent women's guilt is linked to their (sexual) appetites.

Ms. Sosa Meets Mrs. Parks

In *Paradise* the seduction of reading-understood as the beckoning, siren like pull of literacy-emerges prominently in the history of rejection and dissention within Haven and Ruby; limited literacy contributes to the violence directed at the Convent women. Women are not simply victims of male illiteracy however, but have their own responses to the lure of literacy. Thus, when Mavis saw Connie shelling pecans she, "was reminded of her sixth-grade teacher opening a book: lifting the corner of the binding, stroking the edge to touch the bookmark, caressing the page, letting the tips of her fingers trail down the lines of print. The melty-thigh feeling she got watching her (42)." Mavis's seduction occurred as a result of observing the thorough tactile attention her teacher gave every aspect of the printed page. She was moved to feel the erotic sensation she witnessed through the teacher's lingering, attentive fingers *lift*, *stroke*, and *caress* the book.

Mavis's seduction sets in relief the relationship between being anarchic and expressing desire. Hunger tropes desire in *Paradise*. The novel, then, cites a long tradition in Western letters and popular interpretation that understands the story of Adam and Eve's disobedience of God's instruction to avoid eating from the Tree of Knowledge as

a parable about hunger and desire--particularly the dangers of woman's appetite. Expulsion from paradise, their fall from grace, is the ultimate consequence of choosing against the forbidden. Morrison's *Paradise* uses the symbol of Eve as the prototypical pariah, the paradigmatic temptress to question the eternal disgrace of woman's desires.

Like the character Sula, the anarchic women in *Paradise* are regarded as indiscriminately wanton. Testifying to their belief that Sula slept with white men best exemplifies the townspeople's position on her criminality. In *Paradise* the recklessness of racial transgression extended to light skinned blacks. Thus, Deacon's affair with Consolata threatened the purity of their bloodlines. In this case, Connie's light skin and light green eyes are a threatening force and make her anarchic. Certainly she and Deacon's affair is important as a prism for perceiving racial dynamics within Black culture, but perhaps more important for the purposes of engaging the relationship between anarchic women and the nation is that the affair dares to imagine the sexual desires of a respectable black woman at mid-century.

Unlike Mavis, Gigi, Pallas, or Seneca, Connie's residency at the Convent was purposeful and agreeable. Connie was grateful to the nuns who abducted her from the sexual assault she experienced as a child. Conceiving her abduction as a rescue (223), Consolata believed that she was taken from a life of barely conceivable possibilities to one with numerous advantages: clean water, conveniently prepared food, the ability to send messages directly to heaven using Latin, and maternal care and attention (224-225). Because she had been raped, Connie was not a virgin but believed that she had been redeemed through the rituals, customs, prayers and practices of Catholicism. Being restored to grace, however, was accompanied by a mandate to eliminate desire. Thus, Connie was instructed to purify her home, which had once belonged to embezzlers, by

eliminating its offending content: "Consolata's first tasks were to smash offending marble figures and tend bonfires of books, crossing herself when naked lovers blew out of the fire and had to be chased back to the flame" (225). Upon encountering Deacon in 1954, Connie learned that desire was not so neatly purged.

1954 is a pivotal year in American history marking the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown versus the Board of Education* that determined separate but equal public facilities inherently unequal. Thus, Connie's secular enrapture intersected with the year marking the passage of legislation that would precipitate the modern civil rights movement. The co-mingling of black women's sexual longing and the civil rights movement presents an unfamiliar representation of this period. The iconic choices of this era sought to undermine the prevailing representation of *theblackfemalebody* as hypersexed. The choice of Mrs. Parks's act of public defiance as the symbol for protesting Jim Crow public transportation laws best exemplifies this attempt; it also reveals a conservatism at the root of this protest tradition.

A promising defendant at first emerged when fifteen-year-old Claudette Colvin refused to relinquish her seat to white passengers on March 2, 1955. Support was initially galvanized in her defense. Colvin's attorneys viewed hers as an exemplary test case from which to negotiate Jim Crow seating on Montgomery's buses. They would use the charges of minor assault, disorderly conduct, and violating the segregation law to make a federal appeal. This plan was nullified, however, when Judge Eugene Carter dismissed the segregation charge as well as the disorderly conduct charge. The court found Colvin guilty of the only remaining charge of assault, and required her parents to pay a fine. As Douglas Brinkley straightforwardly states, no bus boycott would emerge from Colvin's case because many conservative Blacks found the unmarried, pregnant teen with

reputedly bad manners an impossible defendant (80). As Rosa Parks later noted, "if the white press got a hold of that information [on Colvin], they would have [had] a field day." Continuing, she said, "they'd call her a bad girl, and her case wouldn't have [had] a chance. So the decision was made to wait until we had a plaintiff who was more upstanding before we went ahead and invested any more time, effort, and money" (Brinkley 90). Parks would become the model defendant, a living testimony to the worthiness of civic inclusion.

Reared as the daughter of nuns, devoted to the traditions of the Catholic Church, and versed in the language used to communicate directly to heaven, Consolata tried to build a life worthy of her redemption. Like the prevailing representation of Mrs. Parks, Consolata appeared clean, safe, and refined. Upon meeting Deacon however, Consolata's appetite expanded thus showing her to be a less likely descendant of Mary and a more likely descendant of Eve, a gobbler of desire. On what would be their final night together, Consolata bit Deacon's lip and licked his blood thus appearing to eat him as if his was the transubstantiated body of Christ. The narrator marks this as an intellectual transgression rather than a moral failing; Consolata's "gobble-gobble love" was a "simple mindless transfer. From Christ, to whom one gave total surrender and then swallowed the idea of His flesh, to a living man" (240). Consolata's move to consume Deacon was a mistake rather than a wild, indiscriminately gluttonous attempt to devour human, but particularly male, flesh.

Through Consolata's sexual relationship with Deacon, through her love of Mary Magna, and through the eventual loss of them both she decides on the relevancy, the significance, indeed the validity of human flesh as a factor in living a meaningful life. In opposition to the necessary devaluation of the body for her Christian redemption,

Consolata concludes that the soul's glory is too costly if it forsakes the needs of the body. She calls for a reconciliation of spirit and flesh; a reconciliation that also joins together Eve and Mary. Like the division of the soul and the body, Eve and Mary, Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks one subject is embraced while the other is despised. But Consolata finds this divide unreasonable. Thus, in speaking to the women she has brought together for a meal of food and insight, she tells them to "[n]ever break them in two. Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary's mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve" (263). These words would begin "the curative" process (Hilfrich 336) for the women who would start to make peace with their past selves through the compassionate witnesses they became for each other.

Scholar Tricia Rose's most recent work concerning black women's sexual lives suggests that the importance of serving as compassionate witnesses emerges in light of the stereotypes and myths that frame black women and men's sexuality in the broader culture. Given these overarching constructions of black women as lewd and lascivious and black men as sexually aggressive, she contends that black women are concerned with protecting themselves and their partners from the pitfalls occasioned by being "misseen and misheard" (5). While the Convent women were able to reconcile with their past selves and find compassion for one another, the larger community of men could only lay to rest their dis-ease with the Convent women through violence.

The anarchic women in Toni Morrison's novels appear brave, confident, and resourceful. While such traits would typically make such women likeable, in their communities anarchic women are often tolerated but seldom liked. In fact, the desires that make such women appear so likeable to young girls who consume their representations and style themselves after them are potential sites of violence in

Morrison's work. Using the anarchic as a frame for interrogating female athletes in late capitalism maintains the urgency of the dangers accompanying perceived threats to systems of domination that the "girl power" discourse masks. Moreover, given the centrality of boundaries, community, and belonging to discussions of globalization, the anarchic woman offers a fitting conceptual lens through which to regard contemporary female athletes and to take measure of the character of the nation-state they represent in their contests.

Anarchic Women versus the All-American Girl

The careers of Chris Evert, Martina Navratilova, and Zina Garrisson illustrate the historical unfolding of the anarchic figure in women's tennis since the Open era, the period beginning in 1968 when professional players were able to compete on the tour with amateurs and make a living from their performance. An examination of their careers, their representation in the media and their endorsement deals reveal the gradients of repulsion constitutive of anarchic womanhood.

One vector of repulsion situates all sportswomen in opposition to appropriate standards of femininity. To this end, the "athletic girl" as a representation of "modern womanhood" at the beginning of the twentieth century represents the extent to which all sportswomen are anarchic. "Athletic girls," according to Susan Cahn, "stood on the borderline between new feminine ideals and customary notions of manly sport, symbolizing both the possibilities and dangers of the New Woman's daring disregard for traditional gender arrangements" (8). During the post-World War II years, the more explicit concern over sportswomen's sexuality set the stage for the play of femininity to distinguish anarchic women as a group. Thus, heterosexual sportswomen, or sportswomen who were perceived to be heterosexual, were set against lesbian athletes.

As anarchic women, lesbian athletes represent figures of dismay precisely because they challenge established boundaries and invent uncharted space for women. As Cahn writes:

> Athletically inclined lesbians, in particular, found that the world of women's sport offered possibilities for self-expression and social life despite the homosexual stigma that beset women's athletics. While the contemptible stereotype of the 'mannish lesbian athlete' publicly condemned the female athlete's gender and sexual transgressions, the existence of this caricatured figure did not prevent gay women from generating an alternative set of affirmative meanings and experiences from within the culture of sport. (185)

The penalty for defying conventional gender boundaries pivots around vilification and estrangement. Lesbian athletes are vilified as ugly, masculine brutes. This denial of their womanhood and physical beauty estranges them from public praise and corporate endorsements.

Having access to femininity through their sexuality, heterosexual sportswomen can alleviate the stresses of marginality accompanying the mere suspicion that they are homosexual. In discussing the experiences that sportswomen share with people from marginalized groups, Festle writes that:

> So long deprived of cultural acceptance and positive publicity, they worry considerably about the image being presented of anyone from the same group. Because they feel it reflects upon them personally, they cringe when it seems the media focus not on the virtuous and hard-working

> members of the oppressed group, but on the one exception who happens to fulfill the worst, or most stereotypical, characteristics. (xxii)

The "All-American girl" is a construction and a performance that sportswomen will deploy to show that they are feminine, nice, friendly, warm, and modest. Festle refers to the attempt to "compensate for/counter the image that has been forced upon" sportswomen as "apologetic behavior" (xxii).

Tennis great Chris Evert represents the "All-American girl" during a critical period of the Open era. As Zina Garrison writes in her autobiography, the "All-American girl" was "someone who seemed incapable of bad thoughts or deeds" (92). This image, as Mary Jo Festle contends, comforted tennis fans and spectators who were anxious about the sexuality of women athletes (235). Given that the press supported Evert's deployment of the "apologetic" early in her career, they continued to maintain the "All-American girl" mystique in photographs they selected of her throughout her years on the tour. According to Garrison, Evert was "portrayed as an untouchable, unbeatable, perfect goddess" (92).Photographers were not, however, as careful about Garrison's image as she writes: "the photographers seemed to get me with my legs going in opposite directions or my tongue hanging out" (92). The stories told in the press about Evert complemented the favorable photographs. "I've never read an article about Chris losing a match because she choked or 'tanked,'" Garrison writes, adding, "[e]very Chris Evert story I've seen was written with a positive spin, a pro-Evert setup" (92). Garrison understands racial markings as complements to the "All-American girl" construct as she writes that Evert's being "blonde and blue-eyed didn't hurt" the dominant representation of her as forever good and innocent (92).

In her examination of the compelling rivalry between Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova, sportswriter Johnetta Howard confirms Garrison's construction of Evert's public image. According to Howard, Evert's apparent femininity and grace, her seemingly wholesome family along with her obvious athletic acumen were comforting to the public because she counterbalanced the strident politics of second wave feminist activism comprising the backdrop of her emergence (74). Evert was also revolutionary, in Howard's estimation, because she became a model for feminist principals even as she promoted a traditionally feminine persona. She writes:

> Part of her appeal was her way of seeming everything to everybody. She was both the antidote to big-mouthed feminists and the personification of the feminist dream of the career woman who could have it all. Athletically, if not yet politically, Evert epitomized one of [Billie Jean] King's arguments: the dea that a girl, given the same encouragement and resources as a boy, was equally capable of great achievements. But Evert also showed that a traditionally feminine woman could be a sports champion. (77)

Evert's revolutionary presence also demarcated the terms for being an insider and thus who could experience media and fan support as well as consideration for being a worthy champion and national representative. To this end, Navratilova's image was the foil of Evert's.

Navratilova wanted the "public affection, and sense of community" that Evert experienced and felt great personal anguish over not being embraced (141). More than Navratilova's communist roots, her sexual orientation rendered her anarchic. The vice grip that heterosexism holds on definitions of femininity would prevent any attempt

Navratilova could ever make to project the image of the "All-American girl" once she did gain U.S. citizenship. Rather than the safe model of the "girl-next-door," lesbian players are vilified as locker room menaces who seduce young, naïve girls into homosexual affairs.[9]

Though Navratilova trained hard, lost weight, built muscle and subsequently improved her tennis game, she was not showered with media praise or fan support. They rejected her hard work and determination as corroborating an American belief in the Protestant work ethic. Reporters questioned Navratilova about steroid use and journalists wrote stories suggesting that she was becoming a machine who was becoming impossible for other women to beat (Festle 243). The myths of American self-making were unavailable to Navratilova because of her sexuality as well as the way her muscular body seemed to corroborate the heterosexism that placed lesbians outside of femininity. Instead of Navratilova's serious approach to training and the improved performance resulting from it being applauded for advancing the game, Cahn contends that Navratilova's training regimen, her body, and her dominance put her "at odds with, and not within, the women's tennis circuit" (2).

Though Evert profited handsomely from her "girl-next-door" image, Navratilova' s profits are comparatively linked to losses, though she scored lucrative endorsement deals with Computerland, Vuarnet, Porsche and tennis equipment companies (Festle 241). It is important to point out that while Navratilova did not have the endorsements that Evert did, she certainly had them and as a result, Navratilova

[9] When Marilyn Barnett, the woman Billie Jean King had a romantic relationship with, sued King for alimony, King defended herself in the press against the mistake of having an extramarital affair though she was separated from her husband. King admitted to the relationship and battled against one of the biggest stereotypes of women athletes at the same time. In the aftermath of having her personal life exposed, the *New York Post* reported that concerned parents posted "shower guards" in the locker room to shield their daughters from the seduction of lesbians. King also wondered whether she would be discouraged from working with junior players given these stereotypes. See Festle, *Playing Nice*, 237.

could live as a professional athlete. Perhaps her status as a naturalized citizen signaled a desire for America that mollified those who would typically reject her. In expressing this desire, those who knew Navratilova found her charming. The seemingly innocent and naïve way in which she explored the new opportunities in fashion, food, and fun explained Navratilova's appeal. Zina Garrison, an African American player on the tour, had a very different experience than Navratilova. There was no public narrative that might ascribe charm to her; she did not have any lucrative deals. Though Garrison had been ranked among the top twelve players for seven years, from 1982-1990, she did not have a major clothing or shoe contract (Garrison 90). Race was the salient factor determining her exclusion. For instance, take *Sports Illustrated's* report on Pony's controversial decision not to renew Garrison's contract in favor of promoting white players:

> Pony had Garrison under contract for a while, but chose not to renew the deal. John Wilkerson, who coaches Garrison and [Lori] McNeil, told *Tennis Week* that Pony officials 'said Zina didn't project what they wanted. They said they were looking for a blonde, blue-eyed white girl.' Wilkerson concedes that because the tennis market is predominantly white, Pony may have valid economic reasons for such decisions, but he also says the companies could 'push' black players effectively if they tried. Pony officials say tight budgets, not race, caused them to cut their ties to Garrison. The company is spending its money on a Golden Girl concept featuring a white player, body-suit-clad Anne White, who is ranked No. 46 in the world. (Garrison 91)

While Garrison holds out that her failure to win a major grand slam contributed to her marketability, this fails to explain Pony's choice of Anne White for their campaign.

Further insults in Garrison's career include the lack of endorsements she earned in Houston, her hometown, compared to Warren Moon. As the black quarterback for the Houston Oilers, Moon received numerous endorsements throughout the city. In addition to hometown rejection, the people supposedly working for Garrison rebuked her. In reporting of her agent's colleague who confronted her after she refused a proposal that was too low, Garrison writes, "Who do you think you are," he yelled, "Michael Jordan? How dare you ask for that kind of money?" (94) Black women in other sports competing at the top of their game have similar experiences concerning endorsements. "Even after gaining substantial media recognition," Cahn notes that, "black Olympians who won multiple medals in 1984 and 1988 earned far less in product endorsements, commercial rewards, or lasting popularity than did successful white athletes like gymnast Mary Lou Retton and runner Mary Decker Slaney" (270).

Though whiteness as race is absent in Festle's and Howard's discussion of Evert and Navratilova, it is an essential facet of their identities comprising the gradients of an anarchic identity distinguishing them from black women players who represent the farthest extreme of an anarchic identity. Juxtaposing the image of the "All-American girl" against the figure of the anarchic woman as a Morrisonian construction focuses attention on matters of race and nation thus enabling a fuller exploration into the unique experiences of African American women as pariahs in tennis that reflects their position within the U.S. nation-state. Race prohibits black women from deploying the script of the "All-American girl" as apologetic behavior deployed to maintain normative ideas about gender. The "All-American girl" functions as a redeeming discourse that, while

problematic, provides white, heterosexual women with the means to construct an identity that recuperates their right to belong. As the case of Chris Evert shows, such belonging translates into positive press, fan support, and lucrative endorsements. The script of the "All-American girl" captures the way that black women mark the vanishing point between constructions of race and gender that dominate cultural perceptions. Thus, the "All-American girl" reflects the athletic version of "madonna-hood" that legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw notes within a legal context deployed to create plausible narratives of white women's sexual innocence. Thus, when sportswomen are members of racially marginalized groups they are simply anarchic.

The "All-American girl" has implied an insider status that black sportswomen by virtue of race and gender have not held within the U.S. White sportswomen can gain access to this idea even if they are not American. Take Swiss player Martina Hingis. In his provocative essay on Hingis, Michael Giardina contends that her representation is "'mapped' onto the legacy and media representations of Chris Evert" (211). Though named after Martina Navratilova, Giardina posits that through the strong associations to Evert, Hingis is "linked to ideas of femininity, grace, and success" (212). Giardina explains that this association links her to an "(American) sporting subculture" and to the representation of "traditional American values (read: heteronormative)" that Evert represented (212). As Giardina explains, Hingis's status as a foreigner is unimportant to her representation of American qualities and values. She marks "flexible citizenship," the ability to adapt one's self to meet the needs and demands of the new global economy. To this end, Hingis "is able to manipulate images of both the European sophisticate and the empowered postfeminist woman" that has come about through the emergence of the "Girl Power!" discourse" (212). Since Hingis's body is malleable and can be re-written to

suit the local culture and tastes of places around the world, Giardina deems her an "exemplar of transnational celebrity" (202).

For Giardina Venus and Serena Williams's strong American identity prevents them from being exemplary flexible citizens. "While Venus and Serena Williams are recognized throughout the world as star performers," writes Giardina, "they are understood primarily through American narratives and celebrity identity that marks them as Americans" (207). This remark begs consideration. What "American narratives and celebrity identity" is he referring to if not that of the "All-American girl"? Do the Williams sisters have access to these discourses in this moment in late capitalism?

Anarchic Women as All-American Girls?

The "strong American identity" that Giardina maps onto the Williams sisters certainly works when read through the lens of race. Venus and Serena Williams's unfolding representation as tennis stars is narrated through American racial narratives. In Nancy E. Spencer's essay on Venus Williams and racism in tennis, she contends that race is emphasized in the stories about the Williams sisters rise to fame and fortune. As the story goes, Venus and Serena Williams entered the traditionally wealthy, white, elite world of professional tennis as race and class misfits. Unlike the safe, posh country clubs that served as the training ground for many of their talented peers, the Williams sisters learned the game on cracked asphalt, debris riddled public courts in Compton, California, a distressed, inner-city in south central Los Angeles. They report of having to rid the courts of the drug paraphernalia and wine bottles dotting the landscape before they could even begin practicing. Their father, Richard Williams, envisioned tennis as his daughters' passports out of these ghetto surroundings.

Williams was inspired to have his daughters play tennis after watching Virginia Ruzici win a $30,000 cash prize upon winning a single tournament. Venus and Serena were not even born when Williams set out to realize his vision for the family. As he disciplined his knowledge of the sport by reading books and watching instructional videos, his wife, Oracene Williams, played tennis while pregnant with both Venus and Serena (presumably to impress the sport on them as they grew in the womb through a kind of osmosis). The three oldest girls Yetunde, Lynn, and Lyndrea were Richard Williams's earliest recruits. Yetunda and Lynn were not interested in building a professional career and Lyndrea's prospects were dashed when she injured herself in college. Venus and Serena both took to the sport and excelled.

The sisters each earned number one rankings in Southern California in their respective age categories when Venus was 12 and Serena was 10. In an unprecedented move, Oracene and Richard Williams relocated the family to Florida and removed them from junior tournament play. They wanted their girls to focus on disciplining their faith as Jehovah's Witnesses, nurturing their family bonds, securing their educations and only then practicing their tennis. Though Richard and Oracene Williams's methods were unconventional, as the story goes, their daughters excelled upon turning professional.

In 1997, three years after turning pro, Venus became the first unseeded player since 1978 to make it to the finals at the U.S. Open. That same year saw the start of Serena's notable professional career: she was the lowest ranked player to defeat two top ten players in one tournament (43-44). Their successes continued. In 1999, Serena became the first African American woman since Althea Gibson's 1958 U.S. Open win to take the title and the first African American since 1975 to win a grand slam tournament. She shared the spotlight with her sister in the winner's circle when together they won the

doubles title. In 2000, Venus became the first African American woman since Gibson to win Wimbledon, she followed her sister's win at the U.S. Open, and she won a gold medal at the Olympics and shared gold with Serena with a doubles win. 2002 was Serena's turn to re-claim the spotlight. In that year she won the French Open, Wimbledon, and the U.S. Open. When she won the Australian Open in 2003 the press followed Serena's lead in dubbing her four consecutive slam titles the "Serena Slam." She bested her sister in the finals of each victory.

Spencer astutely notes a very important oversight in this story of the Williams sisters' ascension. In 1995, Reebok signed Venus to what was reportedly a $12 million dollar contract after she competed in only one tournament (Spencer 93). The money afforded the family "a house in an affluent West Palm Beach resort" (Leand quoted in Spencer 93) where they built "two tennis courts in their backyard" (Spencer 93). While this would appear to be a radical leap from Compton, the Williams sisters had been acclimated to this environment while enrolled at Rick Macci's Tennis Academy at the Grenelefe Resort in Florida. Enrollment typically costs "$2,200 a month for room, board, tennis instruction, and transportation to and from local public schools" though the fee was waived for Venus and Serena (Spencer 91). While enrolled at the Academy between 1991-1995 the Williams sisters reportedly worked with Macci for "five or six hours a day, six days a week" (Spencer 98). In light of this early move from Compton and the privileged experiences the sisters earned, Spencer asserts that "it is misleading to suggest that the route from ghetto to Grand Slam finals is a direct route" (98). Despite the inaccuracy of this story however, it stands as the dominant public narrative of the Williams sisters climb to success.

The fact that the Williams sisters' public persona metonymically referenced the Compton courts makes it more astounding that they have been able to alter their public personas. Unlike Zina Garrison who found it impossible to adopt the image of the "All-American girl," the conditions of late capitalism have created the possibility for this transformation. The Williams sisters' status as corporate icons marks a point along a trajectory of athletes in late capitalism that begins with Michael Jordan.

Michael Jordan, Media, Fortunes, and Late Capitalism

Late capitalism designates the evolution of capitalism during the twentieth century and it highlights the transformations within the social, economic, and cultural landscape since the conclusion of World War II. Using the ideas about postmodernism and late capitalism that Fredric Jameson proffered, my use of this key term embraces the emphasis on how late capitalism underscores significant changes in the organization of imperial and colonial power and the emergence of novel forms of business organization. Moreover, Jameson writes that the features of late capitalism:

> include the new international division of labor, a vertiginous new dynamic in international banking and the stock exchanges (including the enormous Second and Third World debt), new forms of media interrelationship (very much including transportation systems such as containerization), computers and automation, the flight of production to advanced Third World areas, along with all the more familiar social consequences, including the crisis of traditional labor, the emergence of yuppies, and gentrification on a now-global scale. (xix)

In the United States, the effects of late capitalism have had a profound effect on the labor and the organization of cities. Cities that once depended on work in the

manufacturing sector have lost jobs because the free market has enabled American corporations to relocate their businesses to reduce labor costs. This has been a major cause of the decline in inner-city neighborhoods throughout the United States. Commenting on the significance of this loss, sociologist Elijah Anderson writes:

> The manufacturing jobs that used to provide opportunities for young people in inner-city neighborhoods and strongly, although indirectly, supported values of decency and conventionality have largely vanished from the economy, replaced by thousands of low-paying service jobs often located in the suburbs, beyond the reach of poor neighborhoods. These changes have damaged the financial health of the inner city and undermined the quality of available role models. The trust and perceptions of decency that once prevailed in the community are increasingly absent. In their place, street values, represented by the fast life, violence, and crime, become more prominent. (145)

Supporting Anderson's emphasis on the significance of job loss, William Julius Wilson writes:

> The consequences of high neighborhood joblessness are more devastating than those of high neighborhood poverty. A neighborhood in which people are poor but employed is different from a neighborhood in which people are poor and jobless. Many of today's problems in the inner-city ghetto neighborhoods--crime, family dissolution, welfare, low levels of social organization, and so on--are fundamentally a consequences of the disappearance of work. (xiii)

Like Anderson, Wilson links this loss to changes wrought by the internationalization of the economy. Wilson adds to this a consideration for the "lowering of unionization rates" and the high regard for education and training in the new global economy (28).

Saskia Sassen offers a critique of the way that "media, policy, and economic analysis" define globalization through highly skilled labor without granting a balanced consideration of the low wage labor force that supports it. Her analysis expands the scope of Anderson's and Wilson's to consider the migrants that make up the low-skilled workers that they locate in the inner-city.

According to Sassen, accounts of globalization that focus attention on electronic technologies, money transference, and the subsequent "neutralization of distance and place" (254) ignore the low wage labor that supports the lifestyles of professional workers. Thus, as highly skilled professionals relocate and become situated in "global cities" like Tokyo, London, and New York to manage "transnational production sites and investment capital flows" (Holt 99), their *situatedness* calls attention to a primacy of place in globalization discourse rather than its dissolution.[10] These global cities bring together a collection of highly skilled workers who support chief managers; all of them have needs for personal services of their own. Some of these needs are clerical, janitorial, and others involve their consumption practices and so lead to the employment of maids and nannies; and as much of these professionals frequent high-end shops and restaurants they encounter the labor of low-wage workers there. "Traditionally," Sassen writes, "employment in growth sectors has been a source of workers' empowerment; this new pattern undermines that linkage, producing a class of workers who are isolated,

[10] This point refutes the claims of scholars like Arjun Appadurai, Paul Gilroy, and others who suggest that globalization has led to whithering border and the dissolution of nation states.

dispersed, and effectively invisible" (255). Sport has been a key site for highlighting these changes and revealing these power dynamics.

According to Walter LaFeber, Michael Jordan is an important twentieth-century figure because of the way that his story unfolded with the information revolution and the emerging dominance of transnational corporate enterprise; thus, Jordan is the first icon of the post-national age. His athletic skills and good looks suited technology like the earth satellite and cable networks that could broadcast Jordan's visage as well as his silhouette to all parts of the globe, thus transcending traditional boundaries of place and nation. Jordan's iconic status helps to connect "spectacle or image society" and "media capitalism" as synonyms Jameson uses for late capitalism.

As consumers worldwide bought Jordan's endorsement of Nike, McDonald's, Hanes, Chevrolet and sported replicas of his jersey and hung posters of him on their walls, they were embracing Jordan in an unprecedented way. Quoting Stanley Crouch, LaFeber positions Jordan as a figure of racial transcendence:

> in 1960, if white girls in the suburbs had had posters of a Negro that dark on the wall, there would have been hell to pay. That kind of racial paranoia is not true of the country now. Today you have girls who are Michael Jordan fanatics, and their parents don't care. (16)

For Crouch and LaFeber the consumption of Jordan's image signified a shift in white American views regarding black masculinity.

While Jordan's status in popular culture highlights the changes in communications, reflects the functioning of transnational corporations, and comprises the touchstone of contemporary sporting celebrity many scholars are reluctant to declare

the poster on the wall as evidence of wholesale racial progress.[11] Jordan's individual profits and those he generated on behalf of Nike, McDonalds, Gatorade and other transnational corporations obscures the low wages and poor working conditions of women laboring in factories that produced those goods. Though Jordan is often cited as an example of how the world is shrinking as people in once isolated parts of the world can now recognize his famous silhouette, distinct class positionalities within the new world economy point to the vast differences between low wage workers and elite performers. For example, instead of reading the Nike slogan "just do it" as a celebration of the focus, drive, and determination that Jordan promoted, the women who labored in Indonesian sweatshops reported that they read the "just do it" sign posted around their workplace and thought it meant "don't talk, worker harder" (Goldman and Papson 143). While iconic sports figures like Jordan are certainly pervasive in this new age, those same images may experience varied readings.

American youth interpret these images through greatly depressed circumstances and future prospects. Bakari Kitwana refers to the generation born at the conclusion of the baby boom generation, or 1965 through 1984 as the hip hop generation. The hip hop generation was born into a nation undergoing profound transformations. As a result of a vastly shifting political terrain they would not experience legal segregation in public transportation, public facilities, or public institutions like schools. This generation would have the vote and they would have employment opportunities denied previous generations. Thus, the hip hop generation represents the first generation of African

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[11] See Mary G. McDonald and David L. Andrews, "Michael Jordan: corporate sport and postmodern celebrityhood" in *Sport Stars: The cultural politics of sporting celebrity* , ed. Devaid L. Andrews and Steven J. Jacson (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 20-35; Michael Eric Dyson, "Be Like Mike? Michael Jordan and the Pedagogy of Desire" in *Signifyin(g), Sanctictifyin', & Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture*, ed. Gena Dagel Caponi (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), pp. 407-416; Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Race in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 105-111.

Americans to live as citizens without a direct experience of formal civic estrangement. This generation's prospects of living out the promises of civil rights, second wave feminism, and black power, however, are greatly reduced as legitimate employment opportunities from traditional labor sectors (i.e. auto manufacturers) have been eliminated or exported. "The impact of globalization," Kitwana explains, "has not stopped at traditional borders. Although young Blacks suffer from the additional burden of racial discrimination, poor and middle-class young whites are not immune from the impact of economic change, a fact highlighted by the continuing world trade protests" (35).

Though the prospects of achievement appear bleak, Kitwana contends that the Hip Hop generation has not rejected the American Dream. He states:

> Everyone wants to make it big. For many, the American Dream means not just living comfortably but becoming an overnight millionaire while still young. Many of us can't imagine waiting until we are forty, or even thirty-five, for that matter. This desire for wealth is accompanied by a sense of entitlement. That a handful of widely celebrated hip-hop generationers have achieved the dream makes the possibility real, despite the odds. Professional athletes and entertainers routinely secure million-dollar contracts. E-commerce and computer technology has also produced young millionaires seemingly overnight. It's nearly impossible to find a kid on the block who doesn't think he can be the next Puff Daddy or Master P, Chris Webber or Tiger Woods. Although such attitudes existed in previous generations, with the hip-hop generation, it is a near obsession. And this desire to achieve not simply financial

> security but millionaire status is the driving force of our generation's work ethic. (46)

Seen in this light, the hip hop generation reads the representation of Michael Jordan as marking their promise. It is not clear whether in Kitwana's view the "kid on the black" understands black women as figures of their money obsessions given that all of the models he uses are black men. Venus and Serena Williams are significant figures to consider in interpretations of the culture of late capitalism because they highlight new possibilities for black girls "on the block" that black male figures, like Jordan, do not capture on their own.

Heywood and Dworkin understand the changes that the new world economy has wrought as being quite significant for altering the reception of representations of women athletes in popular culture thus suggesting that the Williams sisters could certainly be included in the list of black male names Kitwana cites. As they write, "[for] the audience most likely to be interested in images of the female athlete, the structural conditions of their lives are such that male power is only a fantasy that cannot, in any substantive way, be interpreted as real" (12). They might agree with Kitwana that a generation of people brought up under a new economic regime beg for an alternative approach to analyzing their experiences with respect to power. For Heywood and Dworkin, the "objectification thesis" reflecting second wave feminist critiques of the representation of scantily clad female athletes on the covers of magazines appears antiquated in light of the athletes' clear recognition of the power and production of images in the media that has grown out of the new era of globalization. Kitwana agrees with Heywood and Dworkin on the level of recognizing that the paradigms of the Baby Boomers fails to capture the experience of the way that power and domination impact contemporary youth. Kitwana writes:

> The civil rights/Black power generation grew up with a harsh, overt racism and has not been surprised by contemporary America's racial contradictions. The civil rights/Black power generation experienced segregation and second-class citizenship firsthand. Although progress has been made, the older generation realizes that institutional racism lingers. In contrast, the hip-hop generation was socialized on a steady diet of American democracy and the promise of the American dream. We grew up with television sit-coms, film, and advertisements that portrayed it as a reality. Lip service to equality, civil rights, freedom of movement, and integrated schools and neighborhoods created high expectations for our generation--even if we didn't experience it firsthand. (41)

Combining the insights of Kitwana, Heywood and Dworkin brings attention to a problem W.E.B. Du Bois noted in his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, that must play a role in how we measure the triumphs and struggles of this current generation of Americans.

As the twentieth-century dawned, Du Bois famously posited that the problem of that time was "the problem of the color line" (41). The production of the color line contributed to a fraught Black subjectivity, a sense of being divided by both race and nation. As scholars like Thomas Holt and Paul Gilroy have taken up the meaning of race in the twenty-first century in light of Du Bois's insight about race and the preceding era, this work seeks to extend that analysis to consider another aspect of Du Bois's prophetic analysis as it relates to race, nation, and capitalism. Du Bois asserted that the deification of wealth threatened aspirations for freedom. In the chapter "Of the Wings of Atalanta"

Du Bois reflects on the burning of the city of Atlanta during the Civil War in light of the myth about the goddess who became distracted from the race against potential suitors by the golden apples Hippomenes lays in her path. Du Bois warns that failing to take heed of the corrupting force of capital would lead to the ruination of noble values. In his words:

> Atlanta must not lead the South to dream of material prosperity as the touchstone of all success; already the fatal might of this idea is beginning to spread; it is replacing the finer type of Southerner with vulgar money-getters; it is burying the sweeter beauties of Southern life beneath pretence and ostentation. For every social ill the panacea of Wealth has been urged,--wealth to overthrow the remains of the slave feudalism; wealth to raise the "cracker" Third Estate; wealth to employ black serfs, and the prospect of wealth to keep them working; wealth as the end and aim of politics, and as the legal tender for law and order; and, finally, instead of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, wealth as the idea of the Public School. (112)

Most troubling for him is that the desire for wealth that characterized the aspirations of white America seeped into black America as well.

Venus and Serena Williams's fame and fortunes are signs of the significant changes in sport, media, and American culture. They are products of post-civil rights and post-second wave feminist culture that have provided them with a much clearer political path than generations of players before them. Without being barred from private clubs due to race restrictions or failing to earn top dollar for tournament play because they are women, the Williams sisters mark an unprecedented era in women's sports. In 2000,

Venus Williams signed a $40 million contract with Reebok that made her the richest female athlete in history. This was the extension of a contract first signed in 1995 when her talent was only a promise. It was a chance that may have been prompted by the company's ongoing competition with Nike and its effort to attract an element of the youth market that its rival had not captured. Venus was a 6ft. 1 ½ in. woman whose then 108 mph service game could rival some men; she had a unique look and a strong personality that she laid bare on an international stage. As a result of her difference, and the controversy that Richard Williams seemed to court, Reebok was Venus's sole endorsement. With tennis success and public interest sustained, Venus and Serena Williams would become product endorsers for McDonald's, Wrigley's Gum, and Avon. As the sisters acquired these endorsements, they began to re-write their public identities. A close examination of Venus and Serena Williams's as spokespersons and authors lends insight into the way that the profit motives of contemporary corporations provide opportunities for black women athletes to publicly re-cast themselves.

William Wrigley Jr. Company was founded in the United States in 1891. Since then, the company producing the gum with the unique green packaging is a world leader with gum sales in 180 countries (Wrigley.com); thus, Wrigley has made significant contributions in advertising. In the 1930s, Wrigley's advertisements featured the "Doublemint Twins," creating one of the most successful and enduring advertising campaigns ever developed in America (Wrigley.com). When Wrigley's announced its partnership with Venus and Serena Williams in 2001, they acknowledged that this decision marked the first time Wrigley's deviated from its historic campaigns. Rory Finlay, Senior Director of Consumer Marketing for Wrigley, said that partnering with the Williams sisters signaled the first time Wrigley's "ever partnered with professional

athletes" ("TMS"), but he never mentioned that the company was also shifting their iconography from twins to non-twins and from whites to blacks. When a caller phoned in to the teleconference inquiring about whether Venus and Serena's role as spokespersons meant that the advertising scheme for Doublemint had changed, or more specifically, if Wrigley's was "abandoning the long-standing Doublemint twins ad campaign?" Finlay stated in response:

> Doublemint is all about doubles. We have used, as everyone knows, we've used twins for quite some time now to communicate that, that uniqueness of the brand. With Venus and Serena, they're two-of-a-kind. They're wonderful sisters, and so we will be continuing that element of our communication but really now in much more exciting and relevant ways. ("TMS")

Finlay believes that the Williams sisters will help "contemporize" Doublemint through its association with their "unique and distinctive style." The rhetoric that so celebrates the sisters' distinctiveness simultaneously renders them indistinct from one another. For instance, when commenting on the sisters' "bold and fresh style," Finlay adds that "their personality is quite amazing" suggesting that the sisters actually share the same personality ("TMS").

Interestingly, one caller cast the Williams sisters' distinctiveness beyond the ambit of respectability as it was ostensibly associated with the Doublemint twins. "The Doublemint twins have always really signified wholesome, American girlhood," the question began. "How do you two ladies feel about being a part of what that image means?" This evocation of "American girlhood" is interesting in light of this work's interest in the way that black women athletes have historically been excluded from

constructions of the "All-American girl." That this question places the Williams sisters outside of the "All-American girl" image underscores black sportswomen's historical exclusion. Venus confirmed that neither she nor Serena would alter the meaning of the image as much as they would "add to it." The caller's concerns with wholesomeness are interesting as well given that Wrigley's slogan, "double your pleasure, double your fun," accompanying the over seventy year stint of the Doublemint twins advertisements suggests heightened sexual pleasure rather than abstinence ("TMS"). The figure of the all-American girl veils the sexualized meaning of doubling your pleasure while the figure of anarchic woman, as a wanton, lusty figure conjures it. The discussion of the Williams sisters as spokespersons for Doublemint exposes public recognition of the Williams sisters as anarchic women and highlights the tension surrounding embracing them as all-American girls.

The wholesale victimization implied through my analysis so far is not without nuance. Though their twinning accents the vitriolic stereotype that all black people look alike, the Williams sisters have handsomely profited from their publicly twinned personas. Misrepresentations of their relationship as twins have granted them lucrative business opportunities; Venus and Serena's contract with Doublemint reportedly earns them $7 million over three-years (Spencer). Such contracts also provide financial benefits to aspiring black students. The Wrigley's contract makes scholarships available to black students through the A.C.E.S. program. Thus, capitalism in its current configuration holds some benefits for black women athletes. Thus, they have been able to capitalize on their talents and celebrity status but how should their individual success be understood in civic terms?

The Meaning of Anarchic Women and All-American Girls in Late Capitalism

Speaking in the Virginia Convention March 23, 1775, Patrick Henry sought a shift from the colonial position opposing armed struggle with Britain to a more aggressive stance that accepted the necessity of establishing a militia. His speech required that the assembly recall an array of attempts made to subvert British encroachment of colonial liberties by imposing a series of aggressive measures. Included amongst these were the sugar act that decreased colonial profits from molasses, the quartering act that obliged the colony to provide suitable accommodations for British garrisons in North America, and the stamp act that placed a tax on anything from legal documents to dice. According to Henry, these instances confirmed the Crown's low regard for the colonists and their rights as full English subjects with the ability to determine their destiny through Parliamentary representation. Though the colonists fought off this shameful inequality with petitions and resolves, the boycotting of British goods, and sporadic mob violence, Henry warned that continuing on in this way would be useless in the battle ahead. Expressing his beliefs, Henry passionately and famously stated:

> Gentlemen may cry, peace, peace--but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God!--I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death! (McCants 125)

Gerard Rancinan's portrait of Venus and Serena Williams that appeared in Sports Illustrated after the sisters faced off in the finals of the U.S. Open in 2001 is striking in

the way that it cites Henry's fiery declaration. He combines religious and secular iconography to recall Henry's remarks. Its overall composition uses Michelangelo's *Pieta* to position the sisters and Bartholdi's *Statue of Liberty* informs Venus's gestures as well as both of the sisters' headpieces. But as Simon Barnes reminds us "[s]port is not, in the end, war, it is something that people walk away from" (Sportscape), so why does Rancinan call upon this epic battle? His depictions of other African American athletes like Marion Jones, Allen Iverson, Maurice Green, and Tiger Woods don't acknowledge the nation so explicitly, if at all. What is so American about the Williams sisters? What about them prompts questions about the nation? To what extent do the Williams sisters represent the birth of a new nation?

In part, the portrait dramatically amplifies the character of the U.S. Open. Rancinan's photograph of Venus and Serena Williams underscores what S.L. Price calls tennis's "most chaotic and contentious Grand Slam event"; Rancinan frames this drama as American history. Arguably, it is this underlying theme of American history concerning matters of race and national character that explains the interest that audiences have for the sisters' rivalry. Despite the professional judgment of the weak athletic performance between the Williams sisters in major tournaments, audiences have watched them play in record numbers. When they competed for the 2001 U.S. Open title during televisions prime time viewing they brought the women's final "its best TV rating (7.7 overnight) in two decades" (Price 2). They are compelling precisely because their athletic participation in an individual sport requires rivalry yet they declare a sisterhood and a friendship that insists upon reconciliation in a nation whose history obsesses over these themes. Thus, the brilliance of Rancinan's portrait of the sisters is that it understands that their relationship dramatizes a historically persistent quandary regarding

such issues as liberty, possibility, assimilation, competition, and reconciliation in America.

The photograph also bears witness to the knowing and willing participation of women athletes in their media representations. In persuasively contending with the second wave feminist critique of the objectification of women's bodies in the media, Leslie Heywood and Shari L. Dworkin contend that such objections cannot account for the critical awareness of women athletes participating in media culture. They write:

> it is no longer simply the case of naïve women who buy into a false sense of power when they pose for the camera and we need to educate them about their mistake. Instead, athletes already know the criticisms and reject them. They know exactly what they are doing. They know, and they do it all the same, both because they do not experience themselves as manipulated and powerless, and because like many others in the MTV generation who are fighting high debt-to-income ratios and diminished permanent job prospects, they see rightly visibility in the media as the only 'real' outlet for the achievement of selfhood this culture offers. (85)

In light of Heywood and Dworkin's insights, what I have been calling "the Rancinan photograph" is just as much Venus and Serena's photograph. In consenting to being posed and dressed as artifacts of history and nation they are simultaneously collaborating in making the hyperreal ascendant.

The status of the real and the threat to history that arises in light of the status of the hyperreal in postmodern culture has been the subject of much critical discussion. Reflecting on her passage from real to hyperreal, Angela Y. Davis finds the shift quite problematic because of the damage it does to history. In her case, photographs that once

circulated in the culture through newspapers, flyers, and posters announcing her fugitive status have become templates for fashion advertisements. *Vibe* magazine styled actress Cynda Williams to resemble Davis as she appeared in photographs that the FBI used on posters announcing that she was wanted on charges of murder and kidnapping. Addressing the *Vibe* photos, Davis writes, "This is the most blatant example of the way the particular history of my legal case is emptied of all content so that it can serve as a commodified backdrop for advertising" ("Afro" 177).

Davis's concerns meet Susan Sontag's revision of her former critique of the proliferation of images contributing to emotional ennui and ethical dismissal as she rethinks it in *Regarding the Pain of Others*. In this work, Sontag makes it clear that history endures despite Baudrillard's contention that the hyperreal has replaced it.[12] Toni Morrison has also offered a view of spectacle and history that includes an engagement with race.

For Morrison, spectacle is a device, a medium for conveying a national narrative. Using the O.J. Simpson case as her text, Morrison explains how spectacles work:

> Spectacle is the best means by which an official story is formed and is a superior mechanism for guaranteeing its longevity. Spectacle offers signs, symbols and images that are more pervasive and persuasive than print and which can smoothly parody thought. The symbolic language that emanates from unforeseen events supplies media with the raw material from which a narrative merges--already scripted, fully spectacularized and riveting in its gazeablility. The fortuitousness of the event which contributes to the construction of a public verity can mislead us into

[12] See Jean Baudrillard, "Aesthetic Illusion and Virtual Reality," in *Reading Images: Readers in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Julia Thomas (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 198-206.

> thinking that the power of persuasion lies in the events themselves, when in fact it is the already understood and agreed-upon interpretation of the events that is sold and distributed as public truth. (xvii)

As Morrison explains it, spectacle resists debate. Instead, it naturalizes an episode that confirms general consensus and refuses the "mature style of viewing" that Sontag links to critical political practices needed for disagreement and debate. As with Davis's example, Morrison's discussion of the culture of the hyperreal is linked to commodity culture.

In the commodity culture of late capitalism the Williams sisters have been able to narrate a vision of themselves that rivals constructions of them as anarchic. For them then, the hyperreal may be pursued as a viable option for becoming incorporated into public or mainstream culture that appears unavailable to Morrison's anarchic women. Morrison's anarchic women remain outside of mainstream community because they provide a living enactment of the hyperreal. Take for example how photographs emerge in *Paradise* when Deacon and Steward's encounter nineteen light-skinned ladies on a trip with their forefathers to assess the condition of all black towns since the stock market crash. Among that Deacon remembered, with his photographic memory, remembered "nineteen Negro ladies" who lived in one of the prosperous towns they came upon (109). These women had:

> arranged themselves on the steps of the town hall. They wore summer dresses of material the lightness, the delicacy of which neither of them had ever seen. Most of the dresses were white, but two were lemon yellow and one a salmon color. They were small, pale hats of beige, dusty rose, powdery blue: hats that called attention to the wide, sparkly eyes of

> the wearers. Their waists were not much bigger than their necks. Laughing and teasing, they preened for a photographer lifting his head from beneath a black cloth only to hide under it again. Following a successful pose, the ladies broke apart in small groups, bending their tiny waists with rippling laughter, walking arm in arm. One adjusted another's brooch; one exchanged her pocketbook with another. Slender feet turned and tipped in thin leather shoes. Their skin, creamy and luminous in the afternoon sun, took away his breath. (109)

Deacon and his twin Steward were so enthralled and eager to get the women's attention that they managed to toss themselves off the railing where they sat consuming this event. For Deacon, the image of the women is lasting, lively, and vivid. Unlike the photographer's black and white, flat, two-dimensional image, "[h]is remembrance was pastel colored and eternal" (110).

The nineteen ladies Deacon and Steward saw as children were emblazoned in their photographic memories as respectable though they were different and cautioned against. But these women could only be icons of their imaginations since they never met them. The intimacy they shared with the Convent women upset the possible sanctity of their image of light-skinned, adorable women. According to the novel, the Convent women were a "new and obscene breed of female" (279). The light-skinned women their forefathers cautioned them against threatened to overwhelm in this new era through the figure of the Convent women. These anarchic women were historically unique because their desire could touch you. And if you were not careful, they could consume you as Consolata ostensibly attempted to do to Deacon. They were distinct because they did not know their place and refused to keep distant from the men--as the nineteen light-

skinned ladies had done. The Convent women were exceedingly transgressive in part because they were living, breathing, reading, and eating women rather than an image.

The ascendency of the hyperreal blurs image and reality. In *Paradise* an image that appears to come to life represents a threat. Thus, the Convent women who figure this threat must be kept from inclusion into community. Venus and Serena Williams's relationship to the hyperreal mark a turning point in this narrative of inclusion; especially when this narrative of inclusion centers on economics.

From Inspirational Representatives to Aspirational Icons

"Hither has the temptation of Hippomenes penetrated; already in this smaller world, which now indirectly and anon directly must influence the larger for good or ill, the habit is forming of interpreting the world in dollars." *W.E.B. Du Bois*[13]

In making a final reflection on the status of the representations of sportswomen in popular culture as their book was heading to press Heywood and Dworkin make the following statement in light of Venus and Serena Williams's prevalence in the media: "Print media was dominated by concerns with winning records, but also credit card debt, hard beads, fashion, beauty, and the effect of sibling rivalry on play. As representations and discourse surrounding high-profile African American female athletes continue to flourish, researchers can and should continue to consider critically what it means to champion athletes of color as inspirational representatives for women's sport" (156). "Inspirational representatives" defined through the lens of black oppositional politics refers to those who spur on critiques of oppression. Early clubwomen may be seen as viewing black women as "inspirational representatives" within the U.S. to the extent that the position of black women drove their work. As historian Deborah Gray White describes the philosophy of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW),

[13] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Signet Classic, 1982), 113.

which dates its founding to the 1890s, black women marked the point of convergence for race, class, and gender ideologies. As the index of the nation's oppressive forces, the NACW could contend that "a race could rise no higher than its women" (Too Heavy 24). The NACW, and black women's organizations that followed in their wake, assumed a tremendous responsibility by assuming the leading role in positing a self-help agenda that sought to redeem the race from the imposition of interlocking oppressions.

While the needs of the race inspired the women's clubs, the tremendous responsibilities they assumed as theirs alone were costly. If the clubwomen's efforts at uplift failed, they were to blame. Furthermore, in stressing the virtue of black women they narrowly defined femininity, which led to what Hazel V. Carby describes as the "policing of black women's bodies" by other black women. Thus, the early clubwomen can be accused of participating in the culture of surveillance that they set out to critique. Though it was through Black women that clubwomen found their reason for opposing overarching systems of domination, they would unwittingly participate in re-inscribing this system through their work.

The early clubwomen's astute theorizing of the significance of black women as an index of the nation's oppressive forces would find consistent deployment. Gordon Parks's 1942 photograph *American Gothic* and Ming Smith-Murray's *America Seen Through Stars and Stripes* (1976) offer compelling visual representations of the way that Black women's location in the culture inspires critiques of the nation through representations of the laboring black women. These works contest the stereotype of the contented low wage black female laborer. Park's image of Ella Watson questions the prospect of service to the nation being reconciled with the pursuit of happiness when one's liberty is dependent upon the mop and broom serving as one's hands. According to Deborah

Willis and Carla Williams, Smith-Murray's photograph "updates" Park's famous photograph (125). It features a black woman dressed in a white uniform with circle framed glasses, like Watson's, standing before a glass window. The window reflects the American flag in triplicate as well as it reveals the people and the cars populating a city street. "Comparing the body of the young woman standing in uniform at a city bus stop with Parks's portrait of Watson forty years earlier," Willis and Williams write, "one can easily conclude that although they share a history, their relationship to their labor is quite different" (125).

Rancinan's decision to dress Venus and Serena Williams in the American flag recalls both *American Gothic* and *America Seen Through the Stars and Stripes*. As in the earlier works, the prominence of the American flag prompts questions concerning black women's civic status. Through its artistic references, Rancinan's portrait places these questions in an international context. The reference to the *Pieta* cites Italy; the reference to the *Statue of Liberty* cites France. Both references bring attention to New York since Bartholdi's work was a gift to the city in 1878 and the Vatican loaned the *Pieta* to the New York World's Fair in 1965. The French Open and the U.S. Open are two of the four grand slam events in tennis and the Italian Open was once an important tournament in what made up the Old World slam. The Williams sisters' depiction sits at the crossroads between iconic places and iconic art.

Rancinan "updates" the representation of black women's relationship to their labor in sports. What makes this work interesting is that it draws on representations of working class black women's relationship to their labor in the United States instead of other sporting bodies. To this end, his work supports Robin D.G. Kelley's contention that "young people have tried to turn play into an alternative to unfulfilling wage labor"

(53). In making this connection Rancinan sets in relief the differences between this cultural moment and preceding ones, between Althea Gibson's career and Venus and Serena Williams's career.

Althea Gibson came of age playing paddle ball on Harlem's city streets. Given her obvious athleticism and success at the Police Athletic League tournaments Gibson was soon afforded formal experiences in tennis. With the illustrious American Tennis Association (ATA) champion, Fred Johnson as her coach, Gibson won the girls ATA national titles in 1944 and 1945. The ATA was the organization governing competition for black players due to their exclusion from white sporting organizations like the U.S. National Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA).

Gibson's showing at the 1946 ATA championship tournament impressed Dr. R. Walter Johnson. Johnson and his friend, Dr. Hubert A. Eaton, saw that she had the potential to challenge segregation at Forest Hills, the premier tennis tournament held in the United States. In order to realize their vision, the doctors devised a plan for Gibson to alternate between living in the Eaton's home in Wilmington, North Carolina, during the school year, and then with the Johnson's in Lynchburg, Virginia, during the summer. Once Gibson relocated to the south, she gained valuable coaching to improve the consistency of her game. She also learned valuable training in etiquette that was so much a part of tennis.

Gibson's game dramatically improved. Beginning in 1947 she won the women's ATA singles title for ten consecutive years. She went on to Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College (FAMU) where she accepted a basketball scholarship since the school did not have tennis scholarships. She demonstrated the full range of her athletic

acumen at FAMU. She played basketball, tennis, and golf, as a member of the men's team.

In 1950, Gibson realized her benefactors' goal of desegregating Forest Hills. By most accounts, former tennis champion Alice Marble was quite instrumental in facilitating this historic event. Writing for the *American Lawn Tennis Magazine*, Marble chastised her white peers for dismissing Gibson's athletic promise by denying her applications to compete: "If tennis is a game for ladies and gentlemen, it's also time we acted a little more like gentlepeople and less like sanctimonious hypocrites […] If Althea Gibson represents a challenge to the present crop of women players, it's only fair that they should meet that challenge on the courts" (King 76).

The fifties marked a time of great athletic opportunity and achievement for Gibson. She gained valuable playing experience when the U.S. State Department sought her participation in exhibitions and clinics in Southeast Asia in order to improve its image abroad in the wake of the murder of Emmett Till. After completing this tour, Gibson became the first African American woman to win a Grand Slam title in 1956 when she won the French Open. She followed this win with two more historic wins with success at both Wimbledon and Forest Hills in 1957. She matched this success in 1958 with wins in these same tournaments.

Despite earning singles and doubles titles in the mid-fifties and grand-slam titles at the French Open, Forest Hills, and Wimbledon in 1957 and 1958 Gibson never sustained a life beyond the working class. In 1956 Gibson candidly discussed her financial position in the London *Daily Mail*:

> I am still a poor Negress, as poor as when I was picked off the back streets of Harlem. I have traveled to many countries…in comfort. I have

> stayed in the best hotels and met many rich people. I am much richer in knowledge and experience. But I have no money. (Shoenfeld 174)

Racism and sexism prevented Gibson from re-writing her economic circumstances. As Bruce Shoenfeld explains, "There was little money in [tennis], even for a professional, and almost none if you were black. The best private clubs would hardly hire a black [person] as a teaching pro, and few companies would contract a black woman to endorse their products" (175).

Unlike Althea Gibson, Venus and Serena Williams have been able to prosper as professional athletes. Given the stark contrast between Gibson's experiences and the Williams sisters', Rancinan's portrait claims a new reality in black women's laboring experiences in the United States. Though an accomplished tennis player, Gibson did not experience a working reality vastly different from Ella Watson's. As she told the *Daily Mail*, she remained as "poor as she was when [she] was picked off the back streets of Harlem" (Shoenfeld 174) Venus and Serena Williams's story is one of change and upward mobility, or as the reference to the *Pieta* suggests, their story is tale of transcendence.

Articulating a tale of transcendence through a contemporary Horatio Alger story of financial success helps to illustrate a shift in black women as "inspirational representatives" both in women sports and for the United States. The ability of some black women to achieve unprecedented levels of wealth suggests that the goals of oppositional politics have been met. Thus, Venus and Serena Williams's capital accumulation is offered as evidence that race and gender equality have been achieved.

Venus and Serena Williams's iconic status offers compelling evidence of the significant changes in the worlds of sport, media, and culture. For feminist scholars

Leslie Heywood and Shari Dworkin these are definitely changes for the better. "In the world of media culture," they write, "the female athlete can stand as a positive alternative, and her emergence as an icon, a cultural hero, is a tangible sign that some social justice struggles have, in some limited and contradictory ways, been achieved" (163) The Williams sisters highlight the ways that Heywood and Dworkin's claims about female athletes includes black female athletes. Venus and Serena Williams's ability to redefine their representations as anarchic women is hardly an insignificant feat in light of black women's historical attempts to be self-defining. As Hill Collins explains it, "Black women's lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women with our objectification as the Other. The struggle of living two lives, one for 'them and one for ourselves' creates a peculiar tension to construct independent self-definitions within a context where Black womanhood remains routinely derogated" (99-100). Yet, while it is the case Venus and Serena Williams have been able to go from anarchic women to "All-American girls," this is more of a comment on the profit driven ambitions of major corporate enterprises than a reflection of a radically altered terrain for black women as citizens. Poor, unrecognizable black women are not obviously helped by the Williams sisters shifting public status. Rather than viewing anarchic women as figures marking a progression in attitudes towards black women as outlaw women in general, such figures are best understood as savvy businesswomen in a media driven age.

Routed in the Body: Venus and Serena Williams on the Women's Tour

This chapter examines the journeys of black athletic bodies from the 1940s through 2002 to elucidate the postmodern character of African American mobility in sports. My analysis uses the insight of scholars of postmodernity to consider the changed character of travel for African American athletes. Among the important changes noted is the shift away from the bodily awareness of those black sports figures whose bodies were highly policed by segregation laws. During much of the twentieth-century, travel for black athletes in particular and black people in general re-enforced the boundaries and constrictions that traveling ought to dissolve. By the late twentieth-century and the start of the twenty-first, elite black female athletes' bodily awareness while traveling starts to wane, as the case of the Williams sisters illustrates. A defining shift in post-Civil rights America has been the shift away from the politics of respectability. Thus, as black women continue to move across boundaries there is no apparent discourse on ideal bodily comportment. This chapter sees a kinship between this absent politics and the representation of mobility in the self-representations as well as popular representations of African American women athletes like the Williams sisters. For earlier generations of black women in motion movement across boundaries constituted a challenge requiring preparation, strategy, and most importantly for this discussion, a program of bodily comportment; black women travelers in late modernity simply arrive at their destinations. I contend that taking mobility and movement across borders for granted may explain the pervasiveness of what Beverly Guy-Sheftall and Johnetta Cole call "stripper culture" as an ostensible aspiration for many young black women in contemporary culture, an idea that I develop in Chapter 3 on fashion and the body. The

work of this chapter uses representations of Venus and Serena Williams's mobility as a case for taking measure of post-modern notions of race, gender, and embodiment.

This shift proves important not only because of the consequences it has for the way that black women clothe their bodies but also because it reflects the way that young black women currently position themselves within an historical trajectory. Travel for black women during segregation intensified the scorn inherent in surveillance. Through self-presentation, these women sought to deflect if not change this gaze. Given this, black women attempted to define their private lives through crafting their clothed bodies as brilliant carapaces. A narrative representation of this may be found in Toni Morrison's *Sula.*

Upon receiving word that her grandmother was dying, Helene Wright prepared herself for a journey south to New Orleans. The south of the 1920s meant that Helene and her daughter Nel would confront segregated trains, train stations, and the accompanying indignity of not being served as white patrons were served. Preparation required that Helene make food for herself and Nel since they would not be given any on the train. In addition, Helene believed that her "manner and her bearing" would earn her a reprieve from the scorn she was sure to face from whites so she made an "elegant dress" to wear for her journey to further ensure her protection (19). Thus Helene "bought some deep-brown wool and three-fourths of a yard of matching velvet. Out of this she made herself a heavy but elegant dress with velvet collar and pockets" (19). Despite her best efforts, Helene was still subjected to the indignities of caste.

Traveling south with her husband Jackie Robinson in 1946, Rachel Robinson may be considered Helene Wright's historic counterpart. Having spent her life in Pasadena, California, Robinson had faith that her respectability would mitigate the

indignities of Jim Crow. Thus, Robinson's ermine coat became Helene's velvet dress. After being asked to exit airplanes and move to the back of busses populated with dirty field workers, Robinson saw the limits of respectability: "I saw the pointlessness, the vanity, of good looks and clothes when one faced an evil like Jim Crow" (Rampersad 139).

These examples underscore the relationship between travel, race, gender, and embodiment. Traveling during segregated times reinforced the meaningfulness of race and gender as degraded citizenship. Furthermore, in Morrison's case travel offers a framework for elaborating the despised position of anarchic women travelers in relationship to the nation at large. Contemporary black sportswomen assume hospitality and evidence a move away from the politics of representing oneself in light of the politics of respectability. Scholars such as Hazel Carby have critiqued aspects of this politics because of elite black women's uncritical embrace of a technique requiring scrutiny and additional measures of controlling black women's bodies. Black women who traveled from the South to the North were primary targets for this kind of scrutiny. To be fair, scholars are clear about the real dangers threatening to compromise black women's morality. Darlene Clark Hine, Deborah Gray White, and Hazel Carby agree that elite black women's concerns for the health, safety, and morality of black women migrants was warranted. Their critique derives from the emphasis within the strategy that focused attention on policing black women's bodies instead of directing corrective measures towards the causes of those threats. Instead, their scrutiny of black women's bodies sustained the view that black women were sexual deviants.

Farah Jasmine Griffin establishes that the migration narrative has four aspects: 1.) an event that propels the action northward, 2.) a detailed representation of the initial

confrontation with the urban landscape 3.) an illustration of the migrant's attempt to negotiate that landscape and his or her resistance to the negative effects of urbanization and 4.) a vision of the possibilities or limitations of the Northern, Western, or Midwestern city and the South. Griffin includes sports among the genres wherein the migration narrative may be found (12). To this end, an examination of autobiography, biography, and newspaper accounts of black athletes evidences aspects of the migration narrative. In a sport where home-court is the nation, tennis shapes the significance of interrogating mobility and national character. Venus and Serena's careers in tennis offer insight into how the nation sees its representatives. Moreover, professional women's tennis identifies itself as the "Women's Tour." Players on the tour travel to over thirty-five different countries each year. This chapter uses this fact as a framework for considering African American tennis players within the context of the migration narrative.

Arrivals: On Tour with the Williams Sisters

bell hooks contends that "travel" is a term that conceptually muddles the diverse ways that people move across boundaries. She offers the "theory of the journey" as a potential accompaniment to conceptualizations of travel possibly rendering imperialism less obscure (*Black Looks* 173). Furthermore, a "theory of the journey" might also better account for the diverse reasons people find themselves en route. As she writes:

> Theories of travel produced outside conventional borders might want the Journey to become the rubric within which travel, as a starting point for discourse, is associated with different headings--rites of passage, immigration, enforced migration, relocation, enslavement, and homelessness. Travel is not a word that can be easily evoked to talk

> about the Middle Passage, the Trail of Tears, the landing of Chinese immigrants, the forced relocation of Japanese-Americans, or the plight of the homeless. Theorizing diverse journeying is crucial to our understanding of any politics of location. (173)

What do metaphorical journeys tell us? How do hooks's ideas about theorizing diverse ways of moving locally or globally, for pleasure or under duress impact what has traditionally been seen as a male right?

For African American tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams their journey is significantly shaped as a tale of metaphorical ascension that begins with the crime and vice in Compton, California where they learned the game and ends at the luxurious, country club courts of elite tennis. According to Nancy Spencer, this stereotypical story reinforces racial difference in tennis and evidences the plausibility of the American Dream. For Spencer, race lurks in the shadows of celebrity in the tales of the Williams sisters' journey. Racism may also be observed on the Tour as the Williams sisters chart their course along its routes.

Famously, at Indian Wells, a second tier California Tour event, in March 2001, Serena Williams was roundly booed and according to Richard Williams, she was a subject of the racial taunts that the crowd also directed at him and Venus. Some reporters reasoned that the crowd's hostility was influenced by tabloid rumors of family match fixing orchestrated by Richard Williams. Such talk contributed to many people's suspicion that Serena was the superior player in the family--as evidenced by her 1999 U.S. Open victory--but Richard wanted the eldest sister to have a chance to shine. In withdrawing at Indian Wells, in the eyes of many onlookers, Venus was trying to avoid a

match against her sister. For the Williams family, chiefly Serena, Oracene, and Richard Williams, it was racism.

Loneliness compounds racism in tennis. L. Jon Wertheim notes the "essential loneliness of the Tour" (Venus 49). Alienation, loneliness, and estrangement constitute essential elements of the experience of a sport that involves traveling to over thirty-five countries. The idea that loneliness continues to play a role in the Williams sisters' experiences on the tour is evident in the experience of enthusiasm they take in being able to travel to the same locations together. One article describes a scene of arrival in Italy this way:

> *Serena!* Venus shouts from 50 feet away. She's coming down the narrow hallway under the Foro Italica, and Serena's eyes widen as she waits with her mother and sister Isha. Venus rushes up, kisses Oracene on the cheek,and she and Serena lean together rush off, arms, hips, sides bumping in a giggly tangle. "We're the same people," Serena says. "We have two separate hearts," Venus says. "At least I think so." When Venus traveled to Hamburg without Serena before the Italian Open, she fell quiet and calm. The moment she arrived in Rome, though, "I was just out of control," she says."When we get together, I just get, I don't know, crazy." (Price 104)

Price depicts Venus and Serena as lovesick for one another; every part of their bodies touch--arms, hips, sides--when they meet. Serena speaks of her need to be with her sister as controllable, she just gets "out of control" she says. The possibility that their enthusiasm may be linked to the loneliness of the Tour and the break from it that might accompany the presence of a sister who knows the experience of it as a competitor

escapes Price. Instead, using Venus and Serena's words, he paints a portrait of them as deviant bodies, conjoined twins with fused body parts.

Though the Williams sisters have a history of talking about themselves as "black players" and discussing this with pride, they also have talked about themselves as being thoroughly American. One example involving Serena occurred after she was heartily booed at the French Open in 2003. She was charged a point after hitting a ball into the net in response to Belgian Justin Henin-Hardenne signal that she was not ready to receive the serve. Serena lost her composure as the crowd began to raucously cheer as she made mistakes--actions completely at odds with proper tennis decorum. Members of the press speculated that Serena may have contributed to this situation because of her comments about the war in Iraq. When asked during a March press conference about anti-French attitudes in the United States, Williams in a mock French accent responded "We don't want to play in the war; we want to make clothes" ("French Open" 2). According to journalist Christopher Clarey, some among the French found her remarks "flippant and disrespectful" ("French Open" 2). Embittered, certain French manufacturers dissolved business deals with her and French stores removed the goods Williams endorsed. For her part, Williams did not indict Henin-Hardenne in the media nor discuss her own culpability in prompting the booing at the French Open. Interestingly, she writes about this incident in *Venus and Serena Serving from the Hip: 10 Rules for Living, Loving, and Winning*. After laying out the details of these events, Serena reports that members of the press tried to goad her into making negative remarks about Henin-Hardenne. Serena writes that even though she was upset with Henin-Hardenne, she was even more upset with herself. She went on to further explain her actions. As she writes:

> I had lost my composure on the court, but I wasn't going to make things worse by being a sore loser. *No* interviewer was going to talk me into saying something that I would regret later on but that they could turn into a headline. So I just told them that I was shocked that the crowd turned on me—which was true! and I just have to get tougher in case it happened again.Of course, I still had business with Justine, but I handled it woman to woman. (On TV you see people fighting in front of the camera. I think you get better results when you handle disagreements one on one and in private. (30-31)

Serena goes on to explain the greatest lesson that this experience taught her:

> You know how people say "What goes around comes around"? Well, because television cameras caught Justine's actions on tape, not telling the truth made her look really bad. That caused her reputation with other players, fans, tennis officials, and members of the media to suffer. Lots of people told me that they felt bad about what happened. What started out as a bad situation for me became positive in the end. I learned that being a good sport and acting gracious sometimes takes you farther in life than winning. (31)

Serena's discussion here is astonishing in light of her status as anarchic. Rather than the actions of an outlaw, her actions are rational and measured. Moreover, given that the incident involved an etiquette breach, her decision to position the episode in a work on etiquette is appropriate.

In chapter 3 of *Serving from the Hip*, entitled "Self Respect," Venus and Serena each recount racially charged episodes where white European women figure in tales of

incivility. Instead of writing about racism, they ignore race, acknowledge nation, and discuss individual responsibility; thus, the sisters' reflections lack the "political perception" that Jamaica Kincaid saw reflected in how Antiguans theorized and discussed the behavior of British colonials (34). In confronting bad behavior, the Williams sisters query the difficulty of deciding when to defend oneself or to let a situation pass and risk being seen as a pushover. In Serena's case, she decided to stand up for herself to the umpire when Henin-Hardenne refused to accept responsibility for requesting that Serena delay her serve. As Williams explains:

> I stood up for myself by insisting to the umpire that I deserved to play a let. I wasn't about to roll over and let her take advantage of me. But there were two big problems: the ump didn't see Justine motion me to stop, so he couldn't side with me, and the match was being played in France. France is located next to Belgium, so Justine had "home-court advantage," so to speak. (29)

On one hand, Serena's decision to omit race from her discussion has a historical precedent. When Jackie Robinson corresponded with children, he framed his discussion around broader themes of triumph and struggle. Since *Serving from the Hip* addresses itself to a young adult audience, excluding a "political perception" appears warranted. On the other hand, it would have been nearly impossible for any person writing to Robinson to have been naïve about race, and his opposition to white supremacy was clear. The Williams sisters generally steer clear of discussions of racism; instead, they choose to discuss themselves as Americans as if that position eliminates controversy. In this instance, being an American was no less controversial because of expressions of anti-Americanism since the war in Iraq.

In writing about the crowd's behavior at Roland Garros, Serena's disillusionment involved the French crowd's breach of tennis decorum and not with some sense that her experience in France should have put her beyond the reach of racism. In acknowledging that Henin-Hardenne was at "home" as a Belgian, the public got little out of Serena concerning the multiple perspectives on how her own status as a guest of color informed the French response. Paris has historically embraced the African American expatriate and African Americans, including Josephine Baker, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin, have seen it as a space of liberation. But as Tyler Stovall points out, this view was strained by an awareness of French hostility to Algerians and black immigrants. Moreover, while the French embraced the African American guest who was critical of U.S. racism, they were not tolerant when the analysis extended to the French (Stovall). So what sort of guest does Williams imagine herself being? What is her view of hospitality?

Serena has learned to speak French and Portuguese and has also studied Spanish and German. For her, having a command of multiple languages means that she has the "freedom to be [herself] and explore wherever [she is] in the world" (Williams 65). Regarding language, Barry Curtis and Claire Pajaczkowska contend that "most tourists do not speak the language of the culture or country they are visiting" (206) and as a result, they are alienated from their sense of everyday communication. To compensate for this loss of speech, Curtis and Pajaczkowska assert that the "tourist is isolated in the intensification of the significance of non-verbal communication" (207). In this regard, the Williams sisters are both atypical tourists because in expanding their command of language beyond English, they are seeking to engage the world around them. For the

Williams sisters, travel facilitates their sense of identity. In recording her travels, Venus writes:

> Because I am blessed to travel the world as I play tennis, I get exposed to different countries and cultures, which teaches me a lot about what I like and dislike. I've learned that I like all kinds of music--Indian and Arabic, for example. I always try to squeeze in a trip to an outdoor art market. And I'm willing to try any kind of food. One time when I was in Moscow, Russia, I ate in an Armenian restaurant one night, a Ukranian restaurant the next night, then a Russian restaurant, and a Georgian restaurant--just totally enjoying the experience. If anything, sampling different flavors from around the world makes me like American food a lot less. (57)

Here, Venus admits at least two of the three tourist moments that Curtis and Pajaczkowska identify as eating, shopping and sightseeing" (207). They assert that "[a]ll three are transactions of incorporation, in which the tourist negotiates a highly formalized relationship or participation in, and distance from, the environment" (207). Sightseeing is something that the tennis schedule does not readily permit. Venus includes a list of very familiar iconic tourist sites that she has visited, including the Eiffel Tower, London Bridge, the Sydney Opera House, and Coliseum among others.

In many ways, the Williams sisters' ability to go abroad and observe the world at large realizes the dreams of centuries of African Americans who traveled before them. Their expectations for luxury while traveling may be the envy of many travelers despite race. An awareness of African American women's history in motion reveals the Williams sisters' travels as quite exceptional. That the sisters can take their passage for granted,

not develop a program for how they will cross boundaries and prepare their bodies for their journey makes their mobility most compelling.

Routes, Race and Gender

"But what is this group; and how do you differentiate it; and how can you call it 'black' when you admit it is not black?"
I recognize it quite easily and with full legal sanction: the black man is a person who must ride "Jim Crow" in Georgia.
-W.E.B. DuBois ("The Superior Race")

Black women have a history of mobility, though it is often obscured by tales of black men's passage. In the United States, black women experienced differences of mobility on slavers. According to Deborah Gray White, enslaved women were transported on the quarter and half decks and remained unshackled (Ar'n't I 19, 63). White contends that such an arrangement allowed for easy sexual access to those women (63). Travel for enslaved men and women differed while landed as well. Enslaved men were loaned or leased to other plantations more frequently than women and so the numbers of those who traveled were in excess of those women who had this experience. White notes:

> All in all, it was female bondage more than male bondage, that meant being tied to the immediate environment of the plantation or farm. This was a liability when it came to running away. The would-be female fugitive, including the domestic who conceivably had more polished verbal and language skills than the field slave, had to consider her unfamiliarity with the surrounding countryside before fleeing. She also had to consider how conspicuous a lone black woman or group of black women would be in a countryside infrequently traveled by such humanity. Some female fugitives overcame this last impediment by

> disguising themselves as males. However, the small number of female runaways indicates that more bondwomen than bondsmen just "stayed put." (76)

Harriet Jacobs and Ellen Craft are among those enslaved black women who describe dressing as men to aid their flight.

Free blacks in the antebellum period also have a history of travel. Many moved across boundaries as missionaries, lecturers, educators, and philanthropists. Carla L. Peterson's work on African American speakers and writers in the North during the nineteenth-century highlights the political nature of this group. As free blacks associated with other African Americans and people of color, Peterson notes that they acted as "ethnographic observers, cultural workers in the fields of abolitionism and racial uplift, or lecturers to promiscuous assemblies" (89).

Jim Crow extended its dictates to black women. Thus, in light of Du Bois's claim that "the black man is a person who must ride 'Jim Crow' in Georgia," a black woman was also "a person who must ride 'Jim Crow' in Georgia." Jim Crow did not distinguish between black men and women; they equally suffered its indignities. From the turn of the century through at least the modern civil rights movement, the indignity of living Jim Crow was frequently linked to public conveyors and public accommodations.

Meeting the brutality of traveling Jim Crow, anti-lynching crusader Ida Wells and Educator Charlotte Hawkins Brown both sued railway companies. Wells refused to relocate from the "white's only" section and was forcibly removed while Brown was removed from her Pullman Berth (Heavy 92-93). For the first president of the NACW Mary Church Terrell the indignities of traveling Jim Crow motivated her decision to

pass. By mid-twentieth century, Rosa Parks became the symbol for transgressing the indignities of Jim Crow.

Victor H. Green published *The Negro Motorist Green Book* in 1936 as a local service catering to Metropolitan New York and nationally expanded its circulation the following year in response to public demand. The Green Book listed restaurants, private homes, hotels, beauty shops, barber shops, drug stores, and other services a black tourist could use on the road. Each state listed the cities in alphabetical order and the black and white establishments that would offer services free of the embarrassment and humiliation that Jim Crow occasioned.

Though black women and black men equally suffered the indignities of Jim Crow, black women's history as migrants differs from black men's. According to historian Darlene Clark Hine, black women migrants differed from black men through their reasons for leaving the south. Sexual violence and sexual exploitation prompted black women's movement away from the South. Hine contends that migration granted black women a chance for personal autonomy. The North stood as a site of possibility wherein black women could take advantage of increased financial opportunities resulting from both the Great War and World War II. Hine calls black women "links in a migration chain" because they often facilitated and encouraged sustained ties with family in the South through their return for celebrations and funerals; they also encouraged the migration of family members from the South to the North (249). An interesting fact that Hine notes concerning differences between black men and black women migrants is how their journeying reflected the gender conventions of their time so that black men broke up their migratory movements while black women made the entire distance in a single journey (246).

Sidonie Smith points to one aspect of the significance of travel for African Americans when she asserts that "travel functions as a defining arena of agency" (ix). In each of the historical moments discussed above, African Americans may be observed struggling to gain freedom from legal oppression. Setting African American women's mobility in relief brings attention to the specific way they have been forced to negotiate the landscape. Smith's attention to the "how" of travel further enriches this understanding. Technologies of travel provided women with choices in confronting the borders they would cross and transformed the ways in which they narrated their subjectivity. Smith leaves African Americans out of this study because of the constraints of racial visibility that make their engagement with new modes of transportation distinct from the travelers she studies. As she writes: "[t]he travelers whose narratives I explore here assume their ability to move through exotic and not-so-exotic spaces without the constraints of visibility politics as they elaborate a politics of technological mobility" (xv). Continuing, Smith writes that for the travelers she is studying "their relationship to the technologies of modernity is precisely the signifier of their privileged whiteness" (xv).

Toni Morrison offers a representation of women and technologies of motion in *Sula*, *Paradise* and *Love*. Like the women Smith considers in her work who regard themselves as "outsiders," Morrison's anarchic women are so by definition. In *Paradise*, especially, Morrison offers a narrative account that imagines the possibility of black women with respect to technologies of motion in light of modernity as well as the absence of constraints of race.

Toni Morrison's Walking Women

According to James C. Scott, "people who move around" upset organized states (2). As examples of such movers, he lists itinerants, Gypsies, homeless people, and

fugitive slaves among others. Lacking the regularity that comes from constancy of place, chronically moving people make it difficult for the state to impress itself upon them. Scott contends that "the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion" make settling these populations a primary goal (2). Moving about challenges statecraft's ambition to simplify and synoptically assess the land and its inhabitants.

Sidonie Smith posits that walking women uniquely experience their subjectivity as they travel. In fact, women pedestrians typically come to associate themselves with the "premodern" societies that traveling on foot mimics (32). The body registers the subjective changes occasioned upon traveling this way as it must absorb the natural elements and distance that put the body under duress.

In the modern world represented through the lens of a Morrisonian town, walkers figure the hostility between loose individuals and the state and those who travel on foot. Women who come to be at odds with or stand outside of local conventions or current standards of living, walk. For example, at the end of *Sula* when Nel Wright contemplates the gains and losses of the civil rights movement, Morrison describes her as "[o]ne of the last true pedestrians" (166). Thus, Nel is "the one out of sequence" just as Sula had been. Being likened to Sula is not merely coincidental here as it anticipates Eva's claim that Nel and Sula are "just alike" (169).

If Sula was a pariah and knew it, Nel was a pariah who did not. She did not see herself entangled in the drowning of Chicken Little until Eva pointed out how watching it happen made her culpable. In this light, Nel's walking is transformed. No longer can she be simply imagined as a sentimental stroller who children laugh at for being old-fashioned; instead, walking conjures the offending promenade of prostitutes. To this end, walking and moral laxity are also linked in *Paradise* and *Love*.

One general statement that can be made about the pariah figures in *Paradise* is that they are denied residency or are inhospitably treated by some within the larger community with respect to their presence. Thus, the founding families are denied residency and become a "tight band of wayfarers bound by the enormity of what had happened to them" (189). In founding Haven, they made space for themselves to settle into. Pariah women in their midst, however, stayed on the move. Haven's founding fathers were cautioned against "abandoned women with no belongings" (14), but it was their progeny who dealt with them most directly.

Connie called such women "drift" (222) and was also cautioned against them. Yet, as the Convent became the one tolerant place in the vicinity, she found herself caught between the comings and goings of women who drifted. According to Lone, women of all kinds walked the road between Ruby and the Convent:

> For more than twenty years [she] had watched them. Back and forth, back and forth: crying women, staring women, scowling, lip-biting women or women just plain lost. Out here in a red and gold land cut through now and then with black rock or a swatch of green; out here under skies so star-packed it was disgraceful; out here where the wind handled you like a man, women dragged their sorrow up and down the road between Ruby and the Convent. They were the only pedestrians. Sweetie Fleetwood had walked it, Billie Delia too. And the girl called Seneca. Another called Mavis. Arnette, too, and more than once. And not just these days. They had walked this road from the very first. Soane Morgan, for instance, and once, when she was young, Connie as well. Many of the walkers Lone had seen; others she learned about. But the

> men never walked the road; they drove it, although sometimes their destination was the same as the women's: Sargeant, K.D., Roger, Menus. And the good Deacon himself a couple of decades back. (270)

The only streetwalkers, then, were women. The gendering of the road rendered women's relationship to it illicit.

In *Love*, Morrison introduces Junior as a streetwalker. Junior walks into Silk but into a much colder climate along the eastern seaboard. Unfamiliar with the town's history, Junior was ill-equipped to read the advertisement that brought her there. Though natural, political, and social occurrences had altered the landscape and made Silk a typical urban city, Junior's need for a guide suggested the endurance of a strong local culture. As Scott writes, "the relative illegibility to outsiders of some urban neighborhoods...has provided a vital margin of political safety from control by outside elites" (54). Since Junior could not navigate the streets herself, we know that the community still "enjoys at least a small measure of insulation from outside intrusion" (Scott 54). Like Lena, Junior was a stranger and a streetwalker whose first encounters with men in her new surroundings aided her adjustment.

Junior walked into the home and the lives of two women linked through years of hatred that sprang from their one time love. Like Sula, Junior is an anarchic woman who destroys and restores in the same gesture. Though years younger than either Christine or Heed, she's very much like them; particularly Christine, who is also a woman who walks. Morrison describes Christine as a "hysterical pedestrian," and she's also linked to prostitution. Junior and Roman are both linked to ancestral figures. Roman's link clearly saves him; we are not sure about Junior's.

Junior figures the uncertainty of the position of young black women like Venus and Serena Williams with respect to this history of mobility, the body, and identity. In all that has been written about the Williams sisters in newspapers and magazines, books, essays, as well as in the interviews they have given, little of the history of journeying and moving about as travelers bears upon their responses to how their bodies are perceived, how they come to identify themselves, or relate to others. Venus and Serena Williams each tell stories of travel that are stories of arrival and tourism. For instance, when Venus writes about the 33 days she spent in Moscow, Russia for a tournament, she never discusses the consequences of the flight for her performance, the meaningfulness of her excursion in historical terms, or the significance of being recognized in a foreign context as an African American player. In recording her second entry, Venus tells an odd story of being asked to sing at a V.I.P dinner. What makes the story peculiar is that before she is asked to go on stage to perform, she gives no indication that she has made the request on her own behalf or indicated that she could or wanted to sing. She writes:

> I went to this V.I.P. dinner last night. They had this show going on, with singing and dancing. The singer guy had a voice like Louis Armstrong. He was pretty cool. Anyway, Arantxa was sitting at the table next to me, along with her mother and Louise Pleming, this funny Australian player. Well,anyway, they were saying, "Venus, you want to sing, Venus you are going to sing, aren't you?" After about five minutes they were VERY SERIOUS.The tournament director was setting it up and before I knew it they were about to announce to the people dining that I was going to sing! (Diary)

Though initially surprised and reluctant, Venus eventually concedes to sing along with Serena to Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World," a song neither of the sisters knows more than the chorus to.

Althea Gibson was similarly pressed into singing. Bruce Schoenfeld recounts a story about Gibson that includes themes of travel and singing:

> When Althea came to Merion for the Pennsylvania Lawn Tennis Championships, Bill Clothier had her housed at the home of social-register members such as Radnor's A. Willing Patterson, on the theory that if she deserved to be in the draw, she deserved a comfortable place to stay. That was enlightened, especially for a staunch conservative like Clothier, but such thinking was rare. Usually her lodging was a tumbledown motel on the far side of town, with no transportation to get her to and from the courts. One year at the Colorado State Championships in Denver, a regular stop on the post-Forest Hills circuit, Mulloy attended the Tennis Ball with both his wife and Althea, his mixed-doubles partner. The whispers started when the three of them walked in the room together, and they didn't stop until Mulloy pressed Althea into service singing two songs with the band. Her voice was borderline professional in quality, and it won her the room. Or perhaps the assembled socialites were more comfortable considering her part of the night's entertainment, as opposed to an honored guest. (121-122)

The absence of commentary regarding the physical requirements of travel may mark progress in Venus Williams's narrative in light of the demands that Jim Crow made on Gibson in the 1950s in America. However, the fact that both Gibson and the Williams

sisters are pressed into service as singers when as tennis players they are invited guests at formal dinners unites their stories. The parallels between their stories raises the question of whether Shoenfeld's contention that being "part of the night's entertainment" made the guests feel more comfortable with Gibson's presence at the affair also applies to Venus and Serena Williams. The fact that travel sets in relief this similarity between their stories increases the significance of investigating its relevance for contemporary black women's narratives of self and racial identity. For previous generations of African Americans, particularly African American athletes, this disassociation of body from experience of movement was not made. What is uncertain then, is the meaningfulness of this shift away from this relationship.

African American Athletes: Travel and Embodiment

The indignities of traveling Jim Crow are intimately interwoven into Jackie Robinson's story in baseball, and the means of conveyance played an integral part. The story of Robinson's experience traveling to his first spring training in Daytona Beach, Florida as a member of the Dodgers organization illustrates this. Jackie and Rachel Robinson started out in Los Angeles. While they were able to board the airplane and arrive comfortably and safely from California, trouble came their way when they made their first stop in New Orleans. Consistent with historian C. Vann Woodward's claim that Jim Crow laid out stipulations for the segregation of airports, the Robinson's encountered Jim Crow signs posted in the New Orleans airport. Most everything in the airport was segregated: restrooms, coffee shops, water fountains. Woodward contends that airplanes themselves were not segregated during the Jim Crow era. He writes:

> Even to the orthodox there was doubtless something slightly incongruous about requiring a Jim Crow compartment on a

> transcontinental plane, or one that did not touch the ground between New York and Miami. No Jim Crow law has been found that applies to passengers while they are in the air. (117)

The ground was an important place for facilitating Jim Crow and in the Robinsons' case it immediately provided the airline with an opportunity to orchestrate the racial composition of the airplane's cabin. In narrating the events of the Robinson's plane touching down, Rampersad writes:

> As they touched down at Pensacola, they heard themselves being paged: Jack and Rachel Robinson were to report to the ticket counter. When Jack left for the terminal, a flight attendant advised Rachel: "You'd better get off, too." To their indignation, they could not continue on the flight. First they heard that a storm was coming and the plane had to be made lighter, for extra fuel; next, after white passengers took their places, that the New Orleans authorities had not left room for persons booked out of Pensacola. Vigorously Jack argued their case, but he understood what was happening: whites wanted to fly and blacks had to wait. (137)

Since there was no Jim Crow compartment, the Robinson's were asked to exit the plane so that those seats could be given to whites.

Since the Robinson's had not met the end of their journey they used other modes of transportation to make their way. Though a limousine arrived at the airport to take them to a hotel, there were no black hotels in the city and they were ultimately delivered to a bus station that took them to Jacksonville. At one point along their sixteen hour journey they were forced to move to the back of the bus. Once in Jacksonville, the couple had to wait in a "hot and fly-ridden […] Jim Crow section" of the bus station for

a bus that would take them to Daytona. After a thirty-six hour trip, Robinson said that he "never wanted another trip like that one" (139). Despite what he wanted, Jackie Robinson was thoroughly and consistently insulted through his use of public transportation through most of his days playing Major League Baseball.

For African Americans, Jim Crow made travel akin to the suffering that the Ancients thought it should be. Jim Crow ensured that being a tourist and traveling for pleasure would be achieved only through great difficulty. In Susan Cahn's historical account of women and sports she notes the pleasures that athletes derived from travel as well as the increased opportunities to expand their horizons. For black women athletes, she further notes that racial segregation frustrated their experience of travel (120). Though writing specifically about track and field athletes, what Cahn says could certainly be extended to black women athletes traveling during an era of racial segregation:

> Athletes described their travels as a combination of painful and wonderful awakenings. Traveling across the South and into northern cities brought young athletes out of the protective fold of black institutions and communities. They encountered the harsh realities of southern segregation and the more confusing, unwritten rules of northern racism. (123)

Althea Gibson's experience traveling as a tennis player met with many of the same frustrations and successes as the runners Cahn discusses.

Though movement does not provide the frame for the life in tennis that Gibson offers in her autobiography, her biographers note the significance of near continuous motion in her life as they title the opening chapter of this work "Traveling Girl." Althea Gibson, Robinson's contemporary who, like him, was not reared in the South and had

tremendous difficulty adjusting to its dictates; Gibson relocated to Wilmington, North Carolina and Lynchburg, Virginia from Harlem.[14] Though Gibson's move South was uncharacteristic of the migration of blacks during the forties, the South would be the place where she would find the greatest opportunity for proper training on the private courts of Drs. R. Walter Johnson and Hubert A. Eaton of Lynchburg and Wilmington respectively.

Though Michael Jordan's career gets earmarked as the moment when black athletes become apolitical and career driven, Gibson set an earlier precedent. In giving her opinion on the matter, Gibson writes:

> I have never regarded myself as a crusader. I try to do the best I can in every situation I find myself in, and naturally I'm always glad when something I do turns out to be helpful and important to all Negroes--or, for that matter, to all Americans, or maybe only to all tennis players. But I don't consciously beat the dreams for any special cause, not even the Negro in the United States, because I feel that our best chance to advance is to prove ourselves as individuals. That way, when you are accepted, you are accepted voluntarily, because people appreciate you and respect you and want you, not because you have been shoved down their throats. This doesn't mean that I'm opposed to the fight for integration of the schools or other movements like that. It simply means that in my career I try to steer clear of political involvements and make my way as Althea Gibson, private individual. (60-61).

[14] Though Gibson was born in the South, in Silver, South Carolina, her family relocated when she was three.

It makes sense that athletes would accept the concept of merit. Money and personal connections do not ensure success in athletics; however, sports were segregated. Thus, Gibson's attitude about politics ignores the way racial politics impacted her athletic experiences. Not only was she prevented from playing in the major events of her sport but racial politics significantly impacted the traveling involved in competition. During segregation, black athletes, like all black travelers, were not welcome in restaurants and motels. When traveling for competition, black athletes were required to take along their own meals. If traveling for competition involved an overnight stay, black athletes depended on the hospitality of other blacks.

Gibson's attitude towards politics had a direct bearing on how she prepared her body for travel. As she makes her way from Harlem to Wilmington in a "tired old skirt" that she believed would withstand the wear and tear of traveling (42). The skirt may also have been her compromise to respectability since she preferred wearing pants. To be fair, Gibson may have worn a nicer ensemble were she able to afford it. As she notes, she had "never owned a real dress since [she had] been a little girl" (42). Fully subscribing to the politics of respectability would have been a middle class experience.

In the compelling excerpts that Cahn offers in her chapter on black women in track and field one is permitted an enlightening perspective on how travel shaped the political, social, and cultural conscience of those athletes. For some, it created an opportunity for them to take in the world outside of rural environments and the sight of "people eating with chopsticks" and enjoying chop suey provides a glimpse of the cultural deprivation they experienced within the enclosure of the black college campus or their home environments (124). Furthermore, traveling enabled black women athletes to

see the possibility of racial cooperation. For example, describing her experience in the Olympics in Melbourne, Australia, Willey White observes:

> That's when I found out there were two worlds--Mississippi and the rest of the world. I found that blacks and whites could eat together, sleep together, play together, do all these things together. Had I not been in the Olympic Games, I could have spent the rest of my life thinking that blacks and whites were separate. (Cahn 125)

White's experience abroad enabled her to experience integration. She realized that segregation was only locally normative. Obviously situating herself as a black person traveling, White develops a critical perspective concerning race in the American south. Gibson is quite an interesting figure in light of her reflections on race while abroad.

Unlike black women runners, Gibson shies away thinking of her position as a black woman and thinks more generally and thinks about herself as an American. In one remarkable passage, Gibson describes her impressions of the people and the conditions in Southeast Asia:

> In short, they are not all that different from us. They work, they take care of their families, they worry about survival, and in general they behave much as we do except for certain national customs and except for the fact that they have so many more poor people than we have and nothing that resembles our American middle class. In Pakistan it's pretty much all or nothing, and for most of the people it's nothing. (101)

Gibson's thoughts here are striking in portraying the United States of 1955 as a truly unified nation as she generically refers to "us" and "we." Further amplifying Gibson's portrayal of the US of the time is her experience of blackness as a personal burden. She

discusses her awareness of being perceived as a curiosity as well as struggling with the challenges of having to positively represent black people at all times. "It was a strain," Gibson says, "always trying to say and do the right thing, so that I wouldn't give people the wrong idea of what Negros are like" (105). On this point, Gibson identifies the burden of having "body fictions," overwhelm one's subjectivity. In other words, what Deborah Walker King calls "body fictions," are those cultural mandates and myths that accompany actual subjects but bear more authority than the subjects themselves within the culture may be observed in Gibson's discussion. As previously noted, Gibson believed in individual merit. Thus, she believed that "[o]nce […] people got to know [her]" that they would "see that "she is" no different from anybody else; only my skin is different" (105). Gibson assumed sole responsibility for communicating her authentic self to others as she notes that it "wasn't easy to figure out a way to get them to know me" (105). Gibson's position on race, America, and individual merit evidences optimism in the most trying times.

Arthur Ashe and Travel in the Open Era

Arthur Ashe consistently linked his autobiographical writings to experiences of passage, travel, and movement. The epigram to his 1981 memoir *Off the Court* reads: "To that nameless slave girl off the H.M.S. *Doddington*, and her daughter Lucy, her granddaughter Peggy, and her great-granddaughter Peggy, and her great-great-grandson Hammet, all of whom were born, lived, and died as slaves." The slaver as a means of transport then, weighs on Ashe's thoughts about his life and work. Later, the reader comes to learn that the human cargo that Ashe names are members of his paternal family. For Ashe, these family records actually record a broader effort that African Americans make to contest claims of illegitimacy by lack of history. Providing proof of

one's past counters claims of inferiority on account of lacking knowledge of one's ancestry (16).

Ashe's reflections in *Off the Court* as well as in *Days of Grace* show concern for the history associated with racial displacement. The chapter titles of *Off the Court,* "No Man's Land," "The Passage," "On the Road," "A Land of Promise," as well as those for *Days of Grace*, "My Outing," "Middle Passage," and "The Beast in the Jungle" thematically reference movement and the discourse of "otherness" historically associated with travel. As a boy, reading *National Geographic* ignited his passion for travel. Like the black sportswomen in track and field, tennis provided Ashe with the opportunity to expand his horizons. Travel shaped his ideas on beauty and love; on a practical level it offered him an opportunity to improve his game as he met different circumstances.

By all accounts, traveling in the Jim Crow South constituted adventure travel. The threat of danger was real and required respect for its stated and unstated rules. Actual instances of lynching and physical attacks accompanied black people on their journeys and shaped how they responded to the need to cross geographic boundaries that marked racial territory in the American South. Ashe's reflections testify to the impression of this reality in shaping athletic performance:

> There were […] maxims meant only for little black Southern boys: when in doubt, call your opponent's shot good; if you're serving the game before the change of ends, pick up the balls on your side and hand them to your opponent during the crossover. Dr. Johnson knew we were going into territory that was often hostile and he wanted our behavior to be beyond reproach. It would be years before I understood the emotional toll of repressing anger and natural frustration. (42)

Jim Crow influenced how athletes played the game when opponents did not share racial sameness. Ashe, like other black athletes during his day, gave considerable attention to the experience of traveling in America. His reflections highlight the added pressures and challenges black athletes experienced when competing.

Describing the experience of playing tennis in the segregated South, Ashe writes:

> That summer of '53 was symbolic because it marked the first steps on the road from Richmond. In subsequent years, traveling with Ron Charity and others stressed the importance of camaraderie. Blacks could not eat in restaurants, so we brought our fried chicken, potato salad, and rolls in bags and passed the Thermos around the car. Spending weekends as a guest in someone's house taught me more about social graces than I could have ever learned elsewhere. (43)

As Ashe reflects on the experience of being a good guest and a good passenger while traveling in the Jim Crow South, Toni Morrison tells a similar story of the South in 1953 as she recalls the black hosts:

> Whenever I see sheets drying on the line or smell gumbo simmering on the stove, a flood of memories comes back to me. In 1953 when I traveled in the rural South with a group of students, we received the generosity of strangers--African Americans who took us in when there were no places for nonwhites to eat or sleep. They were strangers who gave up their own beds, dressed them in brilliant white linen smelling of mulberry and pine. They fed us from their gardens and were so insistent on not being paid, we had to hide money in the pillow slips so they would find it long after we were gone. These were country people, or city

> people denied adequate education, relegated to a tiny balcony area in a movie theater, backs of buses and separate water fountains, menial jobs or none. Like me, they were ordinary people. Yet, although their lives were driven by laws that said, "No, not here," "No, not there," "No, not you," racial segregation had not marked their souls. (*Remember*)

Ashe and Morrison each marvels at the beauty stemming from very ugly circumstances. Unlike the vicious shamefulness that characterized Jim Crow, black people showed grace in the hospitality that segregation assaulted. Rather than allow the nasty character of Jim Crow to inform how they treated strangers in black environments, black people invented an alternative response.

The Theater of Hair

Carla Peterson's chapter concerning tourism for free black people during the antebellum period applies to the experiences of black athletes traveling during Jim Crow: "what happens when the gaze is returned by the Other and African Americans themselves become the object of tourism? How can they forestall that commodification to which tourism subjects places and peoples?" (89) Peterson notes the "participant-observer" aspect of the black traveler, the "insider-outsider" perspective. The both/and position that Peterson theorizes is distinct from Patricia Hill Collins's construction of the "outsider-within" because it is not prefaced on an ostensible inclusion. Hair grooming becomes the event that turns both Gibson and Ashe, tourists themselves, into the objects of tourism.

The Jim Crow South so offended Ashe and Gibson that they both chose to only visit dear ones residing there but rejected the idea of ever living there themselves. The spectacle of hair grooming was also a similarity that Ashe and Gibson shared as they

traveled abroad. Gibson describes the process of hair grooming as "a real problem when you're away from home" (91). The absence of hair stylists prepared to style certain black hair textures required that Gibson come prepared with the things she needed: "a pressing come, a curling iron, a can of Dixie Peach Pomade hair grease, and even an old soup can with the top cut off so [she] could make a fire in and heat the iron" (91). Gibson describes a moment of awkwardness and perhaps difficulty while in Burma when her white roommate Karol Fageros, who Gibson describes as "one of the prettiest" and "nicest" girls she had ever met, watches her attend to the requirements of hair grooming (89). She writes:

> Well, when we got back to the room, I went into the bathroom and washed my hair and dried it. Karol was sitting at the desk writing when I walked back into the room, and she took one look at me and jumped on the bed and started rolling around and laughing. I didn't blame her a bit; I was a sight. When I first wash my hair and dry it, it absolutely stands up straight. Karol had never seen anything like it before and it just panicked her. "Go ahead," I told her, "get your kicks. You'll see when I get finished." (91)

Gibson's sympathy for Fageros reveals her attempts to present herself as compassionate; thus, a corrective to how she had been perceived. Gibson also gives an impression of her own ugliness that allows readers to further sympathize with Fageros. While both women were visitors in Rangoon, racial difference created distance and difference between Gibson and Fageros to such an extent that Gibson's hair grooming routine became exoticised through the perceptions of her roommate. Thus, the everyday functions

within the terms of Urry's "tourist gaze." Speaking of this particular way of looking, Urry writes:

> There is no single tourist gaze as such. It varies by society, by social group and by historical period. Such gazes are constructed through difference […] the gaze in any historical period is constructed in relationship to its opposite, to non-tourist forms of social experience and consciousness. What makes a particular tourist gaze depends upon what it is contrasted with; what the forms of non-tourist experience happen to be. The gaze therefore presupposes a system of social activities and signs which locate the particular tourist practices, not in terms of some intrinsic characteristics, but through the contrasts implied with non-tourist social practices, particularly those based within the home and paid work. (2)

The dramatic spectacle of Gibson as the exotic other intensified as she continued processing her hair:

> I put some of the mentholated spirits in the can and struck a match to it and got a pretty good fire going. Then, while I held the pressing iron over the can to heat it, I put a lot of the Dixie Peach Pomade on my hair, and when everything was ready, I began to press it. Karol like to died. "What are you doing?" she hollered. So help me, I think for a while there she was actually scared. "Aren't you afraid you'll burn yourself?" she kept saying. I guess I got a little bit sensitive about it because I picked up all my stuff and went into the bathroom with it, but Karol kept getting up and peeking in to see how I was doing. And she kept laughing and

> laughing. She wasn't being mean, mind you, she was my friend; but she'd never seen anything like it before, and it positively fractured her. I remember I said to her, "Don't laugh at me, honey, I can't help it. Us colored girls don't have hair like yours, that's all. This is what we got to do for it." I explained to her that I didn't usually have to fool around with it myself; back home I could get it done in a beauty parlor. But, traveling like this, I didn't have any choice except to do it myself. (91-92)

After tiring of the process, Gibson tries to find a stylist to do the work for her but this failed to work to her advantage.

Ashe's experiences having his hair managed abroad were quite similar. He writes that "one of the toughest assignments for [him] was getting a haircut" (136). Continuing he notes:

> It was particularly a problem in Australia. Aboriginals all have straight hair and the closest thing to me was a Fijian, whom the Aussies would call a "woolly." Several times I had to try to explain to an Australian barber how to cut my kinky hair. And each time the shaving became "theater." People would literally stop and watch; chances are they would never again see a kinky-haired black man get a haircut. (136-137)

The "theater" of hair that Ashe describes intersects with Gibson's experience of being made into a spectacle. Like her, his experience as a tourist readjusts the gaze so that he becomes the spectacle instead of the natives and the sites and attractions of their home. Also like Gibson, whose roommate touches her hair and comments on how "fine" it feels (92), Ashe shares a story about the touching of his hair:

> I know that for a long time several players--especially the Russians—

> wanted to touch my hair but they never asked. Alex Metreveli, the Russian player, had a coach named Serge. One day, at Albert Hall in London, I came out of the shower, semi-dried my hair, put on my clothes, and then proceeded to "pick" my hair. Serge watched in amazement as my *pick* disappeared into my head and with a flick of my wrist I pulled, teased, and shaped my "'fro." "Vat is dat--dust? he asked. "No, it is not dust. Come here Serge; you can touch it." He walked over and felt the top of my head while the locker room roared."Is soft, not hard. I think long time is hard. Feels nice." "What does it feel like, Serge?" He broke out into a big grin and walked out, amid howls of laughter. (137)

Similarities between these stories about black hair leading to laughter and petting are interesting in the way that they underscore both Gibson and Ashe as hard yet "docile bodies." Their bodily competency appears to evaporate as they get "Othered" as exotic spectacles, exemplifying the possibility that Peterson acknowledged for free black tourists during the antebellum period.

What hooks says about hair as "a part of the black female body that must be controlled" may be extended to black men considering Ashe's experience (114). Her discussion of contemporary black women's experiences as exoticized others could have been written with Ashe and Gibson in mind:

> Most of us were not raised in environments where we learned to regard our hair as sensual or beautiful in an unprocessed state. Many of us talk about situations where white people ask to touch our hair when it is unprocessed, then show surprise that the texture is soft or feels good. In

> the eyes of many white folks and other nonblack folks, the natural Afro looks like steel wool or a helmet. Responses to natural hairstyles worn by black women usually reveal the extent to which our natural hair is perceived in white supremacist culture as not only ugly but frightening. We also internalize that fear. The extent to which we are comfortable with our hair usually reflects on our overall feelings about our bodies. (114)

Travel did not free black bodies from race and racial expectations. Ashe and Gibson each confront the responses hooks describes. For them, travel reinforces race and racial expectations instead of freeing them from it. By the 1980s, a difference in these expectations emerges.

Zina Garrison's experience of a "theater" of hair matters more in terms of the hyperreal than in terms of the real. Garrison's frustration is quite different from Ashe's and Gibson's in that oftentimes, her traveling body refers to the circulation of her image rather than her physical body. Thus, her concern for the relationship of her body and her travels manifests in her discussions of how her image appears on television and in photographs. The circulation of her image in the press impacted her ability to earn endorsements and thus to live as a professional athlete. The meaningfulness of the currency of her image drove Garrison to focus on and attempt to discipline her body in ways that reinforced racial difference.

Garrison bemoans her early days before the camera because close-up shots caught her "routinely bad hair days" (Garrison 76). According to her:

> Sweat has never been good to most black women's hair, so there were times when the camera wasn't Zina-friendly. Lori didn't seem to sweat as

> much as I did, and it really used to bug me that she could look so cool and dry with her hair cut short. During the last few years of my career, I wore a cap to keep the sweat from streaming down my face. A lot of friends in Houston didn't know who I was without my cap. It seemed like I'd always have my worst hair days whenever I interviewed immediately after a tough three-set match on a hot day. (76)

Sweating prevents Garrison from having straight hair. Given that Garrison's concern for the look of her hair takes place in public and concerns public perception it eludes the less political rite of passage that bell hooks describes when she writes about wanting to participate in hair straightening rituals so as to become a woman, which hooks describes as an "intimate" affair (*Straightening* 111). About this moment, hooks notes:

> Hair pressing was a ritual of black women's culture--of intimacy. It was an exclusive moment when black women (even those who did not know one another well) might meet at home or in the beauty parlor to talk with one another, to listen to the talk. It was as important a world as that of the male barbershop--mysterious, secret. It was a world where the images constructed as barriers between one's self and the world were briefly let go, before they were made again. It was a moment of creativity, a moment of change. (111)

The intimate experience that hooks describes provides a context for black women and hair pressing that defied her white roommate's experience. hooks's insight highlights how upsetting it must have been for Gibson to attempt to defend what had once been intimate and affirming.

The politics of hair concerns the way European standards of beauty inform notions of good hair and bad hair within African American culture. Explaining the politics of black hairstyles, Kobena Mercer posits that, "*all* black hairstyle are political in that they each articulate responses to the panoply of historical forces which have invested this element of the ethnic signifier with body social and symbolic meaning and significance" (104). While hooks notes the positive intimacy occurring among black women performing hair straightening rituals, she also maintains that the negative implications "exist alongside" the shared experiences between black women (112). As she writes, "[w]ithin white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, the social and political context in which the custom of black folks straightening our hair emerges, it represents an imitation of the dominant white group's appearance and often indicates internalized racism (112). Furthermore, hair straightening becomes an attempt to control an unruly body.

Despite the complaints of many black women about intrusive suggestions concerning the condition of their hair, Garrison welcomed them. She writes:

> Vera Nellum, who has been like a godmother to me for the past ten years, was the first person to make me aware of the need to take extra time to prepare myself before going on camera. She also scolded me when I didn't smile or look directly into the camera. I think tips like that helped me widen my fan base. I had begun to understand, too, that companies in search of top athletes to endorse their products expect the athletes to look their best at all times, particularly when cameras are rolling. (76)

Nellum becomes an advocate of what Paul Taylor calls the "straight hair rule" (59). As he notes, the "straight hair rule, is the presumption, long embraced in African American communities (and, for not quite as long a time, in communities of African descended peoples throughout the world), that straight hair is a necessary component of physical beauty" (59). Motown founder Berry Gordy sustained this investment in Garrison's bid for beauty. According to Garrison, Gordy was an avid tennis fan and was quite interested in whether the style techniques used to enhance the image of famous girl groups like the Supremes could be successful with athletes (78). Such an enhanced image translated into acceptance that carried financial promise. Given her intense desire to live as a professional athlete, the possibility that an enhanced image could facilitate the realization of her goal, led to Garrison consenting to give Gordy's advice a try. Her concerns about hair reinforce links between hair and capitalism that may not have been most obvious in Gibson and Ashe's experiences.

The potential for the hyperreal to determine her potential as a professional athlete had serious negative consequences for Garrison. Again, the emphasis here on the hyperreal in her narrative continues the theme of travel, but with a difference. The circulation or movement of the black body as an image marks a shift away from previous generations for whom the focus on movement was linked to the physical body. For example, Gibson juxtaposes her actual "colored girl's hair" while in Southeast Asia with that other white girls like her roommate's and rates the later as normative. Gibson is clearly wounded by her roommate's reaction but asks for sympathy for her roommate's ignorance. Garrison, on the other hand, reflected on her representation in photographs and began to think lowly of herself in relationship to the image, especially when she compared herself to white women. Measuring herself against photographs as well as the

physical bodies of white girls and women she competed against directly informed Garrison's negative regard for her body. Thus, Garrison suffers with an eating disorder. Interestingly, she links this to race and not the coincidence of race, media, and culture:

> At age 12, I was considered big compared to the white girls I competed against in the 12-and-under junior tournaments; in fact, you may remember I was accused of lying about my age. While others were bothered that I might be too old, I would have been glad for any excuse for my bulk. I noticed all the white girls' figures and admired how slim they looked in their tennis outfits. I never realized then that the people who made those tiny shirts and skirts fashioned them specifically for slender white women, not black women with big butts like mine. I often got quite frustrated trying to stuff my body into the outfits available. (138)

Garrison's honest discussion of her feelings of inadequacy as she compared her athletic body to the athletic bodies of white girls brings attention to a topic little discussed in scholarship on women's sports. When the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports issued their report on the benefits and potential perils confronting girls who played sports they acknowledged that, "little is known about the dreams, interests and physical activities of girls of color."[15] Garrison's story of her struggle with bulimia helps fill in the gaps of black women's sporting experience.

Garrison dissatisfaction with her body and her quest for thinness supports Susan Bordo's insights concerning the way that postmodern cultural ideals and media culture

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[15] See The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports from an Interdisciplinary Approach, *Physical Activity and Sports in the Lives of Girls: Physical and Mental Health Dimensions* [report on-line] (University of Minnesota: Spring 1997, accessed April 10, 1997) available from http://www.kls.coled.umn.edu/crgws/pcpfs/pcpfs.html#key_research_findings; Internet.

have threatened the possibility of cultural diversity[16]. Supporting this idea of the 1980s and 1990s that Bordo critiques, Margaret K. Bass cites the work of Sharlene Hesse-Biber:

> Research studies conducted in the late 1980s and 1990s confirm that the Cult of Thinness is spreading beyond the white middle class. Eating disorders have reportedly increased among the American black population. One researcher speculated that "increasing affluence among some blacks, and thus their access to traditional white middle class values, and the homogenization of life style and priorities, perhaps as a result of the increasing influence of the media, have finally penetrated the black culture; the young black female (and perhaps male) is getting fatter and is becoming more concerned about her fatness." The problem appears particularly acute among persons of color who are upwardly mobile. (225)

Elite tennis culture significantly influenced Garrison's view of her corporeal inadequacy. Quite distinct from Ashe for whom travel introduced new values, Garrison remains a victim of the cultural ideas shaping 1980s and 1990s culture concerning body image.

Venus and Serena Williams mark a shift away from the views of bodily inadequacy that plagued Gibson and Garrison. The cornrows and beads they wore in their hair at the start of their professional careers in the late nineties distinguished them from other black athletes competing during that time. The boldness of their decision is set in relief by public conversations concerning self-presentation taking place in the

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[16] See Susan Bordo. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body, Tenth Anniversary Edition.* University of California Press; 2nd ed., 2004; *Twilight Zones* :*The Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.* University of California Press; 1st ed.,1999.

broader culture. One of the more controversial matters concerned the teaching of *Nappy Hair*. In 1997, the same year Venus Williams became the first unseeded player in the modern era to advance to the finals at the U.S. Open, Carolivia Herron published *Nappy Hair* to warm praise. Controversy ensued when Ruth Sherman, a white third-grade teacher, taught *Nappy Hair* to a class comprised of multi-ethnic students in the Bushwick neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. The children's parents responded in frustration considering the history of nappy hair being seen as an ethnic slur (Leyden 1). Furthermore, many parents reportedly found the subject matter inappropriate for a white teacher to present in a multi-racial setting, while others found the topic unacceptable in the curriculum regardless of race (Clemetsen). Noliwe Rooks presents the landscape of the nineties as a battlefield wherein black female hairstyles were "categorized as aggressive" by "individuals and institutions" who misinterpreted black culture (293, 294). Like the school girls who were suspended until they changed their hairstyles and flight attendant, Barbara Cooper, fired from American Airlines upon refusing to straighten her braided hair, Venus and Serena could be penalized a point if beads flew on the court during play. And yet, the penalties did not threaten their careers as professional athletes as they did Garrison.

Having braids allowed Venus and Serena Williams to avoid the difficulties of finding a hairstylist outside of home and having sweat distort their hairstyles. Though the Williams sisters did not avoid the "theater" of hair altogether, their relationship significantly differs from their predecessors in tennis. For Venus and Serena, the perception of having "nappy hair" was profitable. Such a move suggests that the sisters are free to circulate self-selected images of themselves without the political responsibility to represent the respectability of black women. This decision would not have been

possible or considered responsible in earlier times. Wilma Rudolph's relationship to her image is most illustrative of this point.

Cindy Hines Gissendanner writes that female athletes from poor and working-class communities who were recruited to Tuskegee and Tennessee State were assumed to have values that conflicted with those of the black middle-class. In an effort to calibrate the imbalance between the two classes, a deal was struck with athletes whereby maintaining their scholarships depended on their cooperation with efforts to "recast their value systems, dress, manners, and relationships in a mold of middle-class respectability and restraint" (6-7). Ed Temple, coach for Tennessee State's Tigerbelles, was both policeman and nurturer of black women's respectability.

In Temple's autobiography *Only the Pure in Heart Survive*, he notes that the stigma that is attached to women in sports is as "mannish and unable to have babies" (50). Gissendanner's research reveals that there was a common perception that black female athletes were masculine and one must acknowledge that this "perception" reeks of homophobia. Nonetheless, in order to fissure this prevailing anxiety, historians like Edwin Henderson, used the black press to disrupt this ideology. In citing his column Gissendanner writes: "Colored girl athletes are as a rule, effeminate. They are normal girls. This is not true of the women champions who have made records that compare with marks set by men" (12). Henderson's column served two functions, it settled the dis-ease regarding black female femininity but it also created a suspicion of women who succeeded and defied the limitations arbitrarily established, potentially setting limits on what a woman athlete could achieve.

Temple says that he sees it as his job to "promote a good image for women in sports" (50). The ambition to portray a positive image led Temple to maintain a strict policy with photographers. He writes:

> I don't want any pictures taken of them while they are all sweaty after a race. When they have finished they get on their sweatsuits, comb their hair, and put on some lipstick. Otherwise people would look at a picture right after a race, all sweaty looking, and say, 'Hmmmm, look how ugly she is- she ought to win first place!' (50-51)

When Wilma Rudolph anchored the gold medal winning 4x100-meter relay, the image of her post-performance jubilation would have to be postponed until she was properly groomed. Temple writes:

> Over 100 photographers chased after Rudolph to get her picture. Since I've always been so strict about their appearance, she wouldn't let the photographers get a picture until she could comb her hair, put on some lipstick, and don her little red good luck cap.(84)

The 1960s Games were the first to be televised throughout Europe. Coach Ed Temple forbade his athletes to wear pants while traveling. For Rudolph's generation, being able to dress for the sporting occasion allowed them to extend the politics of respectability to the athletic arena; it allowed them the opportunity for beauty and femininity. While the Williams sisters belong to this tradition of black women embracing the opportunity for femininity, the *politics* of respectability does not mitigate their relationship to their bodies.

The beaded hairstyles that Venus and Serena wore when they first entered the sport, according to Rooks, suggested that they were aggressive. Yet, unlike Garrison who experienced her hair as an obstacle to endorsements, the Williams sisters never encountered such a problem. Venus Williams signed a $12 million contract with Reebok two years before she turned pro and having played in only one tournament (Spencer 93). The impression of an "aggressive" style politics as well as the aggressiveness of their style of play makes it difficult then to make a direct connection between the corporate embrace of the Williams sisters and Michael Jordan. Despite perceived public antipathy towards Venus and Serena, the sisters certainly rejected such labeling. While the Williams sisters have wholly embraced their status as black role models and have embraced their racial heritage, they do not purport any particular racial politics or philosophy. In discussing their hairstyles, they note function and not politics. In *Serving from the Hip* Venus explains that she and Serena wear braided styles because they are easier to manage in light of the fact that hair gets wet from the sweat of continually working out (88). To this end, their beaded hair allowed them to avoid the problem of being "camera ready" that plagued Garrison.

The Williams sisters are able to take traveling for granted in the same way that they can take style for granted. By this I mean that Venus and Serena can make practical decisions without a pressing concern for racial harassment or discrimination, such is certainly not the case for general black women travelers.

Post-modern Tales of Mobility, Race, Gender, and Embodiment

"Travel, once an exceptional experience, a 'rare and plastic season' of life, is now a routine event, as unexceptional as getting into one's car and driving down the road beyond one's usual stopping places."
Eric J. Leed (286)

As previously discussed, in all that has been written about the Williams sisters in newspapers and magazines, books, essays, as well as in the interviews they have given, little of the history of journeying and moving about as travelers bears upon their responses to how their bodies are perceived, how they come to identify themselves, or relate to others. As with Venus's diary of the 33 days spent in Moscow, the account of her experience occurs after her arrival and does not include an experience of transport. This makes their experience markedly different from previous generations of athletes. Garrison marks a transition in a narrow discourse of mobility that focuses on the physical transportation of bodies to hyperreal circulation images that bear upon bodies. Zina Garrison contends that her appearance before cameras made it difficult for her to prosper as a professional athlete. Venus and Serena Williams do not have this difficulty. Even when their hairstyles suggested that they were aggressive, major tennis shoe and apparel companies endorsed them.

"To Walk Her through the Front Door of History"

And so here stands Sarah Baartman the "missing link," naked or in her circus costume, her real name, her African name lost to us as is most of what she embodied or stood for. Yet this tiny, fat assed woman's influence as myth, symbol, science, icon of The Great Chain of Being, the Bell Curve and all the rest is insidious and awe-inspiring. She is everywhere--in every textbook that deals with science, literature, or history: the invisible one--there by absence or negation. There by her definition of not being there. Yet she is there, a dark despised shadow behind our concept of Beauty, of Womanhood, of Sex, of Color. Her negation is omnipresent in our publicity and advertisements, our bathroom scales and our obsession with race, our daydreams and our nightmares.(Chase-Riboud "Inventing")

Though Serena Williams has never acknowledged an awareness of Saartjie Baartman as an historical figure, she began citing her visage in constructing her public, eroticized identity during her 2002 US Open title chase. Scholars Janell Hobson and Jaime Schultz have written about the "cat suit" that Williams wore at the Open that accentuated her body. These academic articles made use of the extensive journalistic commentary on Williams's "cat suit." While this area of comparison is worthwhile—I also address this subject in a later chapter—it is not the sole connection that needs to be

identified and explored. As Barbara Chase-Riboud's historical novel *Hottentot Venus* sets out to explore Baartman as a traveler, a similar investment and interest should be granted to Williams, particularly as Williams's bodily contours so strongly recalls the former. Such an investigation offers insight into black women's experiences as both "premodern" and postmodern travelers.

In scholarship examining representations of the black female body, Saartjie Baartman's legacy stands out as the most documented and scrutinized. Barbara Chase-Riboud offers a compelling reason for Baartman's recurrence in writing that "[s]he is our touchstone of the "other" who saw it all happen, in her own flesh and sinews: the birth of Race, over 200 years, to herself, to her family to her descendents, to her nation, to the Blacks of an entire continent" (3). Sander Gilman, Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, as well as T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting offer insight into the significance of Baartman's representation in visual material in the nineteenth century. Such an examination requires an extensive consideration of science, which as the Chase-Riboud epigraph above succinctly presents as important for establishing the racial ideology that continues to inform reason. Gilman and Beverly Guy-Sheftall examine art and aesthetic practice to underscore Baartman's emergence as an icon of black female eroticism and Otherness. Rosemarie Garland Thomson reads Baartman's significance through an understanding of anarchic corporeality and changing nineteenth-century notions of subjectivity. Janell Hobson, like Willis and Williams, extends Baartman's visual legacy as a marker of deviance beyond the nineteenth-century to take measure of contemporary representations of black women, like Serena Williams, in the media. For Hobson, this extension testifies to the continued academic and artistic concentration on Baartman

(57). Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus* skillfully intertwines the historical and contemporary in her play based on Baartman.[17]

The experience and significance of Baartman's journeys across South Africa as well as the Atlantic is an area where more scholarly attention should be directed. Though Baartman's archive lacks significant artifacts of her own inclusion, few have speculated on what her voyage to Europe must have been like. The relationship between mobility and embodiment underscores the significance of attending to Baartman's voyage in scholarship. Given Baartman's relevance for interrogating contemporary representations of black women's bodies, as Hobson and others contend, a study of Baartman's mobility could provide a way of reading her legacy as it relates to the mobility of contemporary black women. Thus, as the figurative progenitor of black women's cultural deviance, a study of Baartman's physical body in motion may offer a theoretical framework for engaging the relationship between mobility and black women's embodiment. Literature, particularly Chase-Riboud's *Hottentot Venus*, considers both the importance of mobility and the manner of conveyance in her historical novel about Baartman.

Baartman History and Fiction in Motion

Sarah Baartman was a South African Khoisan woman born in 1789 (Holmes 8). When Baartman was less than a year old, her mother died. Baartman was left with her father, four brothers and two sisters (Holmes 8). The time of her youth was filled with violence. The once peaceful herding and farming region took up arms in defense against colonial rule by the Portuguese, French, British, and Dutch. Though the Khoisan held them off for one hundred and fifty years, first the Dutch then the British managed to establish a settlement to manage the valuable trade routes to the East. Thus, Baartman

[17] Hobson points out reviews that censure Parks' work for "re-objectifying" Baartman through the spectacle created in her play.

never experienced peaceful times, by the time of her birth the Khoisan had been either pressed into colonial service or into active, violent resistance.

Baartman's father died fighting against colonialism. At nearly the same moment, violence took the man who would become her husband. Following these losses, a free black hunter and trader, Pieter Willem Cesars, came into Baartman's life. Thereafter, she became the nursemaid to the adopted child of Cesar's brother, Hendrik Cesars, and sister-in-law, Anna Catherina Staal, free blacks residing in Cape Town. As Adams contends, this becomes a critical moment in Baartman's life because from that point forward "the wishes of men dominated her life, because they held her in the grip of their economic and social power" (15).

Though the spectacle of the exhibition of Baartman in Europe dominates the scholarship, history and art also show her in motion. According to Adams, Baartman trekked over five hundred miles in order to take up her post with the Cesars (17). What must it have meant to her to be a traveler, moving to a new life of service and away from her home? Barbara Chase-Riboud represents Baartman's voyage in the novel *Hottentot Venus*. In it, Baartman sets out alone on a twenty-three day walk to Cape Town both hopeful, as she sees "her life […] still ahead of" her and resolute about the prospects of residing among the Khoisan:

> The Khoekhoe are dying out. We are starving. They are killing us with rifles and with the pox. If we don't die of gunpowder, we die of melancholy. There is no meat, no herds. We cannot hunt. Our spears and arrows have no power against cannonballs. My clan has disappeared. They hunt us like animals. A husband cannot protect his own family anymore. (Chase-Riboud 26).

In Chase-Riboud's narrative, Baartman is "thrilled to travel alone" (29). She experienced promise and potential in her self-directed movement. Chase-Riboud stresses walking, the ability to put one "foot in front of the other" as a mode of transport contributing to Baartman's self-awareness. In writing about modern, Western women traveling to locations of "premodern" Otherness who record the experiences, Sidonie Smith contends that walking as a mode of transport greatly impacts the way these women experience transformation from an "unheroic" sense of self to a heroic sense. Smith confirms the bodily character of this transformation. Furthermore, the perceptions of the surrounding world get filtered through the body slowly taking in the environment:

> She cannot look out upon the landscape, towns, and people in sedentary passivity. Nor is there dramatic speed. Without the encapsulating carapace, without the speed of railway or automobile travel, the traveler cannot easily detach sense of reality that technologies of speed introduce through modernity, that reality rushing past train and automobile windows or disappearing into vapor from the altitude of airplanes--has been left behind for another kind of reality, a more immediate and situated reality recovered through a visceral mobility. (32)

Chase-Riboud's portrait of Baartman on foot reveals that the "premodern" subject of Otherness can also register the powerful experience of transformation occasioned by traveling by foot. She offers a narrative that situates the Other as a subject of history located in place and thus impressed by her pedestrian journey across the landscape.

Chase-Riboud attentively considers the impression of every possible mode of transport on Baartman's journey from Africa to Europe. Mobility becomes a primary

apparatus for Chase-Riboud in giving Baartman a voice of her own. In addition to walking framing the fact of her interiority, the novel considers her mindset as she travels by carriage and ship. In Chase-Riboud's novel, Baartman set sail on the HMS *Exeter*, a one-time slaver.[18] She paints a portrait of a pensive Baartman who reflects on the great promise of her voyage. Rachel Holmes compliments this view in her historical account of Baartman.

Even before her journey across the Atlantic, Baartman, as a figure for all of Africa's exoticism, would have already been the subject of many yarns. Jennifer L. Morgan posits that European travelers and explores voyaged to Africa and the Americas with ideas formed during the Medieval period that prepared them to understand Baartman through the prism of monstrosity. She identifies the monstrous as a category that saw female physiognomy as a sure marker of deviance. Large and sagging breasts that hung to the ground and could be slung over the shoulder evidenced certain difference.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson notion of "extraordinary bodies" fully articulates Morgan's reference to monstrosity. Garland-Thomson identifies "extraordinary bodies" as corporeal registers of difference constructed during critical moments of insecurity and instability. She writes:

> Although extraordinary bodily forms have always been acknowledged as atypical, the cultural resonances accorded them arise from the historical and intellectual moments in which these bodies are embedded. Because

[18] Rachel Holmes posits that the historical Baartman traveled first on the *Wilhemenia*, a British coasting schooner that transported salt, and then the *Diadem*. Rather than a legitimate passenger, Holmes ventures that Baartman was most likely a stowaway since there was no record of her receipt of a Governor's request for her to leave Cape Town nor does her name appear in the Admiralty records. Such records appear for Dunlop and Cesar, Baartman's handlers in England.

> such bodies are rare, unique, material, and confounding of cultural categories,they function as magnets to which culture secures its anxieties, questions, and needs at any given moment. Like the bodies of females and slaves, the monstrous body exists in societies to be exploited for someone else's purposes. Thus, singular bodies become politicized when culture maps its concerns upon them as meditations on individual as well as national values, identity, and direction. (*Freakery* 2)

Nineteenth century European perspectives of Baartman's deviance exemplify Garland-Thomson's position since Baartman's physique would not have been anomalous within her own community. Europeans would perceive Baartman's "protruding" buttocks, as confirmation of the sexually appetitive difference between black people and themselves.[19] Not only that but Baartman's "extraordinary body," as Sander L. Gilman notes, "Sarah Baartman's sexual parts, her genitalia and her buttocks, serve as the central image for the black female throughout the nineteenth century" (235).[20] Citing Italian photographic archivist Nicolas Monti, Deborah Willis complements Gilman's contention:

> One might almost say that the black woman was imagined without a head: The body is all that counts, a body offered to man's pleasure, an extremely simplified idea in which beauty is exclusively seen as underlying the erogenous zones of breasts and buttocks. The curves are abundant, the back is sumptuous, and the hips are magnificently shaped, while

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[19] See Sander L. Gilman. "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature" in ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *"Race", Writing and Difference*. 231.

[20] Zine Magubane takes issue with Gilman.

> adolescent breasts blossom out on a superb, enticing bust. (*Picturing Us* 19)

The scientific gaze was ordered by its interest in what it had already imagined as pure bodily excess.

By the nineteenth century scholars and scientists sought to order the observations being made of the world beyond them. During this century the conquests of Empire became the objects of scientific scrutiny and public curiosity. E. Frances White examination of the relationship between the scientific systematization and classification of black women's bodies supports Chase-Riboud's claim concerning the rise of racial science and Sarah Baartman. As White posits, "science did not create racism, it legitimated and helped solidify a new kind of racism for the industrial age" (84). Anne Fausto-Sterling agrees. In turning her gaze away from Baartman's body towards the scientists who looked at her, Fausto-Sterling sees a masculinist desire to tame femininity through their command of the categories of knowledge. Articulating a similar point, Morgan notes that "[a]s the tenacious and historically deep roots of racialist ideology become more evident, it becomes clear also that through the rubric of monstrously 'raced' Amerindian and African women, Europeans found a means to articulate shifting perceptions of themselves as religiously, culturally, and phenotypically superior to those black or brown persons they sought to define" (168). Yet, what would Sarah Baartman have thought of her body upon recognizing herself through the gaze of Europeans? How would this have been addressed through her self-presentation?

Chase-Riboud's novel depicts Baartman as a traveler very much aware of herself as a stranger, as someone at first unfamiliar with the prepared gaze of those who were strangers to her. Chase-Riboud describes hostile though well-dressed audiences

juxtaposed to Baartman's apparent nudity. Baartman looks beyond the appearance of their civility and sees hostility that she links with the violence whites inflicted on her people in South Africa.

One of Baartman's primary struggles in the novel is the age old problem of appearance versus reality. She must negotiate the representations of her circulating in the press, in plays, on playing cards, and in song lyrics against her personal experience of her past and her identity. Chase-Riboud's representation of Baartman as a traveler brings together the problem of appearance and reality with the subject of black women's mobility. Thus, as icons of sexual deviance black women on the move must confront "body fictions" as a competing discourse of subjectivity.

Serena Williams brings into focus this issue of appearance versus reality and the confrontation with "body fictions" for postmodern black women. In *Serving From the Hip,* Venus admits that she and Serena "love to travel," though for her part, Serena does not directly state why she loves it (53). In her on-line diary, Serena repeats statements similar to the one Venus expressed in *Serving From the Hip*. For example, on October 22, 2007 Serena writes that she really likes Paris because "it is so nice there" and represents "a change from Florida, L.A., and N.Y. and the U.S.A. in general." This change may be reflected in her ability to "get love" in Paris as she notes that she might have to get back to Paris "to get some more Parisian love." On April 30, 2008, Serena continues her adoration for Paris as she writes that she adores "Paris and would love to live there one day." Serena clearly does not hold the city accountable for the way people treated her during the finals of the 2003 French Open when the crowd booed her and rallied around Henin-Hardenne. Serena fails to describe the nature of the love she receives now in Paris that has facilitated her adoration for the city.

Rather than extolling the virtues of travelling, in one post, Serena admits how difficult the life on tour can be when she writes about her experience traveling to a tournament in Germany:

> I do miss having a coach but I like the challenge of doing things on my own and trying to figure things out by myself. I do miss having the company. I have my Nike rep here whom is very helpful, but I don't know how these girls travel all the time by themselves [sic]. It is such a lonely life. I would go nuts if I had to do this all the time. As a matter of fact I don't think I will be doing this again. (September 28, 2007)

From her remarks, we learn what she finds difficult about traveling—loneliness—but not what makes it worthwhile. As Serena prepares to leave Germany, she offers another perspective of her time in Germany and why she might enjoy traveling:

> What started out as a boring trip ended up being super fun!! I had such a blast it was so fun. I went to this thing the Germans call Oktoberfest, and it was a big carnival were [sic] they served tons of beer. I don't drink beer, but it was fun to see all of the people there that did drink and did enjoy their fun. (October 6, 2007)

In addition to having fun at Oktoberfest, Serena also discusses the fun she had in meeting a cousin and her husband stationed at an Army base in Germany and enjoying spending time with them. Here, she echoes an idea that was present in her first post about experiencing loneliness in Germany. In addition to traveling being fun when there are food, rides, and people present, traveling also provides her with a context for experiencing both the presence and the absence of family. The experience of presence and absence reinforces the importance of family in her life.

Photographs compliment the places Serena visits and the people she visits with while there. Thus, there are photographs of Serena depicted in iconic places throughout Paris like when she is posed before the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe, and there are photographs of Serena with her family in Germany. Along with these photographs, her official blog includes glamour photographs, travel photographs, family photographs, along with miscellaneous photographs of friends and family. Such photographs represent Serena's efforts to take control of her public representation. Unlike Baartman, who Chase-Riboud represents as someone whose power was limited by her inability to control her public image, Serena reveals herself as one who has been able to anticipate and respond to such constructions. To this end, rather than her perceived lack of power leading to her mishandling, as was the case with Baartman, Serena appears to wed her power to Nike, her corporate handlers, and marvels at the collaboration. On August 22, 2008 Serena writes about a Nike event in her blog:

> Nike closed an entire BLOCK to put this on! I mean only Nike! I love them!!! They had fake grass on the street so it looked like a park in the middle of the street! There were sooooo many people out there trying to get in! It was INSANE!!!!! Check out the pics….
>
> U guys like the outfit? It's all Nike. What's so cool is that u wear Nike gear to red carpet events and still look high fashion. That's what this was all about-sportswear and fashion.

Serena presents her relationship to Nike as unstrained. She is impressed that Nike can transform the landscape. This capacity is certainly something Serena would appreciate given the way she has been able to transform her own environment in moving away from Compton, California. Serena also marvels at Nike's ability to make athletic wear

glamorous. This also becomes the ground for her admiration of the company and her collaboration with them.

Baartman's experience with her handlers suggests that Serena's optimism regarding her corporate handlers should be questioned. Equating corporate power with individual power may prove a troubling equation; especially the strong possibility for corporate abuse. Serena does not question the possibility that Nike can abuse their transformative power nor does she question the extent to which she could fall prey to this abuse.

Rather than revealing a concern for the visual cliché's that might interfere with her attempt to empower her representation, Serena's travel writings reveal a limitation in her assessment of the harmful way sentimental ideas and ideals often work. When Serena traveled to West Africa in November 2006 she composed a poem entitled "Africa: I have Come Home" to commemorate her trip:

> Africa!/My homeland I have finally come home/My heart is full of joy/ For I have been many places/And boy have I seen many faces/But the the beauty of Africa I have never set my sights on/The glory of African land I have not stepped/the magnificent elegance I have not embraced/ With its majestic Splendor, my travels have stopped me from/seeing/ BUT AT LAST, NO MORE!/ For I have made it home Mother/I have made it back to where I belong/Where every man is my brother./ Where people are equal to one another/I have made it home Mother!/ Where my forefathers first stepped foot/Home to where my great, great, great, great, great Grandmother/made her bed./Oh God I have made

> it./No more will I wonder and dream/For Africa my homeland I have finally come home! (Blog)

Serena uncritically accepts a sentimental view of Africa as "Mother" and "home" that scholar Saidiya Hartman cautions against in her book *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. Hartman discourages this view of Africa, particularly of West Africa, because it obscures the historical record of slavery. While Hartman confesses that she "[s]ecretly […] wanted to belong somewhere or, at least, I wanted a convenient explanation of why I felt like a stranger," the position of the stranger aptly describes her presence in West Africa as well as the historical position of black people sold as slaves (4). As she writes:

> The most universal definition of the slave is a stranger. Torn from kin and community, exiled from one's country, dishonored and violated, the slave defines the position of the outsider. She is the perpetual outcast, the coerced migrant, the foreigner, the shamefaced child in the lineage. Contrary to popular belief, Africans did not sell their brothers and sisters into slavery. They sold strangers: those outside the web of kin and clan relationships, nonmembers of the polity, foreigners and barbarians at the outskirts of their country, and lawbreakers expelled from society. In order to betray your race, you had first to imagine yourself as one. The language of race developed in the modern period and in the context of the slave trade. (5)

The descendants of slavery who return to West Africa do not return as citizens. In this regard, returning "home" becomes problematic. Serena completely accepts the notion that Africa represents the place where "every man" is her "brother," which is an idea

that history denies. From what Hartman reveals, Serena's construction of racial kinship certainly develops in the context of the slave trade but it does so in the exchange between "strangers" who developed it as a way of recovering the "kin" that being enslaved denied them. The "home" that Serena claims in Africa, according to Hartman, may be found in the "routes" that the enslaved traveled rather than in the place where they departed (9).

The "body fiction" that Serena confronts, interestingly, is the one she imagines as Africa. Africa as a geographical body fiction problematizes efforts towards the agency that Serena Williams has pursued through her corporate collaborations because they contribute to the corporate ability to exploit, manipulate and abuse power. For example, Hartman tells a story about confronting a group of adolescent boys at the entrance to Elmina Castle that shows how exploitation works on a smaller scale. Three of the boys give Hartman letters, the most representative of the three reads as follows:

> Beloved Sister, please write me. We are one Africa which means we are the same people and I know it's because of the slave trade that's why you left here to U.S.A. and I want you to know that you are my sister and I am your brother according to the history of our ancestors and Africa is both of us motherland so you are welcome back home (Akwaaba) please lets keep in touch by letters so that we could learn from each other and know ourselves well as brother and sister. Share my greetings with my other brothers and sisters in America. Thank you. Peace and love to you senior sister. (84-85)

For Hartman this episode represents a "hustle" where "ingenious adolescents" are among the few "brazen enough to espouse the love of slaves" (88). The letter works on

an emotional level that would move the reader to at least offer small change to the writer. In this scene, the slave returned is also an enviable figure in the eyes of the boys who see these ancestors of slaves as wealthy enough to return (Hartman 89). Serena Williams has shown herself as someone who could be used to exploit the emotional ties between Africa, Africans, and African Americans on the opening day of the French Open in 2002.

When Serena Williams wore the green, yellow, and red (shorts underneath the dress) of the Cameroon national team on the first day of play at the 2002 French Open, it seemed a meaningful gesture. It appeared that Williams, then the third ranked tennis player in the world, a black woman, herself competing in the country that at one time shared colonial rule with Britain over Cameroon, was standing in solidarity with the Indomitable Lions as they were set to play Germany, a nineteenth century colonial authority in Cameroon, in an upcoming World Cup match. It seemed that the black bodies of these sports stars bedecked in vibrant colors signified Walter Benjamin's "tiger's leap" into history. Serena Williams, the descendent of those already enslaved Africans who Hartman aptly describes as those thought "expendable and defeated," were re-united with those estranged by colonialism in Africa through Williams's dominance of an elite game (Hartman 7). Thus, if Benjamin and Karl Marx were right, then Serena Williams and the Cameroon national team appeared to be revolutionizing themselves as they prepared for a new world order where the losers in history would become its victors (Lehmann).

But in the end, Williams's attire signified nothing as dramatic as this; it was merely an ad and she its spokesperson. Puma sponsored Serena Williams and the Cameroon national team. Cameroon won the African Cup of Nations wearing a

sleeveless jersey that FIFA rules prohibited them from wearing during the World Cup. Puma thought Williams the perfect spokesperson for their controversial football designs. Though not the political revolution it initially suggested, this real-time endorsement did take its cue from history as it recalled the great Brazilian soccer player Pele's request for an official to pause the game so that he could tie his shoe. Being given this time, Pele was honoring his agreement with Hans Henningsen, a Puma representative, to create a deliberate spectacle for the boots he was endorsing for $120,000 (Kirschbaum). So while underscoring the spectacle of Serena Williams at Roland Garros to give visibility to the Puma brand cites the company's intentional marketing history at grand events with high wattage sporting celebrities. Rather than assume the position of self-empowerment that Serena Williams espouses, she becomes complicit in promoting a brand through a geographical body fiction that sees Africa as the tie that binds.

Previous generations of African American athletes who traveled domestically and abroad were not prone to accept delusions of geographical space. The politics and reality of race required pre-civil rights and civil rights generation athletes to understand the relationship between their raced bodies and the physical spaces they occupied. As a case study of post-civil rights generation athletes, Venus and Serena Williams showcase the changes that traveling without the dictates of Jim Crow fosters. While this understanding should not be taken to mean that Jim Crow served as a social and civic good; it did not. What is important to underscore is the importance of sustaining the lessons of history. The Williams sisters do not always evidence such knowledge. The Williams sisters take their raced bodies for granted when they travel and this allows them to ignore their manner and mode of conveyance.

Post-modern Tales of Travel, Race, Gender, and Embodiment

"Travel, once an exceptional experience, a 'rare and plastic season' of life, is now a routine event, as unexceptional as getting into one's car and driving down the road beyond one's usual stopping places."
Eric J. Leed (286)

As elite athletes, Venus and Serena's ability to take their means of transportation for granted or count it as luxury is uncommon. For example, in the late nineties, U.S. Custom officials harassed black women travelers. According to legal scholar Paula C. Johnson, black women travelers of varying backgrounds and across the generational spectrum were victims of "racial-gender profiling," which "rendered them automatically suspect as drug carriers" (40). One of the most horrifying examples involved Janneral Denson of Palm Beach County, Florida. Ms. Denson had returned to the Fort Lauderdale Airport after a visit with her husband and his family in Jamaica. A customs agent stopped her and searched through her luggage. Complying with the agent's request, Denson explained that she had been in Jamaica visiting with her husband and going over the details of his visa application with him. Though she provided the agent with notes from her visit, wedding photographs, birth certificates and other artifacts authenticating the legitimacy of her travels, she was detained. Ms. Denson was six months pregnant at the time and was denied food during the period of her initial detainment. Despite her cooperation she was taken to a hospital for further investigation.

Once at the hospital, a doctor examined Ms. Denson and discussed with her a problem that a sonogram revealed but she had still not eaten. Despite the possible harm in giving laxatives to pregnant women, the doctor asked Ms. Denson to take it so as to comply with the agent's requirement that she do so in order to be released. After a round of taking laxatives Ms. Denson was released without being charged with a crime. As a

result of this experience, Denson had to have an emergency cesarean. Her son Jordan weighed only three pounds, four ounces at birth.

Though the public narrative identifies racial profiling with the black male body, Denson case testifies to the realities of black women's subjection to this sort of scrutiny. In her analysis of Denson's story and other's like it, Johnson pointed out a Harvard study that found that "African American women were stopped by customs at a rate eight times greater than that for White males, even though White males far outnumber any demographic group of travelers" (43). According to Johnson, a Customs study "revealed that in 1997, an incredible 46 percent of African American women were strip-searched at O'Hare Airport" and 80 percent of these show that black women are the least likely to be carrying drugs (43).

As a white collar traveler, feminist scholar bell hooks also narrates a tale of encountering racial hostility while flying (*Killing Rage*). In trying to occupy their seats in first-class, her flying companion was erroneously assigned a coach seat. The flight attendants fail to sympathize with the error and instead take the word of the white man who will occupy the seat next to hooks for her journey. For her, this experience becomes a pretext for a discussion about black people learning to channel "black rage" into progressive politics. By the late twentieth-century, black sportswomen's stories of travel ignore manners of being transported and tell stories of a postmodern grand tour instead. In this regard, the journey often participates in a fiction concerning space that entangles black sportswomen in abuses of power.

Playing with Style: Complicity and Black Female Self-Presentation in Postmodernity

An orthodox construction of African Americans athletes and style presumes a masculine narrative. Kenneth Shropshire includes a discussion of sartorial style as an important aspect of the legacy of boxing great Sugar Ray Robinson and extends his consideration to include Michael Jordan, Dion Sanders, Michael Irvin, and Allen Iverson. Paul Gilroy examines the changing signification of the black clothed and partially clad body considering Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods as black sporting bodies as well as hip hop culture in late capitalism. Gena Degal Caponi takes black male athletes as the singular case of *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture*. Given the ambition of this work to seek to expand our categories of intellectual inclusion, it should be singled out for what, or who, it fails to include. While this work aims to include sport as expressive style within the same trajectory in which "literature, music, dance, and speech exist" the plea for inclusion focuses exclusively on African American sportsmen. Extending the scope of interest in African American athletes and expressive style to include African American women athletes not only makes room in the historiography for the breadth of African American sporting history, but it also enables greater insight into representations of black bodies as the locus of overarching discourses of oppression. To this end, this chapter uses African American tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams as subjects for revisionist considerations.

The Williams sisters' sartorial style, in particular, may be used to challenge the over-normalization of black sportsmen as the exclusive historical consideration in re-conceptualizing matters of race and expressive style to include athletics. While Venus and Serena's influence on the racial composition of tennis is still in process, their style dramatizes the arrogance, brashness, and sense of entitlement said to characterize

African American urban youth subculture of the nineties, which they represent in tennis. Concentrating on the Williams sisters complements connections scholars like Paul Gilroy, Michael Eric Dyson, and Walter Le Faber have made between black bodies, sport, and late capitalism. Entertaining black women athletes here enriches the on-going conversation by amplifying the late capitalist issue of African American collusion with corporate culture. Thus, this chapter draws on cultural studies and feminist scholarship to argue that Venus and Serena Williams mark a definitive shift away from a progressive alliance between feminist politics and contemporary sportswomen's style.

The Williams Sisters and Sartorial Style: The Early Years (1997-2001)

When the Williams sisters entered professional women's tennis, they entered with a style unique to the sport. No professional players before them competed wearing hair beads. Consistent with Dick Hebdige's contention that subcultural style is doubly provocative in that it is heralded by the fashion cognoscenti and mocked by those who deem members of subcultures social problems (Hebdige 91), opinions on Venus and Serena's style often varied: fashion designers often celebrated their look, some women's tennis players balked at it while others stood in admiration; reporters oftentimes fixated on their style to comment on the sisters' personalities. Ginia Bellafante of *The New York Times* likened the impact of Venus and Serena's hairstyles in tennis to the influential bob of skater Dorothy Hamill (Bellafante 1). Bellafante reports that notable fashion editor Andre Leon Talley of *Vogue* expressed great enthusiasm for the beads and the jewelry Venus and Serena wore on court. When the sisters appeared on the January 2001 cover of *Elle* magazine, Simon Doonan, Barneys New York creative director, further complimented the Williams sisters' style. Doonan predicted that Venus and Serena would be at the center of the collision of sports and fashion (Friedman 148). This claim

appeared most probable when fashion designer Oscar de la Renta opened his Spring-Summer 2001 show with an homage to the Williams sisters (Menkes 1). Later in 2003 Venus worked with famed designer Diane von Furstenberg to create a fashion line for Reebok (1). The von Furstenberg dress Venus wore at Wimbledon is currently housed in the Wimbledon Hall of Fame.[21]

Women's tennis players and officials did not always share fashion designers' enthusiasm. At the 1999 Australian Open, Lindsay Davenport agreed with chair umpire Denis Overberg who penalized Venus one point for the "distraction" of her hair beads scattering onto the court. Overberg asserted that Williams's beads fell within the scope of the no hindrance rule applying to objects like tennis balls or visors that may fall onto the court and distract from play. Along with tournament referee Peter Bellenger, Davenport supported Overberg's call. "You can hear them, and see them a little bit," Davenport reported. Continuing she said, "I'm not going to say it's a total distraction but it is a little annoying. It's just things flying in the air that you're not supposed to be seeing" ("Venus Glow"). Bulgarian player Sesil Karatantcheva reports that she was far from distracted upon seeing Venus's hair. After beating Williams at the 2005 French Open, Karatantcheva told reporters that she wanted to buy hair beads immediately after seeing Venus winning Grand Slam events while wearing them ("Teen Takes Venus"). It is just this sort of spirit that influenced individual entrepreneurs who were seen outside venues during the late nineties charging customers five dollars a braid for those who wanted to have their hair styled like the sisters (Noel).

Venus and Serena's beaded look and bejeweled wrists entranced journalists who were taken by the dizzying sight of swirling beads and the accompanying noise they

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[21] See also *The New York Times*, "Front Row," July 22, 2003.

made during the Williams sisters' matches. The significance of noise here is that it provides another connection between fashion and the Williams sisters status as anarchic since Hebdige posits that "subcultures represent 'noise' (as opposed to sound)" (90). Sally Jenkins of *Women's Sport and Fitness* wrote of the sisters' "rattling cornrow beads and jingling bracelets" as well as their "tinkling" gold hoop earrings (1,5); Amy Shipley opened her article on Venus's 1998 defeat in the quarter finals of the French Open describing the "clackety-clack" of the blue and white hair beads Venus wore. These descriptions provided journalists with a context for interpreting Venus and Serena's character. Thus, the sound of hair beads could be melodic, as they might have been for her supporters. Take Christopher Clarey of the *International Herald Tribune* who described seeing Venus Williams in Rome in this way: "Venus Williams has beads in her hair that sway when she moves and a statuesque presence that turns heads, even in a city full of arresting art" ("Hingis beats Venus"). Clarey was clearly taken with Venus. Then there are those for whom the beads represent the sisters as "brash," as Harriet Barovick of *Time* described them (Barovick 2). In her biography of the Williams sisters, Jacqueline Edmondson turns the beads into a statement of the sisters' ethnic pride.

Edmondson's view underscores the fact that the Williams sisters appeared to make a statement about race through their style choices. Venus and Serena Williams' braided look was preceded by a host of black performers who sported similar styles in the late 1960s and early '70s and is also consistent with a host of performers with similar stylistic sensibilities in the present day. Musical talents Stevie Wonder and Patrice Rushin are perhaps two of the more famous African Americans who wore their hair in beaded cornrows during the '70s. During that time, black folk experimented with various "natural" hairstyles in an attempt to establish alternative aesthetic representations that

countered derogatory imagery of black people; this distinguished their use of hair politics from white youth who used their hair for political expression. For black people, as William Van Deburg writes, "[a] natural hair style served as a highly visible imprimatur of blackness; a tribute to group unity; a statement of self-love and personal significance" (Van Deburg 201). Although cornrow styles had traditionally been both a children's hairstyle and a style worn by wig wearers to allow a better fit, both black men and women began wearing these styles in the '70s as an extension of the politics of black empowerment.

The Williams sisters' boldness in confronting the authorities within their sport, their refusal to accommodate what they believed to be rude questions from journalists, and their courageousness in a milieu that was initially unwelcoming contributes further to the view of the sisters as espousing a politics consistent with their black power style. Unlike the coolness that Arthur Ashe displayed on the court--which he noted as a part of his training as a black southern athlete--at the beginning of their professional careers, the Williams sisters vented their frustrations with officials during matches. Thus, when Venus was penalized for her hair beads scattering onto the court, one article said that she "screamed" at the tournament referee, "As if I was doing it on purpose. You see me pulling my hair and pulling them out? This is out of control" ("Venus Glow"). At the end of the match, Venus refused to shake the chair umpire's hand. Insisting that she would not change her hairstyle to salvage points in the future, Venus told the press, "Why should I have to change? I like my hair" ("Venus Glow").

At the beginning of their careers, journalists tagged the Williams sisters as surly, rude, hostile, and unfriendly. When Devin Friedman interviewed them for *Elle* magazine, he opens the article noting his efforts to avoid aggravating Serena, as he writes, "he was

also trying not to piss Serena Williams off, because she's kind of intimidating" (Friedman 99). Friedman identifies race as the root of the burden the Williams sisters carry and cites it as the reason they appear rude. Thus, Friedman assumes that by giving Venus and Serena a chance to speak against racial identity that they will be endeared to him for granting them the forum to lighten their load:

> Q: So. Is race more or less of an issue with you guys than you'd like it to be? I mean, do you ever get tired of being *black* tennis players instead of just tennis players…
>
> A: No. I *am* a black tennis player and I'm *proud* to be a black tennis player.
>
> Q: No, no, what I meant was, like, wouldn't you rather people say Serena Williams is an extraordinary tennis player instead of treating it like, 'Black people can be good at tennis too'?
>
> A: I've never felt that way because I *am* black and kids look up to me, and I'm proud of that. (99)

Serena's answers reflect a black nationalist spirit and claim to racial heritage that Nancy E. Spencer posits was at the root of early concerns that the Williams sisters might be bad for tennis.

Women journalists of color did not find interviewing Venus and Serena any easier; yet, they related to the sisters and their alleged rudeness in a different way. For example, when Raquel Cepeda wrote an article about the sisters in *Essence* magazine she narrated the story of their alleged surliness from the position of being thought the same. In her sympathetic portrait, Cepeda said:

> I'll be straight with you: Before my interview with Venus and

> Serena, I know all the dish about how the sisters have been dubbed brash and unfriendly. But I also know what every person of color in America does--that merely stepping into a room and breathing is enough to make some folks label you 'brash and unfriendly.' (127)

Cepada consults with Venus and Serena's family about the racism they confront in the tennis world.

While the Williams sisters' style along with their response to tennis officials and journalists contributed to the view of them as black militants, their style and attitude was consistent with that of black hip-hop artists of their own era as Duane Thomas details it. Cornrow styles are worn by a number of black men and women rap artists as well as other heavy hitters in hip-hop and rhythm and blues. Some of those on this list have included Wu Tang Clan, D'Angelo, Maxwell, Krazie Bone, Yo Yo, Da Brat, Brandy, and Janet Jackson. The editors of *Soul Style: Black Women Redefining the Color of Fashion*, credit hip-hop with creating a "transgendered look" that began in the 1980s with "B-Boy glamour," and has influenced other "hybrid looks." The functional B-Boy style of wearing baggy pants--that allowed for fluid movement--and fingerless gloves--to sustain long hand spins, was altered by B-Girls to suit their sartorial tastes. Rappers Salt and Peppa's B-Girl style of black spandex unitard, big gold hoop earrings, colorful and bulky leather jackets, bright-red riding boots, and thick braided rope chains, epitomized this trend. Salt and Peppa's musical contemporary Yo Yo, sported a different B-Girl look. Yo Yo's big baggy jeans more closely mimicked the B-Boy style. Her blonde cornrows were also in contrast to the asymmetrical cut that Salt and Peppa wore. While young black girls mimicked Salt and Peppa's hair and clothes (especially those jackets) Yo Yo's less

glamorous but certainly feminine look, paved the way for Da Brat's *Funkdafied* style. Da Brat's braided hair was accented with colorful barrettes when she entered the rap scene in the early nineties. Like Yo Yo, Da Brat wore big baggy jeans, which were said to "mute" the body, but she could also been seen wearing a form-fitting tank top. In the mid-nineties, Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown revealed more flesh than any of the black rappers and hip-hoppers before them. Of course all black female performers did not strip down in this way. Eve, the sole female member of DMX's Ruff Ryders, has been described as "equal parts thug glamour and high fashion." Lauryn Hill's dreadlocks and ever changing haute couture ensemble fuses a "mix of glamour and roots" (Thomas 104-127).

Though Venus and Serena's on-court sartorial style has mirrored the fashion choices of their contemporaries in music, their style set them apart from their peers in tennis. Even after the sisters abandoned their hair beads, journalists continued to make note of the expensive jewelry they wore on the court as well as their "clingy" tennis dresses. While Serena scintillated crowds in 2001 with her famous "catsuit," her sister ignited talk in 2000 at the French Open and the U.S. Open about her bright yellow dress. Providing a vivid verbal portrait of this garment, Steven Wilstein writes: "In her skimpy yellow dress, scooped out revealingly in the lower back, and with a single row of white beads adorning her hair, Williams is the most French of the foreigners" ("Plugging Away"). Though the dress was the color Serena wore upon winning her first U.S. Open in 1999, Venus's garment represented a notable shift in the bodies, style, and presentation of the players on the women's tour. Describing women's tennis at the start of the new millennium, L. Jon Wertheim noted the following: "Never before have players been so athletic, so powerful, so balletic, so muscular, so ambitious. So

unabashedly sexy" (Wertheim 5). The turn towards sexiness contributed to the Williams sisters decline as *bricoleurs* of loaded sartorial choices.

A Brief Consideration of Fashion and Tennis: The Primacy of Unabashed Sexiness

After her 2002 win at the U.S. Open, Serena Williams contacted *Sports Illustrated* (SI) about appearing in their annual swimsuit edition (DePaulo 3). From sporting what became known as the "catsuit" on the tennis courts, Serena would don a white bikini for her first three-page SI spread in 2003. The following year Serena appeared again in the annual edition followed by her sister in 2005. The Williams sisters each appeared to decidedly move away from the image of defiance in order to embrace an image of sexiness instead. In doing so, they partnered with historical efforts to sexually objectify women. Laurel R. Davis offers some evidence, however, that this feminist view may be limited.

According to Davis, feminists focus on sexual objectification of women as its central critique. Davis complicates this critique through an appeal to a pro-sex feminist viewpoint which refuses the position that sexualized images of women should stand as a natural enemy to feminism. From this standpoint, "all visual representations objectify" (Davis 46). Citing Weir and Casey, Davis notes, "the material nature of representations necessitates their representation as objects for other people" (46). Elaborating further on Weir and Casey's position, Davis says that they "argue that sexuality necessitates objectification, because it involves interaction with the materiality of other bodies and their particular characteristics" (46). E. Grace Glenny acknowledges the swimsuit issue's clear embrace of white women's desirability but says that the magazine has "had much more trouble representing Black women as sexual at all" (Glenny 8). To what extent

might Serena Williams' request for inclusion in the swimsuit edition be considered a corrective to *Sport Illustrated's* difficulty representing black women?

Leslie Heywood and Shari Dworkin allow for this possibility as they critique feminist positions that exclusively see partially clad and semi-nude female athlete as victims of sexual objectification. They contend:

> [I]t is clear that the second wave feminist critique of the objectification of women's bodies cannot encompass that diversity, nor can it account for the way female athletes seem to understand the production of other images in the contemporary context (nor can it account for the ways in which the male body has become objectified). In the images of female athletes in question here, it is no longer simply the case of naïve women who buy into a false sense of power when they pose for the camera and we need to educate them about their mistake. Instead, athletes already know the criticisms and reject them. They know exactly what they are doing. They know, and they do it all the same, both because they do not experience themselves as manipulated and powerless, and because like many others in the MTV generation who are fighting high debt-to-income ratios and diminished permanent job prospects, they see rightly visibility in the media as the only "real" outlet for the achievement of selfhood this culture offers. (85)

Continuing, Heywood and Dworkin note that "[i]n this current context, athletes, whether male or female, occupy this paradoxical space where they are both subject and object simultaneously--both active subjects who perform their sport and market their

image, and commodified subjects who are passive, who exist to be ogled in the classically 'feminine' position of being seen" (86).

Heywood and Dworkin attempt to mediate the rift between sportswomen and feminists who are critical of the representations of women athletes and their seeming complicity with these representations. Heywood and Dworkin see contemporary sportswomen as offering a vision of resistance that responds to the conditions of late capitalism. In this context, sportswomen serve as examples of those actively constructing ways of making a living in the face of declining wages and mounting debt, job instability, and mounting healthcare costs. Heywood and Dworkin champion sportswomen for using their position of visibility as athletes to offer novel ways of demonstrating female strength and power.

Consistent with Heywood and Dworkin's claims, women's sports advocates and athletes alike have responded to attempts to restrict their demonstrations of strength and competence in the athletic arena. While Heywood and Dworkin would embrace the feminist potential of the Williams sisters' sexy presentations, other sports advocates express an alternative view of what constitutes libratory representations. For instance, in the introduction to *Nike is a Goddess: The History of Women in Sports*, author and women's sports advocate Mariah Burton Nelson presents athletics as a libratory endeavor. It is libratory because it provides women with the opportunity to reclaim their bodies, because the athletic environment allows them to develop an alternative self-perception and an alternative view of style and beauty.

Similarly, two-time Olympic gold medalist Jackie Joyner Kersee regards excellence in the heptathlon as animating alternative concepts of elegance. She writes:

> As for what or who is truly beautiful and glamorous. I look beyond the

> superficial. I see beauty, elegance and grace in every female athlete. Selfishly speaking, I believe there's something especially beautiful about the ability to perform seven distinct athletic skills well. I consider heptathletes the Renaissance women of track and field. In my mind, ours is the most glamorous competition of all. (221)

Kersee uses standard fashion lingo to express an alternative view of style through superior athletic performance. Unfortunately, the metamorphosis of strength into elegance fails to remove the stigma encoded on sportswomen's bodies. Historically, women's muscular bodies connoted masculinity and thus equated athletic women with the unfeminine and hence homosexuality. Since the 1990s, published photographs of famous sportswomen in sexually provocative poses offer testimony to the failure of the metamorphosis of strength into elegance to completely transform powerful female bodies into culturally acceptable ones.

Venus and Serena Williams have not visually situated themselves with the positions advanced by Nelson or Kersee. Rather than participate in the re-definition of beauty as glamour, as their earlier representations suggested they might, their visual representations since 2002 have sustained what Nelson might describe as a traditional notion of beauty. In this respect, the Williams sisters are not alone. The list of sportswomen who began appearing in published photographs in various states of undress since the 1990s includes Jenny Thompson, Brandi Chastain, Marion Jones, and Lisa Leslie among others. Thompson, one of the more outspoken athletes, said of her own appearance in the pages of SI wearing only Wonder Woman bikini briefs and red boots:

> My stance in the picture was one of strength and power and *girls rule*. It's

> nothing sexual. I wasn't pouting or giving a sexual look. It was like, here I am. I'm strong. The body is something to be celebrated, and Olympians have amazing bodies. So I think it's a work of art. (Thompson 120)

For Thompson, the exposed female body is not necessarily a fetishized one. Instead, she focuses on the way she positioned her body and responded to the camera. Thompson asserts that her posture and gestures in the photographs depict "strength," "power," and inestimable value. According to Thompson, confusing sexual flaunting with an exhibition of strength prompts unwarranted criticism, but some women's sports advocates disagree.

Donna Lopiano, former executive director of the Women's Sports Foundation, is deeply troubled by many of the published photographs of sportswomen. She states: "it's incongruent to take that body you've worked so hard for and use it for sex." Lopiano's concerns mimic those of middle-class and elite reformers in the 1920s who were concerned with the growth and spread of women's sports through "novelty" and "glamour exhibitions," and the propriety of these activities (Festle 13). Many contemporary women's sports advocates, like Lopiano, believe that the sexualized depictions of female athletes will result in three things: 1.) the loss of respect for women's sports 2.) the sexual subordination of women athletes (3) the commodification of women athletes and hence the reduction of women's athletic excellence to mere sexual titillation.

The conflict between sportswomen and some women's sports advocates and feminists, according to Heywood and Dworkin, has the potential to centrally locate women athletes within feminist scholarship. Currently, there is a gap in the scholarship concerning sportswomen and the intersection of race, sexual objectification, and

complicity. Since Venus and Serena Williams's entry into tennis they have been at the center of news accounts concerning race. Representations of them in the *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue* offer examples of the sexual objectification of sportswomen that Davis as well as Heywood and Dworkin attempt to complicate. At the same time, these representations bring into focus the counterargument that speaks directly to the frustrations of feminists like Beverly Guy-Sheftall and Johnetta Cole over young black women's collusion with systems of domination.

In *Gender Talk*, Guy-Sheftall and Cole endeavor to expose hushed dynamics within black society previously suppressed for fear of further castigation and scrutiny from the broader culture. Guy-Sheftall and Cole point out that such silencing has served black male patriarchy since it is one of those forces of oppression disaggregated from white male patriarchy though it promulgates the same problem of violence. In view of their goal, Guy-Sheftall and Cole discuss Hip Hop culture and the misogyny found in rap lyrics and music videos; they do not ignore young black women's complicity. For these scholars, young black women, irrespective of intellectual attainment, embrace the misogynistic representations promoted through hip hop culture thus often referring to themselves as "bitches" and "hos," as well as dressing like strippers. Stressing young black women's consistent embrace of degradation across boundaries of educational difference, Guy-Sheftall and Cole write:

> At coronations on many college campuses, including Miss Maroon and White at the all-male Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, queens, sometimes scantily clad, look and behave like strippers. In fact, many aspects of stripper culture permeate hip hop music videos and the public performances and values of Black youth, including on college campuses.

> The most blatant example of the convergence of stripper culture with Black youth culture occurs during Freaknik (which is almost defunct), when thousands of Black college students converge in Atlanta for their annual spring break. (205)

Guy-Sheftall and Cole reject an embrace of "stripper culture" as libratory; instead, they see it as a sign of the crisis within black society.

Positions like Guy-Sheftall and Cole's reflect the counter position to Heywood and Dworkin's. Heywood and Dworkin embrace the possibility of an alternative emerging from women's complicity with objectification because the women themselves are authoring the terms of their objectification. Those who embrace the legacy of blues women's influence on black women's culture, specifically the hip hop generation, share a view closer to Heywood and Dworkin's. The connection with music here is important as Venus and Serena's early sartorial style was very much akin to that of black women hip hop performers.

In *Blues Legacies and Black Feminisms*, Angela Y. Davis argues for blues women as espousing an early feminist critique of domestic abuse as well as an embrace for an alternative sexuality; furthermore, she contends that blues women could command a strong physical presence. Davis positions blues women as early critics of black working class life. Drawing on the lyrics and experiences of three blues women, Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday, Davis provides examples of black women who destabilized traditional boundaries of femininity. Through blues women's lives, Davis adds another dimension to the significance and experience of travel that my previous chapter discussed. Like the black female track and field stars, blues women's travels exposed them to the possibility of a life beyond the geographical, social, and cultural

boundaries of their communities. The opportunity also expanded blues women's view of independence, as Davis contends that, for them, travel was often linked to "the exercise of autonomy in their sexual lives" (67). In doing so, these women were simultaneously challenging gender conventions. As Davis says of Rainey's music:

> Rainey's music presented women who did not have to acquiesce to men who set out on the road, leaving their female partners behind. The female characters in her songs also left home, and they often left their male partners behind. They were female subjects who were free of the new, postslavery fetters of domestic responsibilities and domestic service outside the home. (72).

The blues marks another occasion where black women before the mid-twentieth century are seen carefully observing the significance of mobility in their lives.

As Hazel Carby and Davis both point out, the blues acted as a site for black working class women to contemplate "notions of gender and sexuality that were, to a certain extent, ideologically independent of the middle-class cult of 'true womanhood'" (46). Davis explains that the blues often reflected a pastiche of values on gender, sexuality, love, jealousy, and rivalry. To this end, hip hop is a comparable art form. In writing about Mary J. Blige and Lil' Kim as two icons of hip hop, Deborah Willis and Carla Williams discuss the way that these women defy historical dictates of respectability. In terms almost identical to Heywood and Dworkin, Willis and Williams write that Blige's and Kim's embrace of hypersexuality shows them to be "working within the framework of the 'subject commenting on the meaning of the object'" (113).

Though Guy-Sheftall and Cole would no doubt accept that black women in hip hop emerge from within a historic context, their concern with "stripper culture" does

not involve the collapsing boundary between subject and object as much as it involves the collapsing boundary between the stage performer and the onlooker; Jean Baudrillard also reflects on the dissolution of this boundary. In his essay "Aesthetic Illusion and Virtual Reality," Baudrillard reflects on technology's increasing command over human perception and view of reality. Thus, humans mediate their interactions through technology to the point where talking to an answering machine stands in for talking to an actual person, where a video recorder watches the television programs for you; for Baudrillard this phenomenon represents the diminishment of reality and the cloning of the human subject (203). He offers that these changes lead to a crisis over social responsibility:

> Most of these machines are used for delusion, for the elusion of communication ('Leave a message…'), for absolving face-to face relations and social responsibilities. They don't really lead to action, they substitute for it most of the time. So with the film on the video cassette recorder: maybe I'll see this film later, but maybe I won't do it at all. Am I sure I really want to see it anyway? But the machine must work. Thus the consumption of the machine converges with the consumption of desire. (203)

Baudrillard's view of technologies that absolve us of responsibility is the sort that Susan Sontag finds provincial.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag critiques views like Baudrillard's as insensitive to the millions of people for whom the creation of spectacle invites others to bear witness. As she writes:

> To speak of reality becoming a spectacle is a breathtaking provincialism.

> It universalizes the viewing habits of a small, educated population living in the rich part of the world, where news has been converted into entertainment--that mature style of viewing which is a prime acquisition of "the modern," and a prerequisite for dismantling traditional forms of party-based politics that offer real disagreement and debate. It assumes that everyone is a spectator. (110)

Sontag challenges the mainly French theoretical view of technology that suggests a diminished reality. Yet, her critique supports Baudrillard to some extent. Baudrillard finds value in critical positions wherein the spectacle offered a site of contemplation, for as he notes in "Aesthetic Illusion," "[b]ecause the human abstraction of the spectacle was never hopeless; it always offered the chance of disalienation. Whereas the operation of the world in real time, its unconditional realization, is really without alternative" (199). Thus, Baudrillard does not "assume that everyone is a spectator" as much as he *regrets that everyone has been replaced by the spectacle of themselves*. To this end, Baudrillard's concerns converge with Guy-Sheftall and Coles'. For Guy-Sheftall and Cole the self-absorption plays itself through the "stripper" performance of young black women students who fail to see themselves as political actors, instead embracing themselves as an image of sexual provocation (or an image of sex).

Guy-Sheftall and Cole, Baudrillard, and Sontag all struggle over the relationship between media and responsibility; Sontag appears most optimistic. Sontag contends that people can still be moved or compelled to help others upon taking in horrifying or even ugly images; yet Guy-Sheftall and Cole along with Baudrillard suggest that people are so taken with themselves as spectacles that their commitment to responsibility is undetermined. Heywood and Dworkin share in Sontag's optimistic spirit. This optimistic

spirit may be observed in their focus on the social awareness of female athletes. In other words, in order to be complicit, one has to know who or what they are conspiring with.

Venus and Serena Williams offer a case for examining the character of complicity as it involves black female self-presentation in late capitalism. In sports, late capitalism marks a time when athletic shoe and apparel companies are contracting with schools, coaches, and individual athletes at all levels of sport; when the marketing of athletes occurs on a global scale; when multimillion dollar contracts with athletes bring up the increased possibility that athletes will endorse a corporate ethics in place of social and political commitments. The earliest representations of the Williams sisters as professional athletes suggested a link between their fashion choices and black militant politics. Though the Williams sisters have never formally aligned themselves with oppositional politics, their attitudes and outspokenness on the court and their daring through fashion suggested the spirit of militant politics. Co-optation of politics by the marketplace during the 1970s provides the ground for interrogating the relationship between an ascribed politics of black women athletes and assessing its dynamics in late capitalism.

By the late '90s, black women athletes were demonstrating their support and loyalty to the corporations that sponsored them. Thus, Serena Williams was sure to thank Puma, the company sponsoring her at the time, after she won the U.S. Open in 1999 and Venus did not wear a Women's Tennis Association Logo during the 1998 U.S. Open because Reebok said that it would violate its ban on uniform logos. What one may further note in assessing the corporate response to the Williams sisters is that late capitalism in sports also designates a time when corporate endorsements are not limited for African American women as a result of objections to their style or demeanor, which is significant in light of Michael Jordan's marketing success being consistently linked to

his political neutrality. Interestingly, however, the Williams sisters altered their sartorial style significantly upon achieving success in major tennis tournaments like Wimbledon and the U.S. Open, distancing themselves from oppositional depictions of black beauty and associating themselves with problematic images of hypersexuality.

Heywood and Dworkin's work reminds us that second wave and black feminist critiques that may emerge at this juncture should be mindful of the possibility of the current dynamics that may complicate their sure applicability. Posing in the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue offers just one case of the Williams sisters' seeming complicity with representations of black women as Sapphire, or as temptress. At the same time that they appear to support such a view, they also offer a counter narrative that productively counters dangerous body ideals for women. Affirming Heywood and Dworkin's contention that second wave feminist critiques of the objectification of women does not simply address the representations of female athletes in this moment in late capitalism. At the same time, this work does not share Heywood and Dworkin's optimism concerning the sure alliance between (black women) athletes and feminist agency. While a feminist lens is certainly important for improving efforts to understand black women's struggle to assert an alternative aesthetic in sports, the aesthetic popularly serving as the alternative has failed to convincingly offer a depiction that undermines a patriarchal gaze. As a result, the black male patriarchal construction of African American athletes is maintained to the detriment of black women's inclusion.

African Americans, Fashion History, and Sports

Shane White and Graham White, the authors of *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit,* contend that African Americans historically affirmed their lives and articulated their freedom through hairstyle and dress. This

history includes the antebellum period when various fabrics obtained through bartering with other slaves or as hand-me-downs from plantation mistresses that enslaved women stitched together to create fashions worn mostly on Sundays but also for festivals and weddings. The fusion of contrasting fabrics and vibrant colors emphasized unpredictability and movement--the precise character of slave life.

The aesthetic sensibilities of African Americans have entangled the personal with the political. The dynamics of this expression have been explored by scholars who investigate these dynamics on Southern plantations, urban streets, and in dance halls. Scholars have also seen fit to include sports in this exploration of African Americans and style. In the introduction to *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture,* Gena Dagel Caponi writes that "perhaps no arena of present day cultural life in this country is the African American aesthetic so visibly on display as in sports" (2). Caponi is most baffled by the fact that many scholars fail to regard the athletic terrain within the same scope in which "literature, music, dance, and speech exist." According to Caponi, and those scholars and writers who do explore the African American aesthetic in sport, African American athletes, particularly basketball players, exhibit stylistic tendencies consistent with certain aspects of jazz performance. The players' improvisational manner and stylizations have fundamentally changed the way that basketball is played.

African American men's manner of playing is not the only expression of style that has impacted basketball; their hair styles and the alterations that they introduced to the uniform have fundamentally changed the look of the sport. For example, the baggy shorts, black socks, black sneakers, and baldheads of the University of Michigan's "Fab 5" in the early 1990s prompted many college teams to make similar changes. The

cornrowed styles of then New York Knick, Latrell Sprewell and then Philadelphia 76er Allen Iverson have influenced other professional basketball players to fashion their hair similarly.

As mentioned at the opening of this chapter, a serious limitation of *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', and Slam Dunking* is its exclusive focus on black male athletes. Expanding the focus of African American athletes and expressive style to include black women athletes enables greater insight into representations of black bodies and overarching discourses of oppression. Including black sportswomen into this discussion, then, would allow an engagement with the fact of black women's vulnerability to an enduring legacy as temptress. Thus, not only must she concern herself with being strong and fit for competition but also, African-American sportswomen, must resist base constructions of her hyper-sexualized nature and endeavor to construct an image of herself. As the case of sprinter, Florence Griffith Joyner illustrates most clearly.

While Florence Griffith Joyner's performance on the track in the Olympics in Seoul was stunning, setting records in the 100 and 200 meter dashes, and winning more medals in one Olympics than any woman in track and field before her (three gold and one silver), what seemed to capture the interests of journalists was her perceived sexual allure and not her speed, power, or strength. In one of the most provocative pieces written about Griffith Joyner's athletic performances, *Sports Illustrated's* Kenny Morre writes:

> FOR THE QUARTERFINALS, THE LADY WORE PURPLE. AS SHE SETTLED INTO the blocks before the second round of the 100 meters at the U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials in Indianapolis on Saturday,Florence Griffith Joyner's electric-plum bodysuit caressed her

> from neck to ankle. Over it she wore turquoise bikini briefs. Yet her left leg was bare; somehow it appeared more naked than any other bare limb in the race. As she crouched in the blocks, her long orange-black-and-white fingernails pressed into the scorched, 115 degrees surface of the Mondo track, and she came to a decision.(Morre 1)

Did Griffith Joyner win one might ask? Morre does not tell us until two paragraphs later, after he describes another race in which Griffith Joyner was "[c]lad in sparkling apple green" (Morre 1). Distracting the reader from the awesome power and strength that it takes to carry the speed of a 10.6 second race, the story that is told about this woman in sport is not a tale of heroism and daring but is rather a sultry tale of erotica.

The construction of the black woman as seductress in Morre's account is not a new narrative in the history of black women. Historian Deborah Gray White writes that:

> Many antebellum southerners found little in the black female's character to compliment. Some were convinced that slave women were lewd and lascivious, that they invited sexual overtures from white men, and that any resistance they displayed was mere feigning.(Woman 30)

To whites, dancing provided some justification in support of their belief in black women's carnal and libidinous nature in the post-bellum period as well. In sport also offers a site where black women are represented as instinctively carnal. In a separate article in *Sports Illustrated* by the same journalist, Griffith Joyner allegedly asserts: "Colors excite me. Sprinting is excitement" (Morre "Very Fast" 3). Morre then asserts that "**by accident**, Griffith Joyner came up with the one-legged look (Morre "Very Fast" 3)." Griffith Joyner continues: "I was trying for a new idea, and I had cut one leg off some

tights, and happened to look in the mirror" and concluded, "that might work" (Morre "Very Fast" 3). In Morre's account and ostensibly in Griffith Joyner's own words, she attempted to think and create but she failed- stumbling upon the one-legger by accident. The success of her accidental creation may have gone unnoticed had she not "happened to look in the mirror." Her final titillating and provocative creation is never conscious but is unwittingly a manifestation of her character.

While her appearance may be bold and seemingly assertive, her look is not intended to serve any political function. For Morre writes:

> Griffith Joyner is quick to point out that she didn't choose her racing styles to revolutionize anybody's view of women. She has, since childhood, simply pleased herself by wildly altering her appearance. (Spoils 2)

According to Morre then, Griffith Joyner is not a member of a community of women seeking to alter historic and public perceptions. She is an individual seeking only to represent herself in the world.

There is a tension however, in what Morre writes and what Griffith Joyner says to Susan Reed of *People Weekly*. In Reed's work, Griffith Joyner seeks to use her love of design as a way to construct herself as an agent. She asserts:

> I like designing clothes, and I wanted to bring something of myself into whatI do. The one-legger was an accident. I was actually creating an even more radical style - - it has to do with cutting more holes in the stocking - - and I happened to cut off the leg. I tried it on and thought, 'Hmmm.

> This looks cute.' Besides, it's about time track and field looked pretty. (Reed 1)

In this account, Griffith Joyner was "designing" when she cut the leg off of her tights. This implies that she was acting as an agent when she "accidentally" created the one-legger. In her own words, she was seeking to be radical in her presentation on the track, seeking to transform the prevailing aesthetic in track and field.

Using the body as a site of resistance has a long history in African-American culture, specifically with black working class culture in Atlanta in the 1910's who danced fervently, feverishly and provocatively as a way of "recuperating their bodies from exploitation" (168) Tera W. Hunter argues that rather than commit their bodies to the services and the demands of whiteness, blacks used dancing as a way to defy the tyrannical dictates of whites who sought to control the body for service and labor. Not only did nighttime, dance hall practices grant blacks custodianship over their bodies but dancing also provided blacks with a way to use the body for physical exertion outside the domain of wage labor.

Dancing also helped to articulate a new aesthetic for black culture. Hunter suggests that the glorification of body parts such as the buttocks in dances such as the "funky butt" subverted the normative beauty ideals. By using the body to highlight sexuality, blacks were employing what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham calls the "double voiced discourse" (13). Through the appropriation of the myth of hyper-sexuality that was intended to disempower, blacks assumed control of how they would be defined by altering dominant perceptions in their own communities and private spaces. Moreover, popular representations of blacks caricatured them as grotesque and ugly; however, as

Hunter argues, in dance halls superior-dancing ability introduced an alternative for judging black beauty and allure.

In keeping with this history, not only did Griffith Joyner use her body to articulate an alternative aesthetic, she also adds another dimension to the narrative of the liberated female athlete. In the interview with Reed, Griffith Joyner said that she wants to "bring something of [herself] into what she [does]." This statement is quite peculiar given the creative and transforming potential Mariah Burton Nelson attributes to sports. However, playing sports alone did not provide Griffith Joyner (by her own admission) with a license to do as she pleased with her body; rather, an oppositional posture was assumed when she designed her racing look. Furthermore, being attractive was very relevant for Griffith Joyner, contrary to Burton Nelson's claim, and has been for black women runners historically; examples include Wilma Rudolph, Jackie Joyner Kersee, and Marion Jones.

Sprinter and Olympic gold medalist Florence Griffith Joyner is an obvious frontrunner for consideration of African American athletes and expressive style. Following in Griffith Joyner's footsteps, Venus and Serena Williams have also sought to distinguish themselves in fashion as they enrolled in classes at The Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale. Venus has gotten many high profile opportunities with her company *V Starr Interiors*. Such opportunities include designing the set for *The Tavis Smiley Show*. As a fashion designer, she has also designed a hat for McDonald's staff.

Ideal Bodies, Swimsuits, and Catsuits: The Identity of Beauty in Late Capitalism

According to Davis, consumers of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue "believe that the swimsuit issue does not focus on *any* woman or *any* bodies, but on feminine women and their ideally beautiful and sexy bodies" (Davis 19). For the producers of the

images, Davis posits that highlighting the models' bodies is most important--which is to say that the swimsuit issue is not about fashion and making the clothing appealing (22). The producers of the images--photographers, models, editors--contend that "the beauty of the models is enhanced when they are thin, tall, 'good' for swimwear, and adept at posing" (25). Explaining, Davis writes that, "[i]n the modeling world, 'good' for swimwear means more curvaceous than bodies used for modeling most other forms of clothing" (25). Elaborating on the construction and promulgation of beauty ideals in the swimsuit issue, Davis contends that:

> Many of the swimsuit issue texts urge consumers to view models as ideally beautiful. For example, captions commonly suggest that the models epitomize beauty, and the title for the 1984 swimsuit spread was, "'A' You're Adorable, 'B' You're…" The models featured in the swimsuit issue resemble the current feminine beauty ideals. For the most part, they are young, thin and curvaceous, lack blemishes, muscular definition and visible body hair (except on the scalp, eye area, and occasionally on the forearms), and show no signs of disability. The fact that the beauty ideal demands youthfulness and lack of disability is evidence that it reflects and reinforces ageism and ableism. (26)

The attention Davis gives to the text accompanying the photographs in the swimsuit issue is important because it suggests a formula for reading the meaningfulness of these inscriptions. The visual description serving as the unofficial criteria marking the beauty ideals represented in the swimsuit issue are still in evidence beyond the range of Davis's

study though the Williams sisters mark a departure with respect to race, body type, and ability.[22]

The Williams sisters' inclusion in the 2003-2005 issues does not reflect the consumer ideal. As black women their inclusion is rare since, as Davis contends, women of color are underrepresented in the swimsuit issue given their departure from the beauty ideal of white skin, blond hair, and blue eyes. When Serena first appeared in the 2003 issue, the photographer Walter Iooss Jr. uses the text to help readers adjust to this departure from the beauty ideal. "It was clear she wasn't going to look like the typical swimsuit model," Iooss explains. "But what she has is active beauty, a combination of femininity and athleticism," he notes in an effort to clarify. Iooss recognizes that consumers are familiar with the beauty conventions that typify swimsuit issue models. He attempts to create a space for accepting Serena among those traditional figures of beauty. Iooss's explanation follows text acknowledging Serena's "physical bona fides" as "unimpeachable" yet their example, the "cat suit" she wore at the 2002 U.S. Open, which they offer as proof of her physical credentials, does little on its own to substantiate this claim. The dubiousness of Serena's unimpeachable physical bona fides is most evident in Iooss's decision to declare her body as beautiful and feminine for readers of the text.

According to Janell Hobson, the press was critical of the "cat suit" Serena wore precisely because it accentuated her body. Hobson links this criticism to historical attitudes regarding the black female body. She explains:

> This history--a history of enslavement, colonial conquest, and ethnographic exhibition--variously labeled the black female body

[22] Davis dates her study from 1964, the year Sports Illustrated marks the beginning of the swimsuit edition, through 1991.

> 'grotesque,' 'strange,' 'unfeminine,' 'lascivious,' and 'obscene.' Such negative attitudes toward the black female body target one aspect of the body in particular: the buttocks. (88)

Hobson contends that such a regard for the black female body is "rooted in popular nineteenth-century exhibitions of the Hottentot Venus" (88). Jaime Schultz extends the category of the grotesque in describing the commentary on the catsuit and Serena's body. According to Schultz, journalists writing about the skintight fit of the catsuit linked Williams's obvious muscularity to both hypermasculinity and the super human. Thus, Williams was described as a comic book hero (347-348). As she asserts "[e]quating Serena Williams with imaginary comic book characters not only alludes to her phenomenal skill but also positions her outside what is 'natural' in women's tennis" (348). Her status "outside" the "natural" or normative makes Williams an "extraordinary body" and extends the meaning of Rosemarie Garland Thomson's term to include world class athletes among those figures conventionally regarded as disabled.

In *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* Garland Thomson is interested in denaturalizing representations of "cripples" and "freaks" as figures of certain, biological difference. As one of the chief insights of disability studies offers for critical consideration, bodies get produced by the geography and architecture that make up the built environment. Science and medical technology also help to normalize a discourse of insufficiency in constructing "extraordinary bodies." As Garland Thomson writes:

> the meanings attributed to extraordinary bodies reside not in inherent flaws, but in social relationships in which one group is legitimated by possessing valued physical characteristics and maintains its ascendancy

> and its self-identity by systematically imposing the role of cultural or corporeal inferiority on others. Representation thus simultaneously buttresses an embodied version of normative identity and shapes a narrative of corporeal difference that excludes those whose bodies or behaviors do not conform. (7)

Given that such figures are normalized as disabled, they are used in literature, film, and other texts of popular culture to mark difference and to encode meaning. Garland Thomson endeavors to expose how these figures have been used and in the process un-hinge them from their invisibility as cultural types and their role in constructing a normative ideal.

According to Garland Thomson, Toni Morrison's pariah women explore the living space of marginalized communities. Garland Thomson notes the consistent presence of these anarchic women in Morrison's first five novels and who are "[m]arginalized by the exclusionary hierarchy of appearance commonly known as 'beauty' or 'normalcy,' […] whose place in 'the conscience of th[e] community' is to probe the interrelations of identity, history, and the body" (115). The body in this case--the case of black women who may be poor or old--becomes the bearer of social judgments. Though these anarchic women carry the negative marks of culture, their ability to lead meaningful lives is not obliterated by them. In writing about Eva Peace of *Sula*, Garland Thomson's reading offers a productive way of thinking about the self-making projects of anarchic women. She writes:

> All of Morrison's protagonists are in similar situations: they literally constitute themselves with a free-ranging agency whose terms are

> tragically circumscribed by an adversarial social order. Self-violation, however, is no concession for Eva or for Mrs. Hedges; rather, it is an act of self-production that at once resists domination and witnesses oppression's virulence. Eva differs from her fellow amputee, Melville's Captain Ahab, in that Ahab's amputation enslaves him in an obsessive pursuit of Moby Dick, while Eva's amputation frees her from poverty. Ahab's transformation is wrought by wholly uncontrollable external forces, while Eva's is enacted as a limited choice. Indeed, physical disability neither diminishes nor corrupts Morrison's extraordinary women; rather, it affirms the self in context. Eva's disability augments her power and dignity, inspiring awe and becoming a mark of superiority, a residue of ennobling history. (117)

I quote this reading at length because its terms speak directly to the mainstream media discourse that characterizes Venus and Serena Williams and leads me to conclude that they are cultural extensions of Morrison's anarchic women. Thus, unlike Althea Gibson, Arthur Ashe, and Zina Garrison who all felt constrained by race, gender, and societal expectations, the Williams sisters demonstrate "a free-ranging agency" that journalists and many other tennis players find disconcerting. For scholars like Spencer and Schultz who have argued for acknowledgement of racism in tennis, those journalists and tennis players who critique the Williams sisters' expressions of "free-ranging agency" reveal the existence of an "adversarial social order" at work in tennis and in media.

Representations of the Williams sisters as "extraordinary bodies" destabilize prevailing representations of disabled bodies as "gimps" and "lames." Venus and Serena's superior athletic performances undermine the dominant representation of

"extraordinary bodies" as physically inferior actors in the built environment. What does an understanding of the Williams sisters as "extraordinary bodies" mean aesthetically? Given Hobson's and Schultz's critiques of media discourses that place Serena Williams at the center of its discussion of deviant bodies, the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue appears as both an example of this discussion and a departure from it. While the text acknowledges Serena's deviance by re-defining beauty in applying the term to her, it simultaneously aims to aesthetically re-encode the grotesque for a mainstream audience. In doing so, the Williams sisters' presence in the swimsuit issue becomes the site of a popular convergence of race, gender, and (dis)ability.

Courting the Spotlight in Extraordinary Bodies

From the start of their careers in tennis, the bodies of Venus and Serena Williams have been the subject of intense media scrutiny. Since 2005, Venus's injured body has been the subject of significant attention. She has complained of sore and tender wrists. Journalists suggested that her injured wrists were really an excuse for her failure to play up to her potential and to give her an exit from tennis. The attention on Serena has been quite different. Along with some attention given to her knees requiring surgery, the media discourse on Serena's body since 2005 focuses on her apparent weight gain. Thus, along with race and sexuality, the "extraordinary body" as a category of analysis exposes age, injury, and weight as further contributing to the status of sportswomen as anarchic.

During Serena's run for the Australian Open crown between 2005 and 2007, journalists were unmerciful in their critiques. As Martin Johnson of *The Daily Telegraph* noted in his review of the oftentimes bizarre media scrutiny that, "it's a subject that has led to all sorts of media discussion, including a fashion expert appearing on TV to

inform us that the pleats in her dress provide the very opposite of camouflage, though Serena tried to make herself invisible in her second-round match by wearing the same colour scheme as the court she was playing on" (Johnson 1). Johnson's acknowledgement of this fascination with Serena's body image is interesting given his own 2005 observations, which were of the same variety as the fashion expert's view. Describing the 2005 Australian Open semi-final between Sharapova and Serena, Johnson wrote:

> Williams, though, may not need too many more narrow squeaks like the one she had against Russia's Maria Sharapova yesterday before being forced to make a choice between tennis and the fashion circuit. The hot pants she played in were about three sizes too small, and the energy she must have expended squeezing into them probably cost her the first set. (Johnson 1)

Johnson does not stop with this blatant critique of Serena's attire. He continues his critique of Serena in the next paragraph:

> Maybe she opened the wrong locker, and put on a pair of Sharapova's by mistake, but her movement around the court against the Russian's heavy groundstrokes put you in mind, at times, of a woman in a panty and girdle and high heels running for a bus. And there were the earrings. Not only was she in permanent danger of poking herself in the eye, but a big girl like Serena doesn't need several pounds of extra weight hanging from her ears when the temperature is in the mid-eighties. (Johnson 1)

It is only in the third paragraph that Johnson tells you that Serena won the match (she would eventually win the title) in three sets.

The dissection of Serena's weight led to *The New York Times* reporting on the debate about weighing collegiate female athletes. As Jere Longman reports:

> Female athletes still face the same enormous societal pressures that other women face to remain thin and to possess a body type that many find unrealistic, especially for sports. Some experts believe athletes feel even greater pressure, given the assumption--also debatable--that they can improve performance by lowering their weight and percentage of body fat. Thus, many become vulnerable to what is called the female athlete triad:eating disorders, interrupted menstruation and osteoporosis. (1)

To prevent collegiate athletes from succumbing to the female athlete triad, the National Collegiate Athletic Association recommends that "women not be weighed on a regular basis" (Longman 1). Teams are left with the decision of how to handle this issue and some, like Duke, choose to weigh female athletes to monitor rapid weight gain, while other teams, like Tennessee, choose not to weigh players at all. In this debate, Serena's body serves as a powerful example of an athlete who appears to carry a lot of weight and yet perform superbly in competition. As Donna Lopiano, executive director of the Women's Sports Foundation, says of Serena's body, "[Williams offers] an in-your-face redefinition of what a strong woman should look like" (Longman 2). Her success also counters the belief that athletes have to be skinny in order to be successful.

It is unclear whether the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) asks that players regularly weigh-in, but some journalists have criticized Serena even after she won the 2005 and 2007 Australian Open for reporting her weight as 135 pounds on the WTA's website. For example, in 2005 and 2007, Greg Couch criticized Serena for maintaining a false image of herself and thus failing as a role model by refusing to acknowledge what

he considers to be her actual weight. In 2007, Couch points out that Tyra Banks showed courage when she appeared on the cover of *People* magazine, *Good Morning America*, and her own talk show, *The Tyra Banks Show*, declaring that she weighed 161 pounds. Banks's declaration took place during the same week that Serena won the Australian Open. Unlike the courage that Banks showed, Couch accused Serena of "lying to those girls who are going to grow up with [her] same body shape and size" (Couch 2). Instead of Serena offering a counter-image Couch suggests that Williams's claim to being 135 pounds gives girls another false and dangerous body image to strive for.

Contrary to Couch's claim that Serena lied, other commentators contend that Serena is an effective role model who many people relate to because of the way that her body appears despite the exact number of pounds appended to it. Certainly, Lopiano, quoted above, is included in the category of supporters. In addition, Leif Shiras, commentator for the *Tennis Channel*, testified to his belief in the support that viewers show Serena. In addition to the increased viewers that accompany Serena's matches, Shiras says that the "fact she's built and made the way she is, I think people can relate to her in a way--perhaps more so than someone like Maria Sharapova" (Elmore 3). Serena's agent Jill Smoller's position mirrored Shiras's. Of Serena's win at the 2007 Australian Open, where she trounced Sharapova, the world's number one ranked player, in straight sets, Smoller noted:

> I think what happened in Australia was her saying you don't know until you walk in someone's shoes. She was saying, in effect, 'Here's how I am built. Deal with it. I'm not going to weigh 110 pounds. I'm comfortable with it.' I think people related to her and identified with her. (Elmore 3)

Though one might expect Serena's agent to offer a sympathetic portrait, her thoughts were important to include because they underscore another common view, which is that Serena visually marks an alternative role model for girls and women. Iooss, the *Sports Illustrated* photographer, makes this point when he references her "athletic beauty." Robyn Mcgee, author of *Hungry for More: A Keeping-it-Real Guide for Black Women and Body Image*, sees Serena from this alternative perspective: "She's a huge role model for not just African-American women but all people who have been told you don't have the right dimensions." Continuing McGee is quoted asserting the following:

> She's not 15 anymore. She has a lot in common with a broad cross section of America. Six out of 10 Americans are considered overweight. She's still marketed as her own brand of sex symbol, not as a full-figured clothing spokeswoman. She's not Queen Latifah, but she's one of a kind. (Elmore 1-2).

Williams is continually positioned as exceptional, as the exception, even as she attempts to generalize her body type through a discussion of race.

On her weblog, Serena reiterates statements she made to the press following her 2007 Australian Open win. She writes:

> But more than wining what I liked most in the Australian Open was proving people wrong. Down to the last round the last match I was still fighting critics. Everyone thought I was going to lose because I was playing the number one seed, because to THEIR standards I'm not fit. I don't look like Mary Kate Olsen or Nicole Richie. I'm all black and I'm all woman baby. I have hips, curves, butt, and boobs…I will never be a size two. I will always be bigger. And there are tons of other women and

> people out there that share my same body type. I'm a body-liscious babe. My waist is 29 inches; I can't have a smaller waist unless I decide to starve myself, and if my fans out there want me to win more slams I'm not going to be able to do that.

Serena signs her message, which continues on with a discussion of the lyrics to Whitney Houston's song "Tell Me No," "Big booty Serena." Rather than withering in the face of intense scrutiny, Serena embraces her curvaceous body and her ostensibly broad backside--echoing Venus who balked at the suggestion that she should change her beaded hairstyle so that she would not be further penalized during matches for causing a distraction. Serena's bodily confidence, to some extent, mimics those dance hall performers who Tera Hunter tells us danced the "funky butt" as a way to embrace a part of the black body degraded in the culture at large. Serena refuses the dominant representation of an ideal athletic body; instead, she offers herself as a model for an alternative sporting aesthetic.

In the conclusion to her chapter "The Batty Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body" Hobson suggests that Serena's ability to publicly embrace her *derriere* is a marker of her difference from the typical black woman who must fight stereotypes that athletic success has made conquerable for Williams. She writes:

> Most of all, black women, who have been un-mirrored for so long, must confront the prevailing imagery of grotesque derrieres and black female hyper-sexuality to distinguish the myths and lies from our own truths and the ways we wish to represent ourselves. Only then will we be able to follow the lead of Serena Williams, proudly displaying our behinds while continuing our winning streak. (Hobson 111-112)

Here again we find an observation that speaks to the difference between successful black women athletes and other black women, which is a point that I stressed in Chapter 1. Hobson further brings up an interesting point in noting Williams's *proud display* of her bottom. While she is correct, Serena Williams's display of her bottom is accompanied by her own championing rhetoric, the "we" that Hobson marks as one day benefiting from Serena's example, is complicated by the fact that the "we" currently profiting from Serena's bottom is corporate.

Serena Williams's official website includes the above live action shot of Williams swinging her backhand and exposing her tennis briefs with her surname accompanied by the Nike swoosh logo. It is one of several photographs on Williams's official site showing her bottom while at the same time associating her with a corporation that can lay claim to her body and also profit from her success. Unlike those women who Tera Hunter describe as articulating an alternative aesthetic in juke joints, Serena Williams is attempting to re-code the grotesque black female body as a public act with corporate sponsorship. I disagree with the implication of Hobson's assessment of Williams's sense of her own overcoming being used as a model for black women at large concerning this matter without considering what her rhetoric masks. Williams's rhetoric masks the fact of her continued corporate endorsement despite her size. Just as she and Venus could maintain corporate sponsorships despite the appearance of an oppositional consciousness, Serena has maintained her corporate endorsements despite critiques of her body. Thus, to use bell hooks's insight in a different context, Serena Williams may have suffered as a result of these critiques but she was not oppressed by them, much unlike the experience of her African American predecessors in tennis. While I am not opposed to the fact of Williams's corporate deals, I am troubled by the unexamined way

in which she appears to collude with the sexual commodification of the black female body in profiting. Following her lead would seem to suggest that black women would become complicit in sexual self-commodification, thus supporting "stripper culture."

For many commentators, one of the uncomfortable aspects of Baartman's legacy is the possibility of her complicity with her exhibition. Complicity confounds attempts to clearly decide the roles of victim and victimizer. In this scenario, if Baartman agreed to her exhibition and earned money from her performance, then she fails to earn our pity and troubles critical attempts to use hers as a case of colonial and racial abuse. Not only is Serena Williams's body linked to Baartman's legacy, but so is its entanglement with the issue of complicity and profit thereby revealing that African American sportswomen live the contradictions of exploitation and triumph that Hazel Carby posits as the experience of black women in entertainment (Carby 2).

The Twinning of Venus and Serena Williams

In addition to the specter of Sarah Baartman informing media discourses concerning Serena Williams' body and the catsuit, the twinning of the Williams sisters also underscores representations of their extraordinary bodies. Though Venus Williams is more than a year older than her sister Serena, both current and former tennis players report that the closeness between them reflects a twin-like bond atypical of regular siblings. Psychologist Nancy L. Segal reports that the many and varied studies of twins invariably conclude that "identical twins share closer social bonds than fraternal twins" (97). Although psychologists appear to be less clear on why this occurs, evolutionary psychology links his occurrence to the fact that they share one hundred percent of their genes. Sharing the same genes would predispose identical twins to aid those others "likely to carry and transmit these genes into future generations" (99). Although the

special bond between twins is rare among non-twins, some do enjoy such an intimacy. Segal contends, however, that these "inner twins" share a bond that is "limited to situations they both enjoy," whereas with "identical twins, cooperation is more pervasive" (105). Reports of Venus and Serena's bond transcends the inner twin dynamic and approaches identical twin eminence.

In addition to the Williams sisters' twinning in the Wrigley's Doublemint Gum campaign through the products historical use of twins in its advertising, which I discussed in a previous chapter, the Williams sisters have been represented as conjoined twins in the Bosell Worldwide's famous "milk moustache" campaign. These campaigns mark the ways that Venus and Serena are complicit in overarching narratives of race and gender deviancy. By participating in these ads, Venus and Serena are helping to buttress the vitriolic stereotype that all black people look alike. Furthermore, they have been able to reap millions of dollars in endorsements from these advertisers.

Carla Peterson's examination of enslaved women's experiences helps to historicize the problematic twinning of black women's bodies. As she writes:

> Within both economic systems of slavery and free labor, the black body was made to perform as laboring body, as a working machine dissociated from the mind that invents or operates the machine. For black women, the consequences were multiple. In slavery in particular the black women not only carried out the physical labor demanded by plantation economy, she also performed the sex work that satisfied the slaveholder's lust as well as the reproductive labor of breeding that ensured the replenishment of his slave stock. In the eyes of the dominant culture what resulted was a simultaneous masculinization and feminization of the black female body,

which was consequently perceived as grotesque. (x-xi)

The grotesque to which Peterson refers persists beyond the perceptions of black women's bodies under slavery. The feminization of the body does not specifically support a slaveocracy, nor is the masculinization of the body directly related to the physical demands of a literal slave plantation; instead, it results from the associations of the materiality of black women's bodies as historically linked to this history. According to Patricia Hill Collins, all black women are associated with this history because their maligned position is a requisite component for maintaining race, gender, and class hierarchy. She writes: "[e]ven when the initial conditions that foster controlling images disappear, such images prove remarkably tenacious because they not only subjugate U.S. black women but are key in maintaining intersecting oppressions" (69). Stereotypical images or "controlling images," depict black women as deviant and assign to them the negative characteristics and traits that relate to attitude, beauty, and libido among others. As a result of binary thinking, the maligned position of black women as Other within this construct, provides the ideological justification which sustains the race, class, and sexual norms of the dominant group. Furthermore, Collins contends that while specific controlling images of black women change in the popular imagination, the position of black women as Other persists. Collins asserts that, "[p]articular meanings, stereotypes, and myths can change, but the overall ideology of domination itself seems to be an enduring feature of intersecting oppressions" (88). The Williams sisters' photograph for the "milk moustache" advertising campaign visually conveys the masculinization and feminization of black women that Peterson described, and it further underscores the representation of Venus and Serena as "extraordinary bodies" since the photograph depicts them as conjoined twins.

Bozell Worldwide's now famous milk mustache campaign features self-proclaimed, milk drinking celebrities from fields ranging from acting and modeling to athletics. Four tennis players, including Venus and Serena were selected to endorse the product. The ad copy for all of the celebrities takes advantage of significant events, like sporting championships, to keep the ads "fresh" (direct ref.) The two ads featuring the Williams sisters coincided with the 1999 U.S. Open. After Serena Williams won the Open, the copy for the ad read:

> What's the best way to toast my sister's victory? With milk. It has 9 essential nutrients active bodies need. For best results, serve in a silver cup.

Here, Venus could be the imagined speaker in the text because Serena won the individual Open title; however, the speaker could be Serena. The sisters won the doubles championship together and Venus told a reporter at *Jet* magazine that because she won the doubles match with her sister, she also had an "indirect win for the title" (56). Thus, Venus suggests that she triumphed vicariously through her sister's win. Either of the Williams sisters (or both together) could be speaking in this article. S.L Price reported that the sisters believed that they were "the same people" with two separate hearts." This relationship, which was eroticized in his article, is communicated through image and text in the milk ad.

In the photograph, Venus, who actually stands 6' 1 ½", is rendered the same height as her 5' 10" sister Serena. Making the sisters the same height reinforces their sameness. The black tank tops that the sisters are wearing dissolves the trunks of their separate bodies into a seamless whole, thereby radically imposing their reputed closeness. The words inscribed across their image have multiple interpretations. The "One cup"

could both refer to the product that they are endorsing as well as the "silver cup" mentioned in the expanded text. The fact that these words are emblazoned across their fused chests also suggests a correspondence with bra size given its measurement in "cups."

The "extraordinary bodies" showcased in the milk ad repeats an image of African American female conjoined twins who performed in freak shows during the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. Joanne Martel's compelling biography of Millie-Christine helps reveal this connection. Millie and Christine McKoy's career, the way they were represented, their profitability and marketability uniquely parallels and foreshadows the Williams sisters' experiences in sports. Like the sisters who described themselves as "the same people," with "separate hearts," Millie-Christine's headstone has inscribed on it: "A soul with two thoughts. Two hearts that beat as one." Why has this figure of Millie-Christine returned via Venus and Serena Williams? How do we understand a biological twinning made cultural? An examination into the lives and careers of Millie-Christine suggests ways of interpreting such a re-emergence.

Millie-Christine were born on July 11, 1851 to Monemia and Jacob McKoy who were enslaved in Columbus County, North Carolina. Millie-Chrstine's bodies were fused at the "coccyx into a single pelvis." This physical anomaly made them a lucrative exhibit for freak show promoters whose enterprise flourished in the United States from 1840 to 1940. By 1851, the year Millie-Christine were born, Phineus Taylor Barnum's American Museum epitomized the amusement industry in America.

The museum industry emerged from a desire to increase knowledge and understanding of America after the revolution. Increasing one's understanding of nature was thought to cultivate a higher regard for virtue and truth. Museum owners utilized the

museum's reputation as educational establishments to stage lectures that could both educate and entertain thereby bringing drama into this arena.

A relationship between showmen and doctors facilitated favorable results for each. Showmen spurred on by competition from other promoters benefited from the doctors interested in the field of teratology, which studied "monsters," or those born with verifiable difference. Showmen and promoters like Barnum were known to fabricate and exaggerate their exhibitions. Doctors observed and authenticated exhibits therein providing advertising copy for promoters who in turn could more easily convince interested spectators that they possessed legitimate curiosities. This arrangement satisfied doctors because they were then able to examine what were thought to be highly irregular specimens in support of the advancing, though faddish, field of teratology.

Millie-Christine toured the United States and Europe throughout the antebellum period as slaves generating significant profits for their owner and promoter Joseph Smith. After the Civil War, Millie-Christine continued on the lucrative freak show circuit, providing their family with land and financial security. The sisters however required that one significant change accompany their status as free persons: "there'd be no more intimate examinations by curious doctors in every town" (109). The sisters did allow superficial examinations, but they no longer afforded doctors the chance to peer at and probe their naked bodies.

This new arrangement left some doctors feeling slighted. For instance, Dr. Charles A. Lee examined the sisters in Washington but felt embittered. "The keeper, Mr. Smith, would not allow me to see them naked," he complained, "nor place my hand under their clothes to examine the pelvis" (113). Millie-Christine's encounters with doctors continued on in much the same way as they toured.

The only time Millie-Christine permitted a more intimate exam was when they suffered from an abscess forming near the genitals. Although Dr. William Pancoast diagnosed the abscess troubling the sisters as a vaginal fistula, he failed to stipulate his course of treatment for this ailment. Although more doctors were consulted who could confirm Pancoast's observations, Millie-Christine primarily functioned as research specimens. Millie-Christine's experiences with doctors illuminates the ways that conjoined twins figured as sexual curiosities as well as physical anomalies.

The cultural twinning of the Williams sisters reprises the biological twinning of Millie-Christine by focusing attention on the bodies of black women and sexualizing their sisterhood. The Milk Ad, Price's textual construction, and the Wrigley's Spearmint campaign together focus on a twinned sisterhood to grapple with the possibility of the Williams sisters' relationship at once sexualized and wholesome. Their entanglement serves as a site for the continued analysis of the ways that anarchic black women become All-American girls.

My Sister's Keeper: Rethinking Narratives of National Identity and Inevitable Violence

This chapter uses representations of Venus and Serena Williams in popular culture to examine the "cruel" as it serves as a prism through which to examine socio-political wreckage. I argue that the Williams sisters' cultural significance is partly due to the way they help to frame racism, sexism, and classism as subjects in late-capitalism. As prominent cultural figures, pictorial and textual representations of Venus and Serena Williams urge a consideration then, of historically thematic areas of discord now confused given the ways that globalization and technology are seen to be transforming identity politics. As testimony to this difference, Venus and Serena Williams are spokespersons for global brands like McDonalds, Nike, and Reebok, which provides them with multi-million dollar contracts that enable them to live lives that their predecessors might have imagined but certainly could not have realized. In Althea Gibson's case, she was generally refused corporate endorsements as most companies in Jim Crow America did not want to associate their products with a black woman. Even as late as the 1990s, Zina Garrison could not find a corporate sponsor. The cameras that Garrison saw as her enemy because they never seemed to show her having her best hair day have been used by the Williams sisters to define their likeness as a brand; thus redefining the template for publicly desirable bodies and images.

The effort at re-definition, however, has not met with un-categorical success. The Williams sisters cannot alone define cultural discourse, nor have they necessarily expressed such an ambition. Narratives about them and photographs of them often conspire with themes, issues, and concerns beyond the autobiographical subject position and interests of either Venus or Serena Williams. For instance, though Venus and Serena Williams try to frame their rise to fame as a classic rags-to-riches tale featuring two

loving sisters from a loving family, that story is often paralleled in mainstream media accounts depicting the sisters' closeness as perverse. Despite their personal intentions, the Williams sisters routinely come to frame how racism, classism, and sexism operate in contemporary American culture.

More than just a story about a cultural narrative that shouts over the voices of individual subjects, Venus and Serena Williams's status as cultural figures focuses discussions about national and family identity in a way that refreshes and crystallizes historically urgent concerns of race, gender, and class. Venus and Serena Williams are fraught symbols of harmony in the midst of these turbulent times. They seem to offer the promise that reconciliation is a renewable resource as they consistently enter into contests requiring one sister's sure defeat and yet they continually celebrate and peaceably go home together. Venus took offense at the repeated suggestion that she and Serena's contests belie sibling rivalry. "Why is it always expected that you have to hate your sister? That's not normal," Venus said. "Jealousy isn't normal either. The Bible says jealousy is rottenness to the bone. It is. It will get you crazy" ("Venus reclaim thunder").[23] As the article goes on to suggest, jealousy, spite, and hatred are typical features of athletic aggression. Lacking elements of a fighting spirit typically makes losing inevitable, but this is not so for Venus and Serena Williams. They appear to have established a relationship between winning and losing, a dialectic that has yielded a third term; a term neither the figures of Cain and Abel nor Romulus and Remus appear to have discovered. Though professionally at odds, the Williams sisters have established clear boundaries for their aggression. In their case, the Williams sisters show how

[23] See also, "Interview with Venus Williams." CNN 19 December 2008. 25 March 2009. http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/01/23/talkasia.venus/index.html

sisterhood provides a new possibility for national identity that brotherhood has traditionally denied.

Violence, Love and Modernity

As a concept, modernity attempts to come to terms with experiences in the world. For Bernard Yack, it is an "intellectual [invention] inspired by our need to come to grips with the unprecedented social and cultural transformations of recent centuries (7)." In the 18th and 19th centuries, such changes included the often-aggressive meeting between Western and non-Western people as an effect of mercantilism that gave rise to industrial capitalism and innovations in technology followed by desires for what was being produced (Knauf). According to Charles Taylor, the ushering in of modernity in the West brought with it a subsequent "lack of meaning" as a prominent feature of human experience. The objective, quantitative and wholly scientific mode of engaging phenomena displaced higher religious and even social organizations around kingships, for example, that once gave people a sense of purpose (Taylor). Extending from the 18th century through the 20th, social and political upheavals, the fall of empires and certainly war contributed much to an experience of meaninglessness.

For Sigmund Freud, certainly a key thinker within the tradition of modernity, war challenged civilization's claims to triumph over primitivism. "[War] strips the late accretions of civilization," writes Freud, "and lays bare the primal man in each of us. It compels us once more to be heroes who cannot believe in their own death; it stamps strangers as enemies, whose death is to be brought about or desired; it tells us to disregard the death of those we love" (4: 288-317). The excesses of war and the human propensity to elicit extreme, if not lethal forms of aggression propelled Freud to consider this penchant for violence an innate human characteristic. In *Civilization and Its*

Discontents, Freud states, "men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggression (68). He cites world history, including-if not especially-World War I as evidence of such aggressive instincts. For Freud then, the injunction to "love thy neighbor" or to "love thine enemies" not only counterposes inherent tendencies but also history.

Unfortunately, the continued changes in capitalist modes of exchange and advancements in technology that characterize the late modern age have not altered history to such an extent that the presence of violence in the world convincingly absolves people of Freud's charges. What this "look around you" approach does is further raise the urgency of the question Donny Hathaway and Roberta Flack issued in 1972: "Where is the Love?" The contemporary world is an extremely violent place. To this end, Angelika Bammer writes:

> As inheritors of the twentieth century and witnesses to the emergent twenty-first, we have learned to live with an astonishing level of collectively-endorsed and publicly-enacted physical violence. Whether such violence takes the form of increasingly technologized modes of local or global warfare, ideologically-defined terrorism, or systematically-planned genocide, we have grown used to thinking of the resulting losses in numbers no longer measurable in human terms. The resulting paradox is that we have become at once inured to and fascinated by the repeated spectacle of mass death and destruction. (Memory Sites)

For Bammer, one of the outcomes of this paradox between being *underwhelmed* and engrossed by violence "manifests itself as a crisis of language and representation." In

other words, the quandary for the inheritors of the 20th century and witnesses to the 21st concerns impact and reference. As such, violence in this period of high modernity marks the continued attempt to understand or come to terms with falling, which as Cathy Caruth's work on Paul de Man reveals regarding this problem, bears witness to both the force of theory and its relationship to events.

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth reads de Man for his insights into the questions post-structuralism and deconstruction raise regarding reference or the relationship between language and the world. Post-structuralism's attention to the devices operating to supply meaning in the association between words and deconstruction's concern for the role such devices have for the intelligibility of texts, seem to prompt the assertion that "language cannot adequately refer to the world and indeed may not truly refer to anything at all, leaving literature and language, and even consciousness in general, cut off from historical reality" (74). In Caruth's reading, de Man preserves history through an entanglement of falling as both a figure for theory and as a literal event. In doing so, de Man recuperates reference by building an approach that embeds "the impact of an event" into language (74).

Caruth's interpretation of de Man's essay, "The Resistance to Theory" implicates a literal fall as crucial for emergent problems of reference within the history of ideas (de Man 3-20). Such a problem emerges in the 17th century as Newton's theory of gravity was rendered into a mathematical formula that language, through forms of linguistic science (i.e. logic), attempted to duplicate. Yet language consistently failed in its attempts to refer directly to motion--gravity--and specifically a fall. What this crisis revealed was the need for language to refer to a world where bodies were falling toward each other.

For Caruth then, de Man's association between the problems of reference with developments in the philosophy of history issued a project: "how to refer to falling" (76).

As Bammer illustrates, violence creates a context as well as the conditions for considering impact, or in Caruth's terms, the status of a fall. That is to say, Bammer's insights reveal that violence re-states the problem of impact in this contemporary era as an inability to refer to the enormity of its effects through language and representation. To what extent does such an event implicate culture in its semiotics? What role do sports play in addressing violence within the current milieu in relationship to impact?

Perhaps boxing is the most obvious sport in which to take up these questions. According to Gerald Early, boxing is "a remarkable metaphor for the philosophical and social condition of men (and, sometimes, women) in modern mass society (xiv). The metaphor involves the prizefighter acting out male aggression as well as "the individual in mass society: marginalized, alone, and consumed by the very demands and acts of his consumption" (xiv). As metaphor, boxing exceeds the simple brutality that its spectacle suggests. In fact, boxing expands the way that violence may be understood. As Joyce Carol Oates notes in her influential book *On Boxing*, even the American Medical Association acknowledges that boxing is "less dangerous than speedway racing, Thoroughbred racing, downhill skiing, professional football, et al." (Oates 187). The violence that appears most compelling in boxing occurs in the realm Oates identifies as "the cruel." As she writes, "[boxing] is not, contrary to common supposition, the most dangerous sport […] but it is the most spectacularly and pointedly cruel sport, its intention being to stun one's opponent's brain; to affect the orgasmic communal 'knockout' that is the culminating point of the rising action of the ideal fight" (188). In addition to the physical cruelty, Oates also indicates the ways that the "cruel" serves as

the domain in which the socio-political emerges. It becomes the context for the emergence of racism, sexism, and classism. As Oates observes, "Boxing is only possible if there is an endless supply of young men hungry to leave their impoverished ghetto neighborhoods, more than willing to substitute the putative dangers of the ring for the more evident, possibly daily, dangers of the street; yet it is rarely advanced as a means of eradicating boxing, that poverty itself be abolished; that it is the social conditions feeding boxing that are obscene" (188). "Cruelty" as a marker of socio-political violence is not limited to boxing; instead, here is where pervasive sporting violence appears most evident.

In reflecting on the history of black athletic participation in American culture, scholar Michael Eric Dyson has described it as a rather recent phenomenon due to socio-political forces marking sporting cruelty:

> The prohibition of athletic activity by black men in mainstream society severely limited publicly acceptable forms of displaying black physical prowess, an issue that had been politicized during slavery and whose legacy extended into the middle of the twentieth century. Hence, the potentially superior physical prowess of black men, validated for many by the long tradition of slave labor that built American society, helped reinforce racist arguments about the racial regimentation of social space and the denigration of the black body as an inappropriate presence in traditions of American sport. (261)

Charles Dana's editorial remark as the editor of the *New York Sun* in 1895 enhances the concerns that Dyson indicates as Dana's remakes associated black physical prowess with claims of white supremacy. Dana wrote:

> [w]e are in the midst of a growing menace. The black man is rapidly forging to the front ranks in athletics especially in the field of fisticuffs. We are in the midst of a black rise against white supremacy. (Rhoden 1)

The maintenance of white supremacy in sports would mean that racism informed how athletic contests between black and white athletes were structured. In boxing, this meant that black heavyweights would not earn a chance to fight for the championship because white heavyweights would not box them. For boxers in lighter weight classes who could fight for the title, the need to defend white supremacy meant that white fighters could use illegal tactics to defeat black opponents as referees looked away. Thus, for a majority of black boxers, the United States did not provide opportunities for them to earn a decent living.

In sports where a premium was not only placed on physical prowess but mental agility, Dyson also points out that in a racial economy where white supremacy was to be maintained, black physical achievement was also wedded to intelligence. As he notes:

> Coupled with this fear of superior black physical prowess was the notion that inferior black intelligence limited the ability of blacks to perform excellently in those sports activities that required mental concentration and agility. These two forces—the presumed lack of sophisticated black cognitive skills and the fear of superior black physical prowess—restricted black sports participation to thriving but financially handicapped subcultures of black athletic activity. (261)

These "subcultures" that Dyson refers to are the black professional sports leagues that arose in America during the 1920s, which is often called the "golden decade of sports" because it was the era of some of the greatest sporting icons in the nation's major sports.

Thus, this would be the period of baseball's Babe Ruth, boxing's Jack Dempsey, and football's Harold "Red" Grange. As black athletes were generally excluded from competing with whites in these sports at the highest ranks, they competed against one another. The 1920s was an important era for these "subcultures" because during this time, professional black organizations became viable. These leagues were particularly important for black people who had been humiliated by segregation.

Black athletes who endured the humiliation of segregation reflect on that experience in deeply moving ways. The stories of athletes like baseball legend Jackie Robinson, basketball great Oscar Robinson, and tennis icon Arthur Ashe reflect the painful recognition of being fully aware of being lowly regarded even in situations where they were needed for success. Robinson's life on the road while playing in the Negro Leagues did not differ much from his experience in the Major Leagues. As a black player in both leagues, he was subject to Jim Crow accommodations. In recounting the typical experience of Robinson and other black players who played with the Dodgers Arnold Rampersad writes that in Florida, where the team trained, black players continued to:

> stay at the 'colored' Lord Calvert Hotel while the white Dodgers enjoyed air-conditioned, beachfront accommodations. In addition, Harold Parrott, the genial traveling secretary for years under Rickey, was gone; Lee Scott, his replacement, seemed less concerned with the griping of Negro players—as did O'Malley and Bavasi, compared with Rickey. On the road, the black players often had to search for a decent place to eat; once, they were reduced to buying a loaf of bread and slices of cold meat at a shop and eating in the streets. This was after white taxi drivers refused to pick them up and they were forced to lug their bags through

> the streets to a local black 'hotel.''It was a dump,' a player recalled. 'I wouldn't have kept a dog there.' (266)

Coming to see one's self in light of this poor treatment resulted in a painful recognition. Playing well despite this recognition is a testament to the focus of these athletes as well as it served as an act of defiance to such degraded casting.

The success of black athletes in professional sports and the passage of Civil Rights legislation created an opportunity for unprecedented economic opportunity for blacks in sports. As Dyson observes of the legacy of the racism and sports:

> the physical prowess of the black body would be acknowledged and exploited as a supremely fertile zone of profit as mainstream athletic society literally cashed in on the symbolic danger of black sports excellence. (261)

The opportunity for economic advancement oftentimes obscured the racism continuing to operate as "the cruelty" of sports.

Michael Sokolove's book *The Ticket Out: Darryl Strawberry & the Boys of Crenshaw* as well as Steve James's highly acclaimed documentary *Hoop Dreams* highlight "the cruelty" of sports as it operates through a narrative of redemption that many black inner-city youth take as a promise of a life filled with riches. As Dyson explains:

> black sport activity often acquired a heroic dimension, as viewed in the careers of figures such as Joe Louis, Jackie Robinson, Althea Gibson, Wilma Rudolph, Muhammad Ali, and Arthur Ashe. Black sports heroes transcended the narrow boundaries of specific sports activities and garnered importance as icons of cultural excellence, symbolic figures who embodied social possibilities of success denied to other people of

> color. But they also captured and catalyzed the black cultural fetishization of sport as a means of expressing black cultural style, as a means of valorizing craft as a marker of racial and self-expression, and as a means of pursing social and economic mobility. (261)

Sokolove underscores the limitations of the pursuit of social and economic mobility through sports, particularly baseball, and does so while highlighting "the cruel" as a prominent feature of these limitations. As Sokolove exquisitely lays out in his book, the proximity to which their extraordinary talent appeared to position black boys to their dreams marked the presence of "the cruel" in sports. Many of these high school aged boys personally knew professional athletes and thus moved beyond life in cramped homes and streets riddled with gang violence because of the talent they possessed. The neighborhoods where they lived in South Central Los Angeles segregated them from more highly educated people who might have offered alternative career and lifestyle options. Instead of seeing black doctors, lawyers, professors, and bankers Sokolove suggests that athletes were the most highly visible models for crafting a way out of poverty. The statistics, however, are not in favor of the choice to concentrate on sports over other alternatives. As Sokolove writes in the book, in 1979 when Darryl Strawberry, Chris Brown, Cordie Dillard, and Nelson Whiting were among the most talented group of high school baseball players in the nation (the team itself was so talented that even back-up players were drafted by major and minor league baseball teams), about "500,000 boys played high school baseball. More than 5 million under the age of eighteen played on an organized team" (30). According to Sokolove "[a]bout 1,000 men played big-league baseball, and each year only a small percentage of those slots turned over" (30).

Failing to stress better alternatives for pursuing a life out of poverty amounts to being an aspect of "the cruel" operating in sports.

Sokolove's work also stresses the "immediacy" of realizing dreams of baseball glory as another attraction of sports that counts as another marker of its cruelty. Sports have the potential to instantly deliver a gifted athlete from rags to riches while attending college does not. For those living in poverty, enduring gang violence, and suffering over the absences they find in their lives the capacity for deliverance that sports offer makes the gamble well worth the investment. The unlikelihood of this gamble paying off, however, is masked by the fierce media attention and routine recruiting of scouts appearing to take interest and oftentimes offering incentives to these players. The obscuring of this reality further contributes to "the cruel" of sports.

As young black men are playing baseball in fewer numbers than basketball, it has become the site for the fulfillment of dreams. Historian Robin D. G. Kelley stresses that all inner-city black boys who play basketball do not believe that they will become professional players and escape the ghetto, while at the same time Kelley argues that many of these young men are critically aware of their limited career options. Thus, Kelley asserts that "black working-class men and their families see themselves as having fewer career options than whites, so sports have been more of an imagined possibility than becoming a highly educated professional—'it was the career option rather than a career option,' writes Michael Messner" (*Disfunktional* 54).

The story of "the cruel" in sports is generally a story about boys and men. This does not mean that girls and women have not been affected by it. Instead, as Kelley's work suggests, the exclusion of women from profitable play is one of the more obvious ways that "the cruel" operates for girls and women interested in sports (*Disfunktional* 55).

The history of sexism operating in women's amateur and professional tennis sets in relief the general outlines of how "the cruel" has functioned in the lives of girls and women.

Sexism as "the cruel" of Tennis

1968 was a watershed year in American history. That year saw South Vietnamese Communist forces ambush U.S. troops, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, and the youth protest of U.S. involvement in Vietnam during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil assert that 1968 was a turning point in women's history because women who had participated in the activism of the time were energized by their involvement yet "frustrated by their exclusion from its leadership" (629). As a result, DuBois and Dumenil contend that "women began to insist that equality and liberation should characterize the relations between the sexes, as well as among races and nations" (629). A second wave of feminism emerged from this exhilaration and frustration. Feminists challenged inequality within "the protest movements of black power, Chicanismo, and the New Left, women's liberation soon challenged the condition of women in the larger society" (269).

The founding of the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) offers an example of the impact of second wave feminist activism on sports. Billie Jean King became the most visible and vocal women's player of this era and was greatly influenced by feminist politics. In 1960, Billie Jean King entered the U.S. women's rankings at number four. By 1961, she gained international recognition when as an unseeded player, she and her doubles partner, Karen Hantze, won Wimbledon, the sport's most prestigious tournament. King won her first Wimbledon single's title in 1966 and maintained this streak through 1968, the start of the Open era. Before 1968, tennis players held amateur

status much like Olympic competitors and were forbidden by rule to earn money from their performance in the sport. By 1968, amateur players and professional players could legitimately compete against one another for major championships and earn honest prize money. Professional status was not an apt description of all players competing in major tournaments in 1968 because the designation was not fully approved by all governing bodies; instead, they were categorized into four classifications: 1.) Amateurs, 2.) Teaching professionals, 3.) Contract professionals, 4.) Registered players (Collins 214). For this reason, Arthur Ashe had to maintain his amateur status when he competed in the U.S. Open at Forest Hills so as to maintain his Davis Cup eligibility. When Ashe won the inaugural U.S. Open tournament, he received $20 per day in expenses while the runner-up, Tom Okker, who registered as a professional was awarded $14,000 (Collins 214-215).

Tennis players were often paid under the table during the years proceeding the Open era leading to this era being known as the "shamateur" period. Tournament promoters and sponsors profited despite the small sums offered to players under-the-table, leading many players to believe that they were being exploited (King 114). Even as the Open era emerged, women players would be further affronted since honest payments did not result in equal payments for men and women. Feminist politics greatly informed the emergence of the women's tour, but as King explains, women's tennis players did not imagine that their fight would serve as a corrective to sexism in the broader culture; thus, the women's tour had localized goals. King writes:

> We were fighting for our own cause, for fairness, recognition, and the right to control our destinies, not some greater principle of women's rights within society. Nor were we actually fighting for strict equality in tennis; those who said we did were not listening. When we were

> demanding $18,000 in prize money for a field of thirty-two women, the men were asking for $50,000--plus expenses. Only at Grand Slam tournaments like the U.S. Open, where men and women still competed together, did we demand equal pay. Eventually, we won on virtually all counts. (120)

The entertainment value and celebrity personas that women's tennis offered contributed to their success as professional athletes.

Patriarchal thinking posed the greatest initial challenge to women's tennis and their pursuit of equal prize money. Male players and the sport's governing bodies justified the difference in prize money because they believed that they could beat the women, that they played more sets than the women, and the men believed that the crowds came to see them play and not the women (King 120-121). Women players and their advocates countered by emphasizing their entertainment value. As tennis critic Bud Collins asserted, the length of play did not equate to it being more enjoyable (King 120). Further stressing their role as entertainers, women asserted that a middleweight fighter could not beat a heavyweight but that did not make the middleweights any less entertaining to watch (King 120). Initially though, the men did not budge. According to King, two critical events led to women challenging their unequal treatment. The first occurred when Jack Kramer offered the winner of the men's Pacific Southwest tournament $12,500 and the winner of the women's tournament $1,500. While some women wanted to boycott the event, others did not like the idea of rebellion since they did not consider themselves feminists and thought a boycott too risky. Gladys Heldman offered a competing solution. She created a tournament in Houston during the same week as the Pacific Southwest tournament that could offer $5000 to eight women who

did not want to play in Kramer's tournament (King 123). The other moment occurred during the U.S. Open when Ceci Martinez created a questionnaire designed to gauge spectators' desire to watch women's tennis. Martinez and her doubles partner, Esme Emanuel, distributed the questionnaire to approximately two percent of those in attendance and so could report these results: "One-third of the men and one-half of the women liked watching men's and women's tennis equally well; one-third of the men and one-half of the women thought prize money allocations should be equal, and more than one-half and two-thirds of the women said they would pay to watch a tournament with only women players" (124). While those numbers may appear dismal in the context of our own times, in the 1970s these numbers were promising.

Promotions improved for women after Heldman negotiated a sponsorship with Phillip Morris that began with her friend Joe Cullman who was a tennis enthusiast and had been instrumental in bringing sponsorship money to men's tennis. Cullman easily convinced Phillip Morris to sponsor Heldman's Houston tour. Phillip Morris then used the women's tournament to promote the new cigarettes, Virginia Slims, designed for women. Thus, the Houston tournament was renamed the Virginia Slim's tournament.

As racism and classism are exposed as the socio-political violence of men's sports, then sexism is "the cruel" that women's sports illuminates. Racist allegiance to maintaining white supremacy facilitated the erection of the color line in professional sports and racist views concerning the body and intelligence helped to keep that line firmly in place through the first half of the twentieth century. The "permanent unemployment" that Kelley observes working class black boys and men observe fuel their ambitions to enter the ranks of professional sports (55). As Oates's ideas concerning "the cruel" suggests, failing to eliminate the conditions that drive poor boys

and men of color into the violence of the sporting world is problematically ignored, oftentimes by those who decry violence in sports. Sexism as an aspect of "the cruel" enables a view into the boundaries that have been erected to exclude women from earning a living as professional athletes.

Women's sports advocates and athletes alike have responded to attempts to restrict their demonstrations of strength and competence in the athletic arena in numerous ways. As women's sports advocate and author Mariah Burton Nelson notes, "while playing sports, women use their bodies to do as they please, if in that process female bodies look unladylike—if they become bruised or bloody or simply unattractive—that seems irrelevant. Women own their bodies" (xi). Women's self-determination to use their bodies according to their own dictates speaks directly to what Kelley argues sexism denies. He writes:

> Practically all scholars agree that young women and girls have had even fewer opportunities to engage in either work or play. They have less access to public spaces, are often responsible for attending to household duties, and are policed by family members, authorities, and boys themselves from the 'dangers' of the streets. Aside from the gender division of labor that frees many boys and men from child care responsibilities and housecleaning, the fear of violence and teen pregnancy has led parents to cloister girls even more. Thus, when they do spend much of their play time in the public spaces of the city, parent-imposed curfews and other pressures limit their time outside the household. (54)

The Women's Sports Foundation confirms Nelson's notion that playing sports benefits girls. A reduction in the number of unwanted pregnancies for high school girls who play sports, higher levels of self esteem for girls who play, improved body image for girls who play sports are some of the benefits that the Women's Sports Foundation proffers. The benefits of athleticism and play however, do not eliminate the challenges of sexism. Scholar Mary Jo Festle argues that the demand that women athletes exhibit traditional feminine behavior continued beyond the desegregation of sports, particularly tennis, in the 1950s. Festle contends that during the 1960s and 1970s, women athletes began to challenge "apologetic behavior," or the ploy to appear "modest, feminine, and 'nice,'" that prevent them from fully embracing their athletic identity and skills because they would be stigmatized as unfeminine (read: lesbian) (151). Tennis players like Billie Jean King rebelled against established conventions that sanctioned lower purses for women players involved in tournament play. As discussed earlier, they deconstructed the dichotomy between men and women that justified men earning more money than women because they were different and thus better than the women. Women argued that they were all entertainers and thus entitled to the same money based on their entertainment value. Even with such contestation, Festle posits that the women tennis players during this period belonged to a "transitional generation" that still "had one foot in the old world where female athletes needed to be apologetic, and the other foot in a modern setting where women influenced by the feminist movement thought they should be treated better" (143).

Festle argues that in the 1980s, women tennis players moved into a second stage of professionalism. Some historians have asserted that women athletes were calculated in their deployment of the "apologetic" because of their interests in marketing themselves

to corporate sponsors. Thus, athletes like Martina Navratilova, utilized a particular style of dress and demonstrations of modesty and friendliness (the "apologetic") in order to "soften" their appearance so that they seemed more feminine and thus less threatening to those sponsors who were leery of using female athletes whose muscular bodies marked them as masculine and thus homosexual. Although Festle does contend that women tennis players during this era were less anxious about "closeting" their sexuality if they were not heterosexual, the attempts to distance one's self from the culturally perceived markers of a lesbian identity by emphasizing a "caring a nurturing nature," as well as adopting a "glamour" aesthetic, demonstrates the continuation of the policing of women's sexuality in the sport (142-164).

Festle's investigation of the "apologetic" enriches an understanding of the ways that "the cruel" has inhibited women's access to an authentic and fully liberated self-expression in sports, particularly in tennis. One limitation of Festle's otherwise insightful discussion of the "apologetic" in women's tennis history is that it fails to thoroughly investigate cultural scripts available to white women that enable them to enact "apologetic" behavior as a strategy as well as the fundamental dichotomies embedded in deploying this strategy in the promotion of their own interests. To state the matter differently, she does not interrogate the ways that modesty, chastity, femininity, and beauty operate as cultural norms available to white women because black women were presumably the complete antithesis of these virtues. In part, Festle's oversight may be due to how she sets up the terms for discussing women athletes as an oppressed group due to the limitations of gendered thinking. For instance, speaking of the rejection that women athletes experience when they demonstrate masculine characteristics through sports, Festle writes:

> The rejection (or fear of it) that these women endure is shared by many sportswomen, as well as by members of most marginalized groups. So long deprived of cultural acceptance and positive publicity, they worry considerably about the image being presented of anyone from the same group. (xxi)

In this account, sportswomen are initially regarded as representatives of the dominant racial group. Instead of considering the possibility that sportswomen are already members of racially marginalized groups, Festle simplifies the identity of sportswomen so that they are simultaneously oppositional to marginal groups but proportionally rejected and excluded. Thus, in Festle's account all of the sportswomen are white and they are set in relation to some Other. What happens when some sportswomen are white and some sportswomen are black?

The unexamined racial assumptions operating in Festle's argument reveal useful insights into the ways that white sportswomen may unfortunately conspire with the continued oppression of black women athletes and thus the maintenance of "the cruel" in sports. According to Frigga Haug, "[women] are not simply stamped with the imprint of their given social relations, but […] acquiesce in them and unconsciously participate in their formation" (25). In light of such participation on the part of women, Barbara Trepagnier posits that the "complicity of white women in terms of their body-identified identities, unconscious or otherwise, results in real effects, both material and psychological, upon the lives of black women" (200). Thus, one of the outcomes of deploying the "apologetic," without regard for the ramifications of this strategy upon racially marginalized sportswomen, is a re-inscription of cultural norms that demonize black women.

One reason why the Williams sisters are significant cultural figures is because they highlight the way that race informs the "apologetic" and simultaneously exposing how it conspires with "the cruel." Prior to the Venus and Serena's emergence as tennis stars, Zina Garrison was the most successful African American female player since Althea Gibson. Though Garrison never reached the same level of success that the Williams sisters attained, in wrestling with the figure of Chris Evert as the paradigmatic tennis lady, Garrison provides a meaningful context for assessing the "apologetic" and "the cruel" as raced enactments. In her memoir, Garrison plainly states that she admired Evert and wanted to mimic her and thus inspire the cultural admiration Evert inspired. Lacking a racial analysis, Garrison fails to offer a critique of the model Evert offers as Billie Jean King does with respect to sexuality. King held Evert accountable for promoting heteronormative ideas while simultaneously maintaining that she rejected divisive ideology towards other women players. In repeatedly confronting Evert, King attempted to disrupt the force of the "apologetic" to pass as a culturally innocent performance. She held Evert accountable for her role in using the "apologetic" to advance her own image at the cost of lesbian players who could be denied the performance. Neither King nor Garrison challenged Evert on lacking a racial analysis in her deployment of the "apologetic."

Race continues to be absent in discussions of Evert and the current generation of tennis stars. Martina Hingis, who Evert herself dubbed as heir to her former throne, has dismissed the notion that race matters at all in tennis (Giardina 212). As Giardina observes about this coupling:

> Being mapped onto Evert […] opens the door for Hingis to begin to be established in the mainstream of contemporary (American) sporting

> subculture. With Evert operating as an archetype that works to define the organization of Hingis as an emergent celebrity, Hingis becomes linked to ideas of femininity, grace, and success. Most importantly, though, is that she becomes linked to Evert in terms of an affective representation of traditional American values (read: heronormative). (212)

In addition to the heteronormative link that Giardina underscores between Evert and Hingis, Hingis's explicit remarks concerning racism draws attention to "femininity" and "grace," in particular, as aspects of the "apologetic" that obscures race. Linking Hingis to Evert raises the specter of race as an aspect of the "apologetic" behavior she deployed. In speaking about racism and the Williams sister, Hingis was quoted as saying:

> I definitely don't feel there is racism on the tour. I mean, it's a very international sport. Maybe (by being) black, they have a lot of other advantages because they can always say it's racism or something like that, and it's not the case at all. ("Sisters Use Race")

In Hingis's view, blackness is an asset because it allows black people to make accusations of racism. Like the phrase "playing the race card," Hingis's position suggests that racism is like a powerful card that black people have been dealt to play to their advantage. In the specific case of the Williams sisters, such a claim ignores the ways that racist and sexist myths operate against them.

Violence, Tennis, and the Williams Sisters

Although black males are the usual figures in the stereotype of black who commit violent crimes, in the case of tennis, the Williams sisters are the perpetrators; yet, the only time either Venus or Serena was involved on the court in anything resembling

violence—understood here as direct physical confrontation involving another person—would be the occurrence in tennis that became known as "The Bump Heard 'Round the World."

As Venus explains, she did not receive a warm welcome when at seventeen and ranked sixty-sixth in the world she played in her first U.S. Open tournament. Venus advanced to the semi-finals to play twenty-three-year-old Romanian player, Irina Spirlea, who was then ranked number seven in the world. In a section of the book Venus co-wrote with Serena, *Venus & Serena: Serving from the Hip*, Venus describes the unfortunate occurrence that fueled a media circus:

> The match was a tough one, and partway through we reached a point where we were to change ends of the court. Most of the time on a changeover, both players walk toward the side of the court that the umpire sits on, pass by each other, and head to their benches. But this time things didn't go quite that way. As Irina and I neared the net to cross over, the thought flashed through my mind that if one us didn't step aside, we might run into each other. In that split second it dawned on me to engage in a little gamesmanship. I might be younger and new to the tour, I thought, but I'm going to let her know that her trash talking and mean attitude don't intimidate me. As we neared the net, I said to myself, "I'm not moving." Well, she must have said the same thing inside her head, because the next thing I knew we were bumping into each other! I had assumed that she would step aside, and she probably thought I would too. Sometimes you get caught up in your emotions and can't foresee the possible consequences of your actions. (32-33)

As Venus goes on to explain, she sat down and immediately began reading her notes after the incident but the camera showed Sprilea smirking and gesturing to her coach and friends in the stands. Venus writes that she attempted to minimize the episode when she was asked about it because as she sees it, her job is to "stay out of the headlines—unless they're about winning tennis matches," but Spirlea saw this moment differently (33). Spirlea's comments to the media suggested that she was quite offended by Venus's arrogance. Richard Williams also added to the media commentary, though Venus does not write about this in her book, when he blatantly racialized the occurrence when he called Spirlea a "big white turkey" (Schimel 36).

Instances of such contact and public displays of overt impropriety are atypical in women's tennis. On the court, players typically mask the cruelty that gets played out off of it. In this case, the "body fictions" operating through the presence of Venus and Serena Williams facilitate the poor public behavior of their competitors. As Deborah Walker King explains, "body fictions" are imposed via "television, magazines, cultural mandates and myths" (viii) that accompany actual subjects but bear more authority than the subjects themselves within the culture. King argues that the presumed veracity of the "body double" undermines political alliances. She writes:

> Society's unquestioning reliance upon stereotyped constructions of 'the' body as a vehicle for recognizing and knowing the other quietly undermines self-determination, while dominant systems of masculine privilege and cultural commodification alienate and silence individual agency with a roar. The negating force of body fictions is even more destructive to women's alliance building and women's lives than masculine privilege…As long as body fictions and the factional

> relationships they ensure function as the molding rules of bonding and trust among women, the sometimes vicious (and always profitless) female infighting of the past will continue to offer itself as an invisible pillar of masculine privilege in the future.(ix)

Though "body fictions" are constructions, their impact is expressed with actual cultural force. Not only do they impair our relationships but they can also be lethal. King calls the force of constant and overwhelming preponderance of "body fictions" on the psyche and spirit a "conceptual violation" and explains its lethal force through the story of a college professor. King writes:

> In 1996, an assistant English professor at a California university sat down in her home office, wrote a letter revealing the conceptual violence she felt she had suffered while seeking tenure, and then committed suicide. Having grown depressed and alienated beneath the strain of body fictions and racial prejudices, she laid down her battle gear and left us. Her loss is our loss; her defeat, our defeat. (x)

The horrors of a "conceptual violation" as a lethal force, as King contends, certainly have communal implications.

The "body fictions" operating in the case of the Williams sisters are set in relief by the differences between their public construction and that of Tiger Woods. Woods often serves as a marker of multiculturalism and transnational identity; Venus and Serena Williams represent blackness. According to Henry Yu, Woods' ancestry and family biography distinguishes him as a non-threatening Black man. He writes:

> Tiger Woods combined a number of standard ways in which African American men are perceived as safe and nonthreatening [sic]. His Green

> Beret father, like Colin Powell, was a war hero, embodying the safe black man who sacrifices himself for the nation. Tiger's father correctly channeled the violent masculinity that popular imagery ascribes to African American males, forsaking the alleged criminality (drug dealing, drive-by shooting, gang-banging) that is the negative twin of the figure of the black war hero. Better yet, Tiger's father directed the dangerous, sexual desirability of his black masculinity not toward white women, but toward the safe option of a foreign, Asian war bride. Tiger himself, as the son of a black veteran who applied military discipline to create a black male sports hero, served to connect the appeal of the safe black male body as sports star to as a lineage of the black male as military hero. (226)

According to Yu, even more than Woods symbolizing the possibilities for Black masculinity, he "was seen to transcend racial division within his own body" (226). The Williams sisters do not represent any such transcendence. Rather than transcending race, the Williams sisters are consistently understood through their raced bodies, which are in turn associated with an over-determined reading of them and their bodies as marking the flagrantly scandalous flesh of Compton blacks. The "drug dealing, drive-by shooting [and] gang-banging" marking the "alleged criminality" of "violent masculinity," greatly informs any reading of Venus and Serena Williams.

Venus and Serena Williams do not view themselves as anarchic women; instead, an anarchic identity emerges through reading their bodies. The "body fictions" of race and gender in particular, act as conduits for the expression of a shadow narrative that

garbles any authentic expression Venus and Serena Williams seek to convey or how their family deploys various aspects of the American Dream.[24]

The Williams Sisters: Race, Place, and the American Dream

As the theory of race as a social construction asserts, race refers to subjects who are made, not born. The making of black racial subjectivity has been a topic routinely included in the life stories of black men and women. Important also in the making of racial along with gender subjectivity is the way such identity gets linked to place. From writer Ralph Ellison's autobiographical reflections in the "Ethics of Living Jim Crow," to Muhammad Ali's stories of life in Louisville, Kentucky, race and place were certainly intertwined. Arthur Ashe is perhaps the one African American tennis professional who deeply reflects on becoming a black southern tennis player, Venus and Serena Williams mark a certain shift in this narrative.

The Williams family patriarch, Richard Williams, sits at the center of the narrative of Venus and Serena's astonishing athletic success as well as the tension between the myth and history of Compton in the sisters' rise to fame. According to legend, Williams got the idea to raise tennis stars upon watching Virginia Ruzici claim $30,000 in prize money for a single tournament victory. Thinking the sport offered women a good, lucrative life he set out to learn the game through books and instructional videos so that he could coach his daughters to success. Yetunde, Isha, and Lyndrea would all receive

[24] The Williams family used the broad outline of the American Dream of earning success and untold fortunes through hard work and sacrifice to frame their rise to prominence; yet, the details of their flourishing include a father who tells the story of stealing his wife's birth control pills in order to ensure her pregnancy and thus the production of two future tennis millionaires; dodging gang fire on the tennis courts of Compton and paying people to hurl racial invectives at the sisters in order to prepare them for the racism they would face in the mostly White tennis world. See for example: Dave Caulkin/AP, "Venus Williams Wins Wimbledon 2000 Tennis Championship," *Jet*, 24 July 2000, 10; Sally Jenkins, "Double Trouble," *Women's Sports and Fitness*, November-December, 1998; Peter Noel, "Fear of the Williams Sisters: Battleing the Myth of the Black Super-Athlete," *Village Voice* Vol XLV No. 45, 14 November 2000; S.L. Price, "Who's Your Daddy?," *Sports Illustrated*, 31 May 1999; S.L. Price, "Father Knew Best," *Sports Illustrated*, 20 September 1999; S.L. Price, "For the Ages," *Sports Illustrated*, 17 July 2000; S.L. Price, "Sportswoman of The Year," *Sports Illustrated for Women*, November and December 2000.

tennis instruction but Venus was the first of Richard and Oracene's daughters to exhibit extraordinary facility. Serena soon followed Venus in showing tennis mastery.

Though many tennis notables learned the game on public courts--Chris Evert, Arthur Ashe, and Zina Garrison among them--the Williams sisters rise from municipal courts became legendary because of the specter of violence that characterized the Compton neighborhood where they practiced. As historian Josh Sides argues so thoroughly, by the 1980s, Compton had become "a metonym for the urban crisis" (583). By the 1980s, Compton, the once working class suburb, saw the beginning of its decline in the aftermath of the Watts riots. Sides asserts that white flight from Compton occasioned by the riots meant the loss of retail businesses that provided an important tax base for the district. Concurrently, the riots occasioned the departure of manufacturing companies that once provided the blue-collar work that enabled African Americans in Compton to live an aspect of the American dream. The economic changes taking place in Compton, however, were typical of those occurring in suburbs in other parts of the country, including: Hoboken, New Jersey; Highland Park, Michigan; Chester, Pennsylvania; East St. Louis, Illinois; Camden, New Jersey; and Alton, Illinois (594). Convincingly, Sides contends that Compton changed from "place name to metonym" for two reasons. First, the election of the city's first black mayor drew national attention that focused on the troubles plaguing the city as unique rather than typical. Second, Sides argues that Compton's proximity to the film and music industries further distinguished Compton as a matchless center of crime and vice. Sides cites NWA's (Niggas With Attitude) 1988 album *Straight Outta Compton* and John Singleton's 1991 Academy Award nominated film *Boys in the 'Hood* along with the Hughes Brothers' 1993 film *Menace II Society* as crucial for provoking the metonymic turn.

Straight Outta Compton depicted Compton, in Sides's words, as "an infinitely bleak social landscape, where 'ruthless' gangsters got high, stole cars, 'blasted' other gangsters, 'slaughtered' police officers, and tricked 'bitches' into having sex with them" (596). Though originally promoted as autobiographical, some members of NWA later admitted that *Straight Outta Compton* promoted images inconsistent with their actual lived experiences. As Sides notes of two of the group's most famous members, Easy-E (Eric Wright) was the "product of a lower-middle-class home, the son of a U.S. postal worker; Ice Cube (O'Shea Jackson)[…] had to be lured back from Arizona—where he had gone to take advanced architecture courses—to record the album" (597). However manufactured, the Compton that NWA promoted carefully selected some of the worse elements of this area to contest the geographical supremacy of East Coast rappers. Sides contends that NWA's vision of Compton seduced filmmakers like Singleton and the Hughes Brothers who chose it over the historical city in staging their films. A similar seduction captured Richard Williams and the press who wholly consumed the narrative he spun.

Richard Williams drew on NWA's vision of Compton to describe his daughter's incredible ascent through the tennis ranks. Williams repeatedly told reporters of how his daughters' dodged gunfire as they practiced on courts littered with glass and debris. He also described making a deal with local gang members for their protection during the time his daughters played. As Nancy Spencer points out, the emphasis placed on Venus and Serena's rise from Compton overstates the extent to which they were underprivileged children. By the time Venus was 15 years old, she had signed a deal with Reebok for an undisclosed sum. The contract must have been quite lucrative, however, because it enabled the family to move to an affluent West Palm Beach resort. The family

had two tennis courts installed in their backyard. Despite these early advantages, emphasizing Compton made Richard Williams's description of his daughters as "ghetto Cinderellas" more plausible. It also transformed the story of their ascent from history into myth.

Journalists and tennis enthusiasts, nonetheless, accepted the myth of the Williams sisters as underprivileged as many had accepted the myth of Compton's status as a unique center of depravity. The acceptance of this story, in part, may be attributable to the fact that as teens, neither Venus nor Serena challenged their father's story of their childhood in Compton. Others may have seen the photographs of a young Venus posed against a graffiti strewn wall, tennis racket overwhelming her small frame, and downcast, sad face as an image consistent with the difficulty of living in Compton. Still others might have taken the sisters on-court appearance, attitude with reporters and opponents, along with the stories they heard reported from players in the locker room as a sign of the menace that was Compton invading the country club.

According to scholar Jeffery Decker, the narrative of being self-made has been regarded as an expression of national identity. As he states, "[h]istorically, there has been a close fit between personal success and nation building" (xvii). Thus, Venus and Serena's mythic rise from "Compton" underscored the possibility of achieving a good life in America. Americans, then, could feel good about themselves because their country allowed residents of some of its bleakest communities to rise to fame and fortune. Arguably, the process of inventing the myth of the Williams sisters' ascent exemplifies the process of manufacturing sports celebrities in late capitalism. He posits that:

> those within the celebrity industry seek to manufacture celebrity identities that acknowledge, and seek to engage, the perceived sensibilities of the

> audience in question. As such, sport celebrities are crafted as contextually sensitive points of cultural negotiation, between those controlling the dominant modes and mechanism of cultural production, and their perceptions of the audience's practices of cultural reception. The celebrity is thus, at any given conjuncture, a potentially potent "representative subjectivity" (source of cultural identification) pertaining to the "collective configurations" (social class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, nationality" through which individuals fashion their very existence. (Andrews 70)

Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods serve as paradigmatic cases of sporting celebrity during historical moments of "evolution of the US racial formation" (70). What Andrews calls "evolution" however, does not acknowledge the stasis of cultural expectations that would require black male sporting heroes to be congenial rather than threatening. As a powerful voice in marketing Jordan and Woods, Nike helps push this narrative of both men. Reebok sought to improve its position in the market and so they pushed an alternative narrative through its endorsement of Venus Williams. Venus enabled Reebok to tap into a new market of hip hop youth for whom place mattered.

Indeed, the making of the Williams sisters is definitely a narrative of race, gender, and place identity. In their story, place represents a point from which to measure their ascent. In their story, "Compton," functions as a site that confirms the difficulty of their road and thus the absence of privilege. Theirs is a contemporary Horatio Alger story, but in this case, it shows the rise from poverty to prosperity of poor, urban, black girls. Unlike many of their athlete predecessors who offered social and political critiques of the constraining places in their narratives, neither Venus nor Serena, in general, offer this.

Early in their careers and at points later, it became more typical of them to perform the imagined subject position of the place they chose to represent. When they were children, their parents were most likely responsible for this decision. Visually, such decisions would include the Ken Levine photograph of a very young, forlorn looking Venus clutching a tennis-racket while leaning against a graffiti strewn wall meant to recall the inner-city distress of "Compton." In later years, the sisters have used their relationship to Compton variously. At times, they have talked about being from Compton in order to identify with audiences representing distressed communities. For example, in 2006, Venus Williams was attempting to offer encouragement to students at Vance High School in North Carolina by telling them to believe in themselves "because no one else will," which she said was her and Serena's motto. She was then met with a rousing cry when she linked this motto to the fact that she was "from Compton, the 'hood." As she explained, being from "the 'hood" meant that people told them they weren't going to make it. While these remarks appealed to her audience, Venus was less willing to concede her rise from "the 'hood" to Larry King.

Venus Williams was featured as a guest on *The Larry King Show* on July 16, 2008 after winning back-to-back Wimbledon singles titles. King asked Venus about her life in Compton to which she responded that however trying her experience was it was far better than those of her colleagues who learned the game in Eastern Europe. This has become a standard refrain for Venus when giving interviews to members of the mainstream media. With this response, she appears to be responding to the subtext of the question that assumes a limited range of experiences possible in the lives of residents in inner-city communities. As her own life shows, an inner-city as vastly depressed as Compton is alleged to be does not preclude the possibility of having loving families

within its boundaries. By their own accounts, Venus and Serena grew up in a home with two loving parents and three doting older sisters. Venus and Serena both performed well in school, they never fought or argued, and they tried to live according to the principles of their Jehovah's Witness faith. Thus, the implications of Venus's remarks echo Cornel West's distinction between a neighborhood and a 'hood. He writes:

> Young black people call their block a 'hood' now. I grew up in a neighborhood; it is a big difference. A neighborhood was a place not only for the nuclear family, but also included aunts and uncles, friends and neighbors, rabbis and priests, deacons and pastors, Little League coaches and dance teachers—all of whom served as a backdrop for socializing young people. This backdrop provided children with a sense of what it is to be human, with all its decency, integrity, and compassion. When those values are practiced, a neighborhood emerges. (126)

West further explains that patriarchy and homophobia were the most obvious menaces operating within the neighborhoods that typified his childhood experience and should be critiqued. At the same time, West contends that these scourges should not prohibit it from serving as a model for "the nonmarket values and nonmarket activity" that neighborhoods encouraged (126). In her remarks to Larry King then, Venus offers a reading of life in Compton that may serve as a corrective to the notion that life in the inner-city is solely a 'hood experience without the possibility of a neighborhood existing. She also corrects any notion of a dysfunctional black family and the inordinate stress encumbering it.

In the remarks exemplified by her statement to King, Venus offers an appraisal of life in the inner-city that is valuable because it offers a more complicated depiction of

how life there has come to be represented. When juxtaposing life in America's inner-cities with those in Eastern Europe, her remarks are optimistic—especially in light of what Hurricane Katrina exposed of poor, African Americans in one of the nation's most recognized cities. In fact, Venus's insensitivity to the plight of these residents was notorious. At a press conference following her swift defeat of Maria Kirilenko in the second round of the U.S. Open, Williams glibly told reporters that she "doesn't watch the news" when she was asked about the devastation that Hurricane Katrina was creating. She then complained that her flight was delayed from Florida to New York and she didn't understand why. As sportswriter Andrew Lawrence points out, these remarks were particularly troubling because Venus considers herself quite worldly. With so much talk about the global landscape then, the Williams sisters offer us a way of seeing the place of how the local comes to figure into this ostensibly borderless terrain.

The Williams Family, Constructed Dysfunction and Compton

Rather than Venus's optimism gaining ascendency, the more negative narrative of Compton prevailed. This more negative narrative adhered more tightly to representations of the Williams sisters in relationship to the American Dream. Sports commentators and journalists have routinely acknowledged the awesome talents of the Williams sisters and the uniqueness of having sisters emerge as world-class athletes. However impressed with their talents, the Williams family has also been held in an uncomfortable embrace. Some of this discomfort might have stemmed from the way that members of the Williams family presented themselves. Journalists, black and white, often commented on how unwelcome Venus and Serena Williams made them feel upon interviewing them. Reportedly, Venus and Serena would have private, whispered conversations with one another that made the interviewer feel like an outsider. After

matches, both Venus and Serena were described as glaring at reporters who asked what the sisters thought to be rude or inappropriate questions. Richard Williams seemed to tell stories that reporters thought implausible. Take for instance the story of Venus and Serena Williams's conception. Richard has told reporters that he hid his wife's birth control pills because he wanted more children so that he could realize his vision of having daughters who would play tennis. Such stories tended to leave reporters baffled. As some write, they weren't sure if Richard Williams was a mad man or a genius.

At the Ericsson Open held in Indian Wells, California, in March 2001, the Williams family moved beyond complains about Venus and Serena's demeanor when their family became the subject of direct accusations regarding their competitive honesty. After beating Russia's Elena Dementieva to advance to the semifinals, Venus had positioned herself to face her sister, Serena. At a post-match press conference, Dementieva responded to a question about the semifinal match between Serena and Venus by stating that Richard Williams would determine the winner. Then, shortly before her semifinal match was scheduled to begin, Venus withdrew citing knee tendinitis. Belgium player Kim Clijsters advanced to the final where she would play Serena, who received an automatic birth to the final round in light of Venus's withdrawing. When Venus and Richard Williams entered the arena to watch Serena in this final match, not only were they met with boos, but Richard Williams also claimed that racial taunts were hurled at them. According to him, white people in the crowd said, "Nigger, stay away from here. We don't want you here."At the time, Venus claimed to have "heard what he heard." Serena was also booed. The crowd was so opposed to her that when she lost the first set, the crowd gave a standing ovation. Despite the crowd's

behavior, which is exacerbated in tennis because of the typical politeness of the sport, Serena went on to defeat Clijsters in three sets.

The Indian Wells incident is important because it crystallized a belief that had been brewing in the tennis world since Venus defeated Serena during the semifinals at Wimbledon in 2000. Since the sisters' play had been so terrible and because Serena was perceived to be the stronger player after winning the U.S. Open title in 1999, speculation began that Richard Williams had determined the outcome of the match. Thus, in 2001, these charges resurfaced when Venus suddenly withdrew from her semifinal match-up against her sister at the Ericsson Open. In March 2001 the same month as the Ericsson, *The National Enquirer* published a cover story that listed Franklin Davis, Williams's live in nephew as well as Williams's lover Diane Tucker as sources confirming the allegations that Richard told Serena to lose to Venus in the 2000 semifinals at Wimbledon. Davis and Tucker reported that Richard told Serena to lose but could not confirm whether or not she followed his instructions. As someone commented in the article, Williams has been known to say outlandish things for "shock value." Money was the reported reason Richard Williams advocated match-fixing. According to Davis, Williams did not want Serena to get too far beyond Venus in the rankings and outpace her in earning endorsement money. And while *The National Enquirer* is a tabloid and not a reputable news source, they include such sources as *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the *Los Angeles Times* among the reputable sources raising these allegations. Along with these sources, the tabloid also references remarks that former professional tennis player John McEnroe made before the 2000 Wimbledon match began that initiated all of the public speculation concerning the Williams family and match-fixing.

Though thought to be a very arrogant, hot-headed player during his competitive days, John McEnroe was resentful of what he took to be the Williams sisters' arrogance. Writing for the *London Sunday Telegraph*, for example, McEnroe angrily declared that the Williams sisters "have no respect for anyone in the game." Corroborating Venus and Serena's opponents claims that their "twin-like bond" is "rude and exclusionary," McEnroe wrote, "would it kill them to say hello to people in the locker room." Richard Williams has generally been seen within tennis circles as the reason for the sisters' presumed haughtiness and arrogance. He is generally constructed as a cult like leader with his two daughters as his unwitting followers. S.L. Price's 1999 *Sports Illustrated* article "Who's your Daddy?" captured this impression in graphic text.

Price's article features Venus posed behind Serena, both with their hands on their hips, leaning to the side confronting an imagined onlooker with their gazes. Richard Williams, the subject of the article is missing from the photo, but his presence and relation to the girls is established by both words and colors on the opening page. The caption reads, "[c]all Richard Williams what you want—bizarre, deceitful, or perhaps mad—but be sure of one thing: He has brilliantly guided the careers and lives of his daughters Venus and Serena, the hottest players in tennis." Rather than underscore the "brilliance" of Richard Williams, the colors and text raise other concerns regarding paternity. Richard Williams's name is rendered in bold, yellow type, same as the world "Daddy" and the question mark that appears as the very last words on the page. The question of paternity embedded within the title resonates with constructions of dysfunctional black families, sexually indiscriminate black women, and the more specific concerns regarding the suitability of the Williams family in the decorous world of tennis. Furthermore, the phrase "who's your daddy" has a powerful resonance in that it is

phrases that both recalls and signals sexual commodification. Read in this context then, Venus and Serena are both constructed as prostitutes, working the (tennis) circuit hard for their "daddy" (read: pimp). This construction of the Williams family in a reputable sports magazine is echoed in *The National Enquirer* story alleging match-fixing when it suggests that Richard Williams manipulates his draughts so as to secure greater endorsement dollars.

Compton has also figured in actual tragedy that make the mythic representations of Compton appear all the more real. On September 14, 2003, 31 year old Yetunde Hawanya Tara Price, the oldest sister of Venus and Serena Williams was killed while sitting in a white Yukon Denali with her 28 year old boyfriend Rolland Wormley, who was not wounded. Price was one of three daughters born to Oracene Price and her late husband Yusef A.K. Rasheed. In addition to serving part-time as Venus and Serena's personal assistant, Yetunde also worked as a registered nurse and part owner of "Headed Your Way" beauty salon in Lakewood, California.

Price lived in Corona, California, and was a divorced mother of three children. There are conflicting accounts of the events the occurred the night Price was murdered on Greenleaf Boulevard in Compton, California, approximately one mile from where Venus and Serena used to practice tennis. One scenario describes Wormley, an alleged gang member himself, as having shot at a rival Crips gang member earlier in the day, possibly even firing shots at him. Later, when Wormley and Price stopped at a suspected Crips' drug house, got into an argument with one of the occupants of the house when someone from the gang fired at the car. In the second scenario, the Price was fatally wounded as she and Wormley were just passing through the neighborhood. Though the details of that night are unclear, the fact that Price was pronounced dead at Long Beach

Memorial Medical Center after being mortally wounded by a bullet from an AK-47 semi-automatic assault weapon are indisputable.

Robert Edward Maxfield and Aaron Hammer, both members of the Crips, were arrested for Price's murder. Though the charges against Hammer were dismissed in November 2004, Maxfield was eventually convicted for Price's murder. He was sentenced to serve fifteen years in a state prison. Through the course of a prosecution that spanned two and a half years, Venus and Serena Williams rarely appeared in court. On the day of sentencing, Serena did appear in order to express her dismay at Maxfield's actions in light of all the work that the Williams family had done for the sake of the Compton community.

In general, the tragedy was presumed to have taken an emotional toll on both Venus and Serena. For a while, both withdrew from tennis and many speculated that they would retire. The press missed the connection between this tragedy and Venus's remarks concerning Hurricane Katrina. Instead, Venus herself would have to put her remarks into the context of her sister's murder:

> You know the reason I don't watch the news is because I don't like violence. Obviously, my life has been touched severely by violence. So that's why, you know, I don't expose myself to that, because it's heart wrenching and terrible. The first thing you hear on the news is so-and-so got gunned down; so-and-so got shot; somebody got murdered. I just can't deal with it personally. (Clary-NYT 2005)

This is the closest that Venus has ever come to publicly discussing her sister Yetunde's murder. Her honest remarks return us to "the cruel" as it plays itself out in sports, particularly, women's sports. In addition to sexism and racism operating simultaneously

in sportswomen's lives and serving as an example of "the cruel" in sports, the violence that Venus's remarks highlight is that which women witness as being an important component of examining "the cruel." Interestingly, comic books serve as a site for engaging this topic

Sugar Fly Williams and Elektra: Witnessing Women

In Jaime Schultz's compelling observations of the "cat suit" Serena Williams wore at the 2002 U.S. Open, she notes that some journalists associated Williams's attire with those of comic book characters. For Schultz, such an association enables several readings of Williams. Schultz notes:

> Equating Serena Williams with imaginary comic book characters not only alludes to her phenomenal skill but also positions her outside what is 'natural' in women's tennis. One might read Williams's assigned super-hero status as freakish or aberrant among her peers, rather than superior or transcendent to them. (348)

In Schultz's view, Serena Williams's position outside of a perceived norm aligns her with a literary analysis that Trudier Harris makes concerning the "suprahuman" stereotype of black women that uses notions of perceived masculine physical strength to characterize black women. Schultz relates this idea to the view of African Americans as "natural athletes," thus suggesting that as Williams may be constructed as "suprahuman" and outside of conventional notions of femininity, she is well within the norm for African American athletes. As Schultz contends, however, in tennis, being outside the norm of traditional femininity complicates Williams's position within her sport.

Schultz's reading of Serena Williams's outsider status ought to be expanded to include an understanding of her as being an "extraordinary body." In *Extraordinary Bodies:*

Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature Rosemarie Garland Thomson is interested in denaturalizing representations of "cripples" and "freaks" as figures of certain, biological difference. As one of the chief insights of disability studies offers for critical consideration, bodies get produced by the geography and architecture that make up the built environment. Science and medical technology also help to normalize a discourse of insufficiency in constructing "extraordinary bodies." As Garland Thomson writes:

> the meanings attributed to extraordinary bodies reside not in inherent flaws, but in social relationships in which one group is legitimated by possessing valued physical characteristics and maintains its ascendancy and its self-identity by systematically imposing the role of cultural or corporeal inferiority on others. Representation thus simultaneously buttresses an embodied version of normative identity and shapes a narrative of corporeal difference that excludes those whose bodies or behaviors do not conform. (7)

Given that such figures are normalized as disabled, they are used in literature, film, and other texts of popular culture to mark difference and to encode meaning. Garland Thomson endeavors to expose how these figures have been used and in the process un-hinge them from their invisibility as cultural types and their role in constructing a normative ideal.

An additional way of reading Serena Williams adorned in her "cat suit" in the way that Schultz has is to include the extent to which Williams helps to expose the normative ideal as it operates in tennis. Moreover, Venus and Serena Williams's superior athletic performances undermine the dominant representation of "extraordinary bodies"

as physically inferior actors in the built environment. Furthermore, an understanding of the Williams sisters as "Extraordinary bodies" enables one to observe that such bodies are not just figures who allow others to read and interpret experience, as fully human subjects often excluded from civic life, they are also capable of offering their own readings and interpretations of their environment. To this end, constructions of Serena Williams as a comic book character are not at odds with the way she views herself. In her endorsement of Hewlett Packard, on extended on-line version unveils a short episode of Serena as the superhero, "Sugar Fly Williams."

The cartoon "Sugar Fly Williams in Knowledge is Power" featured on Hewlett Packard's website depicts Williams as a superhero patrolling the universe.[i] While flying in outer space with her tennis racket outstretched, she stops when she spots danger on earth. The danger comes from a robot positioned atop the "Comptonia Public Library" shooting tennis balls at the public and effectively denying them access to the library. Williams defeats the robot by slapping his tennis balls with her tennis racket. The cartoon concludes with "Sugar Fly Williams" extolling the virtues of literacy. Though a cartoon character whose thoughts occasionally emerge through comic book bubbles, Serena's construction as a comic book character, a superhero, parallels that of other female comic book characters as witnessing women; specifically, Sugar Fly Williams is a witnessing figure like comic book superhero Elektra Natchios in the *Ultimate Daredevil and Elektra* (UDE).

Frank Miller is credited with revitalizing the superhero Daredevil and introducing Elektra into the character's story. In creating Elektra, Miller wanted to lend balance to the romantic lives of superheroes. According to Miller, male superheroes were generally paired with female companions who lacked superpowers. Elektra served as a corrective

to this trend through her extraordinary martial arts skills as well as through the figure of Electra from ancient Greek tragedy that Miller draws on in constructing her. Indeed, Elektra evokes the specter of Electra.

Electra appears in the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripedes. Although each dramatist distinctly interprets the character, she consistently figures as a woman who advocates violence in the works of all three. Batya Casper Laks contends that, "Electra is one of the most recurring myths of Western civilization."[25] As Miller attests, his version of Elektra was certainly meant as a citation of the figure from ancient Greek tragedy. The structure of her presentation in pop cultural form does not mirror that which Laks proposes in marking a recurrence of the "Electra myth." Yet, the configuration of this characters identity in film and the UDE graphic novel in particular, facilitates a testimonial regarding the conditions of twenty-first century culture. In other words, Elektra functions as a cultural critic; for like the Electra of Sophocles, the comic book heroine acts as a witness to atrocity.

In the film *Daredevil*, Elektra is an eyewitness to both her mother and father's violent deaths. In the UDE, her mother dies as a result of breast cancer and she also witnesses the destruction of the dry cleaners her father owns through arson. She further witnesses Trey's sexual harassment of Melissa and the scars and other visible traces of his eventual rape of her. As in Sophocles' work, an equally ocular memorial is erected as a response to the visual offense. Phoebe is depicted going into a woman's public restroom and though she is told that there were two available stalls, she tells her

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[25] Batya Casper Laks, *Electra: Gender Sensitive Study of the Plays Based on the Myth* (Jefferson and London: McFarland and Company, 1995), 4. Although Laks proceeds then to engage a very specific delineation of the structure for the recurrence of the "Electra myth," in general, her insights into the significance of this myth as a way of marking a cultural and social analysis proves quite useful for thinking about the figure of Elektra as she appears in popular culture.

informer that she'd rather wait for a particular one. In the space of four panels, Phoebe may be observed sitting in a stall surrounded by walls decorated with hearts proclaiming love, doodlings, and other lavatory testimonials acknowledging who "was here." In the very last panel, Phoebe has taken what looks like the tip of a fountain pen and scratched the name Trey Langham, adding it to a list that includes Max Layton, Peter Baldwin, and Robbie Pollinar, all designated under the heading: "Men Who Rape." Thus, the women's restroom, often mocked in popular culture as a space where women enter together in groups in order to gossip and to apply make-up, is offered here as a space of resistance--a site of witness. This memorial site is a place wherein life-sustaining information gets transmitted to other women.

Continued emphases on what Elektra witnesses comes as a result of the way the criminal justice system handled Trey's crimes. For instance, after the police identified Melissa as an exemplary witness, they quickly moved to undermine the significance of what she saw. This dismissal extends bell hooks' account of the relevance of black women as eyewitnesses to include white women who accuse young, wealthy, white men of crimes.[26] Trey's father's wealth and political connections overrode Melissa's credibility resulting in the court dropping the charges against him. Ironically, Trey files charges with Student Court against Elektra, Phoebe, and Melissa for slander.

As a result of seeing her friend raped and learning that Trey's political connections led to the charges against him being dropped, whatever Elektra's faith in the law was, it begins to wane. She ultimately decides that she's the one for the job. Elektra's decision to kill Trey comes as a result then, of the everyday violence she endures rather

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[26] See bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 94-100.

than anything particularly seductive about violence itself.[27] Elektra's actions reflect the force of "insidious trauma," or the "traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit."[28] Her behavior then bears witness to the *fragility of virtue* under duress.

According to Bar On, feminists who embrace the Hegelian view that sees the benefits of the life and death struggle solely, don't consider "the ethico-political impoverishment of war and violence." This viewpoint contributes to the premature "generalization of women's position abstractly promising a revolutionary vision." Carefully scrutinizing the impact of trauma on women's character reveals that violence isn't necessarily transformative. More than a celebration of girls who "kick ass" then, the UDE presentation of Elektra expresses a coincidence with Electra in ancient Greek tragedy whose virtue unravels as a result of what she is forced to witness.

Both Venus and Serena Williams were witnesses to violence through the experience of losing their sister. Venus has attempted to limit some of what she witnesses by not confronting it in news reports. For her part, Serena's court presence upon the sentencing of her sister's murderer marks an attempt to intervene despite her frustrations with the judicial process. While the UDE offers an origin story of violent women, the Williams sisters' experiences with violence continues to be a struggle against violence. Their cooperation with one another despite the necessity of the conflict of competitive tennis, is hopeful.

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[27] For further commentary on this, see Bar On, *The Subject of Violence*, 164-165; Bar On, "Everyday Violence and Ethico-Political Crisis" in *Daring to be Good: Essays in Feminist Ethico-Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), 45-52.

[28] Laura S. Brown quoting Maria Root in "Not Outside the Range" in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 107.

Bloodless Rivalry

Competition makes kindness difficult. Winning is the goal of athletic competition and its terms are absolute: you either finish first and win or you lose. With such strict terms sportsmanship has to be taught in order to mediate the tension and conflict occasioned by the anxiety of failing to win. One of the many reasons that Venus and Serena Williams are compelling athletes of our times is because they appear to have established a new relationship between winning and losing, a dialectic, which has yielded a third term. This new possibility allows opponents to live together, openly admire another's successes--even against you as the opponent—and photograph and celebrate the person who has just beaten you on the court. The possibility that competition could be laced with genuine goodwill appears most desirable at this moment in late capitalism.

Despite the overwhelming consensus that head-to-head contests between the Williams sisters have proved disappointing because of the low quality of the tennis, people have watched these matches in record numbers. For example, when the sisters faced each other in the finals of the US Open in 2001, it was the first time that women played in the finals during prime time viewing and they attracted more viewers than any other program that evening, including coverage of the college football game between Notre Dame and Nebraska. Sports writer Howard Fendrich contends that the draw of an all-Williams final lies in the fact that their matches combine rivalry and dynasty, elements essential for capturing sports enthusiasts. Another reason for the initial enthusiasm for watching all-Williams finals was the historic nature of their meeting. The meeting of two black women, sisters, at center court of a grand slam tournament was monumental and news sources continually pointed out this fact.

The historical significance of the Williams sisters' contests exceeds the details of tennis history. The larger historical significance emerges in Gerard Rancinan's photograph paying tribute to their match-up, which accompanied the *Sports Illustrated* article "American Revolution." Despite the low intensity of these matches and the numerous errors, Rancinan highlights the grand historical themes Venus and Serena conjure for an audience historically poised to question the changes that have taken place in the nation regarding race, equality, and citizenship. Rancinan's staging casts the sisters as figures of revolution wherein they recall Patrick Henry's famous words "give me liberty or give me death." In addition, the American Revolution serves as an appropriate reference because it acts as a generic way of casting some of the radical changes the sisters have brought to the women's game. Their sense of style and perceived sense of entitlement distinguished them from other African Americans who played before them. Rancinan's citation of war may seem overstated but the metaphor is often used to describe athletic competition. Before it was metaphor, athletic competition took place between soldiers of warring factions. Even more compelling in Rancinan's case is how his work alludes to civil war.

According to Drew Gilpin Faust, the Pieta served as iconography during the American Civil War. Rancinan's staging recalls such civil strife and references a biblical legacy as Serena lies prostrate over her sister Venus's legs as Michelangelo displayed the limp body of Christ falling limp over Mary's. The fact of Venus and Serena's status as siblings recalls civil strife, as does their race—though with a difference. The American Civil War, motivated by slavery, is understood to have been a war fought between and among brothers, mostly white men who shared different views regarding slavery, state's rights, and treason. Such war between brothers has a long biblical and mythical trajectory

that includes Cain and Abel as well as Romulus and Remus. As Ricardo J. Quinones contends, the Cain-Abel story shows brotherhood to be an ideal met, ironically, with tragedy. To this end, the cultural representation of brotherhood is the story of trauma. Coinciding with Cathy Caruth's work on trauma, Quinones argues that the "Cain-Abel story involves an encounter with history" (20). As Quinones writes, "perhaps the greatest contribution of the theme will be the program it provides for scrutiny of the ambiguities of human action, understood in the full complexities of historical change" (20). In the most basic sense, Venus and Serena offer just this representation of human action and historical change.

As the Williams sisters recall historical change, they incite questions regarding the possibility of the incorporation of black bodies into the nation-state. Here then, they recall what Quinones describes as the "ever present concern of difference and differentiation" constitutive of the Cain-Abel story. Cain's slaying of his brother and the mark that he bore as a result shows otherness as unassimilable. The Williams sisters, however, challenge this ascription to the outside. As bodies that refuse racial transcendence, they represent the "shadowy other" within the US civil union. What their representational status in popular US culture suggests is that the mark of otherness, as it were, may not necessitate perpetual exclusion and are instead figures for the possibility of reconciliation.

The incorporation of the black body into the market place defined the US as a slaveholding republic. In that context, the black body as currency was a source of profit for others. The difference in this moment in late capitalism is that black people can also profit significantly from the commodification of black bodies. In *Against Race*, Paul Gilroy provides a way of reading black bodies as a reconfiguration of the difference

constitutive of changes that have begun to mark alterations in notions of the nation-state. Seen in this context, Gilroy notes that:

> Corporate multiculture is giving the black body a makeover. We are witnessing a series of struggles over the meaning of that body, which intermittently emerges as a signifier of prestige, autonomy, transgression, and power in a supranational economy of signs that is not reducible to the old-style logics of white supremacism. (270)

The case of the Williams sisters helps to extend Gilroy's argument to include black sportswomen within the scope of his claims about the commodification of black bodies. As black outsiders, once anarchic within the tennis arena to now enjoying the status of All-American girls, they demonstrate an historical shift regarding this uncertain integration.

Conclusion

In the March 2006 issue of *Tennis* magazine Chris Evert composed an open letter to Serena Williams. In the letter, Evert expresses concern for Williams's career choices:

> I've been thinking about your career, and something is troubling me. I appreciate that becoming a well-rounded person is important to you, as you've made that desire very clear. Still, a question lingers—do you ever consider your place in history? Is it something you care about? In the short term you may be happy with the various things going on in your life, but I wonder whether 20 years from now you might reflect on your career and regret not putting 100 percent of yourself into tennis. Because whether you want to admit it or not, these distractions are tarnishing your legacy.

The concern that Evert expresses was shared by active and former tennis professionals as well as sportswriters who thought that both Serena and Venus were squandering opportunities for athletic greatness by taking their attention from the game. For Evert's part, Serena's divided interests bewilder her because they place emphasis on ambitions that Evert views as less significant than being world's number one. Evert's tone is rather condescending as she tells Williams that after 2003, she forsakes winning Grand Slams because she gets "sidetracked with injuries, pet projects, and indifference and have won only one major in the last seven you've played." Evert's critique, however, ignores the murder of Yetunde Price, Venus and Serena's oldest sister on September 14, 2003 as a compelling reason for Williams having lost her focus. Two mistrials were declared against Robert Edward Maxfield, the man suspected of killing Price, first in November of 2004 and again in April of 2005. The Williams family trial did not end until Maxfield

was convicted April 6, 2006, one month before Evert published her open letter. Serena actually attended the sentencing of Maxfield and told the judge how "unfair" the murder was to her family. The following year, Serena won the Australian Open, defeating then world's number one, Maria Sharapova, and dedicated the win to her sister Yetunde. Thus, the time period that Evert finds so inexplicable in Serena Williams's career had been filled with tragedy and grief.

The lack of compassion that Evert shows for Williams is typical of what happens to anarchic women. The full complexity of their lives is not considered when judgment against them is being rendered. By 2008, the Williams sisters were consistently winning tournaments. The competitions between them also satisfied expectations for competitiveness. After playing her sister in two competitive sets, Venus won Wimbledon for the fifth time (at the same time that she was vocal in advocating equal prize money for men and women and winning this debate) and Serena won the U.S. Open and with it the number one ranking in women's tennis. Marking this occasion, L. Jon Wertheim composed an open letter to the Williams sisters with a different message from the one Evert wrote Serena in 2006. Speaking as the voice of "The Tennis Establishment," Wertheim's letter offers an apology to Venus and Serena for the biased criticism directed at them over the years. Thus, he apologizes for calling them "cocky" while labeling other players who "swaggered and wore provocative clothing" "colorful" and "confident" (Wertheim 80); for criticizing them for lacking "proper coaching" while praising the coachless Roger Federer as "self-reliant" and capable of thinking "outside the box" (80). Here, Wertheim shows the compassion Evert lacks when he considers that the "comfort and support" Richard Williams and Oracene Price afforded their daughters through their roles as coaches "was more important than whether they'd ever played on Centre Court

or knew the nuances between string tensions" (80). Speaking specifically to the critique Evert levels against Serena Williams, Wertheim writes:

> And you know what really upset me? Your wavering interest in tennis. It seemed that you showed up to play only when you felt like it and treated tennis less like a job than a hobby. The Establishment likes it when players are obsessed with tennis, not when they entertain "outside interests." Other players were entering twice as many events as you, and losing to you in the biggest tournaments. *Arghhh!* (80)

Continuing, Wertheim admits that he was wrong in judging against the Williams sisters' approach. He concedes that at "28 and "27" Venus and Serena are "still going strong" while their contemporaries are not: "Justine Henin retired. So did Kim Clijsters. So did Martina Hingis—twice." Finally, Wertheim concludes:

> I loved it when they were playing two dozen events a year, chasing ranking points from here to Katmandu. Maybe your approach is better over the long haul, no matter how many tournament directors and tour executives you infuriate. Maybe your folks are capable coaches. I admit, your sportsmanship is beyond reproach. (80)

As the voice of the establishment, Wertheim's admission reflects the insight of the first chapter of this dissertation: for black women athletes in this contemporary moment, it is possible for one's public identity as anarchic to be rethought and recast as all-American.

Unlike the athletes discussed in *Reconstructing Fame: Sport, Race, and Evolving Reputations*, Jackie Robinson, Roberto Clemente, Curt Flood, Paul Robeson, Jim Thorpe, Bill Russell, Tommie Smith, and John Carlos, Venus and Serena Williams have experienced the recuperation of their identities within the lifecycle of their active lives as

competitors thus adding reputation as an alternative site for interpreting speed as an aspect of the global age. The Williams sisters have been able to take advantage of changes in sport, media, and American culture to have their reputations recast. Their careers also reveal that being an anarchic woman does not necessarily bar one from financial success. Previous generations of black women athletes did not have such opportunities as racism prevented others from seeing them as marketable. To this end, the Williams sisters mark a shift in the relationship between celebrated black women athletes and working class and middle class black women.

One of the questions this dissertation set out to address was the role that representations of black women as anarchic played in clarifying the boundaries and bounty of citizenship in this late capitalist moment. The case of the Williams sisters illustrates that being anarchic does not prevent talented black women athletes from achieving financial success and experiencing the positive transformation of their identities. The opportunities they have to earn a living as competitive athletes evidences the civic benefits accruing to successful black women athletes in this contemporary moment that distinguishes them from previous generations of black women athletes. Travel offers an additional arena for evaluating the boundaries and bounty of citizenship in this contemporary moment.

This dissertation was concerned with travel and movement across boundaries. Specifically, it asked the following questions: In what ways are young black women athletes transforming political discourses of migration, travel, style, and the body? What are the implications of these changes? During Jim Crow, black athletes crossing geographic boundaries shared the degraded experience of travel that other black travelers experienced. Rachel Robinson, Jackie Robinson's wife, becomes painfully aware of this

fact as she and her husband traveled the last leg of their journey to Florida for his first training camp with the Dodgers. In describing this part of the journey, Arnold Rampersad writes:

> When they pulled into Jacksonville, the bus station only added to their misery. The building was hot and fly-ridden, its Jim Crow section crowded and stinky as they waited for a connection to Daytona Beach to the south. Aside from apples and candy bars, once Mallie's shoebox was empty, they had eaten nothing on the journey by air and bus from New Orleans. Jack himself would have bought food from the holes in the wall where blacks were brusquely served, but Rachel refused to eat that way: "I wouldn't do it, and he said he would go along with me if I felt that way." Rachel remembered, "I had never been so tired, hungry, miserable, and upset in my life as when we finally reached Daytona Beach." But she would also believe that her descent with Jack into the Jim Crow hell of the South "had made me a much stronger, more purposeful human being in a few hours. I saw the pointlessness, the vanity, of good looks and clothes when one faced an evil like Jim Crow. (Rampersad 139)

Like the character Helene Wright that Morrison writes about in *Sula*, Rachel Robinson thought that her dress would allow her to define her station and decouple herself from black people of a lower caste. Fully describing Robinson's experience of transformation, Rampersad describes the scene she must have experienced in sartorial terms:

> Just before dawn, the Jim Crow section of the bus began to full up with black working men and women, many on their way to the fields, their dresses and overalls torn and soiled, heads wrapped in country

> bandannas. With many seats empty in the "white" section of the bus, the blacks took turns sharing the few back seats among themselves. What the laborers made of the strange couple—the man asleep in his rumpled suit and tie, the lady with her massed curls and her ermine coat and alligator bag—Rachel could only imagine. (138)

Despite the Robinson's show of respectability and wealth, they were still subject to the same discrimination as the poor and working class folk squeezed into this Jim Crow bus station.

The Williams sisters mark a shift away from a history of undifferentiated blackness. The attempts made by previous generations of black athletes to cross boundaries with respectability, most evident in the ways they dressed their bodies and styled their hair, are not efforts made by the William sisters and they do not suffer as a result. Rather, Venus and Serena Williams can make practical decisions about how they style their hair, for example, without a pressing concern for racial harassment and discrimination—this is certainly the case since becoming All-American girls. While it was the case that they could be charged penalty points for losing beads during a match early in their careers, they were never barred from earning endorsements—as was the case with Zina Garrison. The inability for Garrison to secure endorsements and thus have her image circulating across boundaries due to her coarse hair and thick body type does not describe the Williams sisters experience as icons in popular culture. While the Williams sisters are generally able to cross boundaries without reprisal, this is not the case for the typical black woman traveler, as the case of black women harassed by U.S. customs officials shows; again showing that the Williams sisters's civic triumphs are not universally experienced by black women.

One of the more interesting aspects of the changes witnessed in representations of the Williams sisters concerns their willful shift away from being *bricoleurs* of loaded sartorial choices. Rather than continuing to incite frustration and antagonism from "The Establishment," Venus and Serena Williams embrace sexiness. It is not clear why they make this choice since they were able to reap a significant profit even while they were edgy personas. This concern raises an additional set of questions that this dissertation set out to tackle; namely the following: How do the mechanics of race and gender operate so as to simultaneously enable censure and celebrity? What utility can this insight have on the conceptualization of market versus civic relations? The case of the Williams sisters illustrates Leslie Heywood and Shari Dworkin's contention that contemporary women athletes should not be limited to second wave feminist critiques of sexual objectification. While Venus and Serena Williams have posed for photographs while scantily clad, they have also offered alternative representations of body image and beauty that counters dangerous body ideals. The alternative ideals they offer allow the sisters to remain edgy and to contest the notion that they have sold out and become complicit with corporate greed. Venus and Serena Williams have not radically altered overarching representations of black women as temptresses nor have they offered representations that undermine a patriarchal gaze.

Though race and gender narratives of African American women's identities are not wholly subverted, the slight altering disguises the complicity of black women athletes like Venus and Serena Williams with these problematic narratives. While promulgating these stereotypes warrants censure, this measure is avoided as the high visibility of black women previously excluded from representations in magazines like the *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue* appears to be worthy of celebration. This confounding then, makes

simultaneous censure and celebrity possible. Though scholars like Janell Hobson contend that Serena Williams serves as a model for black women who struggle with body image, the civic utility of Williams's example is confounded by her collusion with corporations who seek to profit from the sexual commodification of the black female body. The Williams sisters maintain the contradictions of exploitation and triumph that Hazel Carby posits as the experience of black women in entertainment.

Perhaps the most compelling distinction Venus and Serena Williams hold in their narrative of success is their status as sisters in elite competition. The final question that this dissertation raises sought to examine their relationship as sisters and sports rivals: How can this specific case of the Williams sisters render less abstract the role of fraternity (if not sorority) for democracy? This dissertation consistently scrutinized their unique status as highly successful athletes and sisters. The theme of their twinning in commercial endorsements reflects both a vitriolic stereotype as well as a context for thinking through the meaning of the Williams sisters for American culture in this moment in late capitalism.

Venus and Serena Williams's family story has been a story of ascent as well as violence. The final chapter of this dissertation used these features of their family history to examine love and violence in contemporary American culture. While they thought their family had escaped the violence of Compton, California where they learned to play tennis, in 2003, their oldest sister Yetunde was gunned down near where they learned the sport. Despite the violence that has surrounded them, the sisters have been able to maintain a harmonious relationship. Their mutual love and civility amidst the necessary turbulence of their athletic rivalry offers a model of sisterhood triumphing over the legacy of brotherhood in foundation myths that end tragically in death.

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