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978-0-521-56462-5 - Writing America Black: Race Rhetoric in the Public Sphere

C. K. Doreski

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## WRITING AMERICA BLACK

### *Race Rhetoric in the Public Sphere*

*Writing America Black* examines the African-American press and selected literary works by black authors. By viewing the journalist's role as historian, reporter, taste-maker, and propagandist, C. K. Doreski reveals the close bond to a larger African-American literary tradition. Rich in cultural and historical context, this valuable study will be of interest to readers of literature, history, African-American studies, American studies, and journalism.

C. K. Doreski, author of *Elizabeth Bishop: The Restraints of Language* (1993), has published widely on the cultural settings of journalism and literature. She is presently completing "Contingencies of Citizenship: Americans at Home in the Second World War," a study underwritten by the citizenship initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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In memory of my father –  
and for Bill

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White man, hear me! History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally *present* in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations. And it is with great pain and terror that one begins to realize this. In great pain and terror one begins to assess the history which has placed one where one is and formed one's point of view. In great pain and terror because, therefore, one enters into battle with that historical creation, Oneself, and attempts to recreate oneself according to a principle more humane and more liberating; one begins the attempt to achieve a level of personal maturity and freedom which robs history of its tyrannical power, and also changes history.

But, obviously, I am speaking as an historical creation which has had bitterly to contest its history, to wrestle with it, and finally accept it in order to bring myself out of it.

—James Baldwin, “White Man’s Guilt”  
(*Ebony*, August 1965)

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## PREFACE

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Negro weeklies make no pretense at being newspapers in the strict sense of the term. They have a more important mission than the dissemination of mere news. . . . They are race papers. They are organs of propaganda. Their chief business is to stimulate thought among Negroes about the things that vitally concern them.

– James Weldon Johnson, “Do You Read Negro Papers?”  
(*New York Age*, October 22, 1914)

*Writing America Black* resurveys Walter Lippmann’s “American Century of public opinion” from the perspective of African Americans committed to what W. E. B. Du Bois called “the real needs of the people,”<sup>1</sup> the actualization of democracy, and the authentication of the historical record. Americanism for these native sons and daughters meant a destabilizing, institutionally enforced signification subject to revision or erasure in the black independent press. Paradoxically, in the spirit of Thomas Jefferson’s revolutionary conception of “the people as the only censors” and Walt Whitman’s concern that “a true poem” be as realistic as “the daily newspaper,” writers for the black press assumed that the “true principles” of government were located in the public sphere – and that community news, with its unrestrained airing of dissensus, was instrumental in the construction of authentic race narratives.<sup>2</sup>

As Houston Baker explains in “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere” (1994: 13–14):

Black Americans arrived on New World shores precisely as *property* belonging to the bourgeoisie. They were strategically and rigorous-

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ly prevented from acquiring literacy. And they were defined by Thomas Jefferson and his compeers among America's Founding Fathers, as devoid of even a germ in their minds that might be mistaken for reason. Historically, therefore, nothing might seem less realistic, attractive or believable to black Americans than the notion of a black public sphere. Unless, of course, such a notion was meant to symbolize a strangely distorting chiasma [*sic*]: a separate and inverted opposite of a historically imagined white rationality in action. . . .

Yet, it is exactly because black Americans have so aptly read this flip side that they are attracted to a historically imagined "better time" of reason. They are drawn to the possibilities of structurally and affectively transforming the founding notion of the bourgeois public sphere into an expressive and empowering self-fashioning.

Fully rational human beings with abundant cultural resources, black Americans have always situated their unique forms of expressive publicity in a complex set of relationships to other forms of American publicity (meaning here, paradoxically enough, the sense of publicity as authority).

Such intertextualities reweave America's national narrative.

Because black national representation both mediates and is mediated by the nation as a whole, I begin at a moment of constitutional crisis when renewed affirmation of African-American citizenship was necessitated by the erosive contingencies of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. (1896). This study explores the sites of several such definitional crises for the black America that located community and national identity in a public sphere employing what Houston Baker identifies as the "twin rhetorics of *nostalgia* and *critical memory*." These rhetorics combine a "purposive construction of a past filled with golden virtues, golden men, and sterling events" with the "cumulative, collective maintenance of a record that draws into relationship significant instants of time past and the always uprooted homelessness of now" (1994: 7).<sup>3</sup> *Writing America Black* investigates the ways in which these representational encounters between imagined communities (what T. S. Eliot identified as the "fluctuating circle of loyalties between the centre of the family and the local community, and the periphery of humanity entire" [1934, 21]) construct not simply the news of the day but history and literature as well. The allegorical capacities of history invest news with a nationalizing force. Consequently, representational prac-

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tices reflect the centrality not marginality of African-American experience as they recast past events in the predication of a fully realized citizenship. Aware of, though ultimately indifferent to, the “pastness of the past” that Eliot found central to the concept of “tradition,” *Writing America Black* responds to the literal presence of the history James Baldwin made the contestatory grounds of his essay for *Ebony* magazine, “White Man’s Guilt” (1965). “The combativeness with which individuals and institutions decide what is tradition and what is not, what relevant and what not,” which Edward Said finds essential in formulating tradition, aptly defines the contentious self-fashioning of the black independent press (1993: 4).

In whatever form – genealogical traces, news events, histories, memorializations – African-American history and tradition as concepts grew ex nihilo. Contending with what Orlando Patterson has termed the “social death of slavery,” black Americans learned the importance of a legitimate social identity accomplished through the authority of naming and its associated control over the resultant genealogical and historical record. Because of the perpetually reconstructive (and therefore often adversarial) nature of their project, these witnesses relied upon collective memory and ephemeral media to a greater extent than did mainstream historians.

In the twentieth century, African-American historians (a category intended to embrace writers engaged in the construction of a viable historical record) endeavored to fill in the blanks left by white historians. They seemed to respond to Ezra Pound’s modernist recollection – “And even I can remember / A day when the historians left blanks in their writings, / I mean for things they didn’t know” (“Canto 13”). The Poundian historical project, however, not only presumed the existence of a master text, but also assumed authority over those “blanks in their writings.” Such confidence and largesse were impossible for black Americans constructing their family, racial, and cultural histories. For them, history entailed a conspiring world of document and creation where the discourses of what we conventionally label “news,” “history,” and “literature” coalesce into an African-American narrative of history and nation that became what Baldwin called in “White Man’s Guilt” a “disagreeable mirror” (410). It also involved the destabilizing presence of memory.

For more than a decade, cultural historians, led by Pierre Nora, have seriously investigated the role of memory in the historical

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process. Nora's concept of "lieux de mémoire" is instructive here; as he explains, sites of memory exist "where memory crystallizes and secretes itself at a particular moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists" (1989: 7). Nora's suggestive mobilization of memory has prompted scholars to seriously consider it as an agent in the formation of history, tradition, and national identity. The Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally anthology, *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (1994), and Michael Kammen's *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (1991) are two of the most impressive products of this approach. Such transnational scholarship has inspired the terms of my investigation – history, narrative, commemoration – and provided its means of periodization.

*Writing America Black* reconstructs the racial memory of the twentieth century from the perspective of African-American writers committed to deconstructing the received national narrative (Americanization institutionally enforced by church, school, military, and other such agencies of socialization) in order to build a more perfect historical record. Though examples of this subtextual insubordination may be found throughout the century, they are dramatically foregrounded in what James Baldwin has characterized as "time[s] of stress . . . dangerous situation[s]" for the "great, vast, shining Republic" (1985a: 24). And so my study of black linguistic claims to the public sphere organizes itself around the nation's wars, foreign and domestic, hoping to capture what Elaine Scarry has called "the making and unmaking of the world." Wars, as Scarry notes, produce a referential instability, a "juxtaposition of injured bodies and unanchored issues," that is subsequently expressed in a "vocabulary of cost" and a "vocabulary of injury" (1985: chap. 2). The traumata of such moments are at least ideologically relieved by the liberating effect they have upon cycles of national identification, confirming Langston Hughes's conclusion that "a nation is never so alert and alive as when it is a nation at war" (1958: 498).

Wars in the twentieth century, "the first century of world wars,"<sup>4</sup> from the Spanish-American War to Vietnam, have occasioned some of the most profound articulations of Americanism, national purpose,



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and historical identity from the African-American community. War's "fundamental role in stimulating, defining, justifying, periodizing, and eventually filtering American memories and traditions," as Michael Kammen explains (1991: 13), has a poignant significance for those suffering erasure from those very definitions, justifications, and periodizations. Because of the very referential instability that threatens established national narratives or historical scenarios, counterdiscourses form, enabling, in Michel Foucault's terms, an oppressed minority "to speak on its own behalf" (1978–88: 1.101). Even at the oppositional extreme of a subnational construction like black nationalism, the textual field cleared by these lapses in national coherence discloses a fervent belief in constitutional rights and declarations of independence.

The internal and domestic complement of war is riot, and such moments of civil disturbance and (in the words of the Kerner Commission Report) "socially-directed violence" contribute to the structural organization of the study. I retain the contested term "riot" rather than its representational translations, "rebellion" or "insurrection," because of the word's broadly referential value (in the language of the report-writing official as well as the artist appropriating and destabilizing the concept) and its etymological weight. Riot as public disturbance conveys the meaning at risk for Charles Johnson's official study of the 1919 riot, *The Negro in Chicago* (1922), as well as Gwendolyn Brooks's redactive vision in "Riot": "Because the 'Negroes' were coming down the street" (1969: 470). Since we are unable to rest in the memory time that Sterling Brown identifies in "An Old Woman Remembers" as a time when "there wasn't any riot any more" (1989: 89), we must retain the strident misprision implicit in the word.

Moreover, this study seeks to enlarge the discussion of the literary and journalistic constructions of modernism and African-American history even as it squarely situates these marginal works in the ongoing assessment of modernism's central preoccupation with history and its relationship to poetics. Through rhetorical assessment of a representative selection of individual weeklies and magazines, analysis of moments of historical significance, and consideration of this century's dialectic of race liberalism, the study prepares the reader for the appropriation and aestheticization of the newsworthy and historical in the writings of authors as diverse as Gwendolyn Brooks, Sam

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Cornish, Alice Walker, and Jay Wright. Notably absent from this book is sustained attention to either the Harlem Renaissance or the civil rights movement of the 1950s. Although the literature and journalism of these culturally intense periods inspired this study (and would find its method congenial), they have been extraordinarily well served by such recent critical studies as James DeJongh's *Vicious Modernism: Black Harlem and the Literary Imagination* (1990), George Hutchinson's *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (1995), and Melissa Walker's *Down from the Mountaintop: Black Women's Novels in the Wake of the Civil Rights Movement, 1966–1989* (1991). I have turned to less cohesive moments, when the news challenged America's racial communities to redefine the nature of news and literature.

The first half of the book explores the formation of a racially charged national identity, investigating the ways in which regional periodical literature served as primary agents of Americanization; the second half of *Writing America Black* investigates media traces in writers who moved beyond the dominant but failed national and cultural explorations to a black nationalistic structure within a Pan-African perspective.

This study does not simply make a case for intertextual readings of African-American ephemeral media and literature. It seeks as well to enlarge the notion of discourse to move beyond the dialogic relationship between master and counterdiscourses, not only accepting the truism that history shapes literature but admitting the possibility that literature informs the national historical narratives. As Kammen concludes in *Mystic Chords of Memory*: "Public memory, which contains a slowly shifting configuration of traditions, is ideologically important because it shapes a nation's ethos and sense of identity. That explains, at least in part, why memory is always selective and is so often contested" (1991: 13). Fraudulent healing of national wounds through amnesiac commemorations encourages aggressive reopenings of the American text, such as Langston Hughes's "Let America Be America Again," Melvin Tolson's "Rendezvous with America," and Amiri Baraka's "It's Nation Time," all of which challenge received historical verities and deny the closure imposed by these ceremonial displays.

Part 1, "History, Citizenship, and the American Way," examines some key journalistic constructions of these abstractions from 1900 to 1950. Until the end of the Second World War, "America" served as a referential, and often ideal, construct for the vast majority of

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African-American writers. Most commonly, “America” in the black press involved a challenge to the nation to live up to its promises through affirmation of its founding principles. Borrowing rhetoric freely from a host of “methods of Americanization” texts (targeted at the foreign born), writers located their American-ness in their nativity; they were *native* sons born into the language. So essential was the concept of rights linked to nativity that Robert Abbott noted as a key tenet to his founding *Defender* platform: “Government schools open to all American citizens in preference to foreigners.” Under the guise of freedom, most such exercises were aimed at socialization. In 1922, Robert Park, white University of Chicago sociologist and one-time secretary to Booker T. Washington, justified such nationalizing efforts as agency-regulated “social activity intended to extend among the people of the United States the knowledge of their government and the obligations to it” (Park 1925: vii). The public sphere, as Jürgen Habermas and Benedict Anderson independently suggest, as a means of communication found its ideal mode of transmission in the newspaper, for it “provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation” (Anderson 1983: 25). Whether at Boston’s *Colored American Magazine* or Chicago’s *Defender* and *Negro Digest*, journalism encouraged the collective production of a social text of race and nation, liberating editors and authors from the philanthropic bonds of liberalism.

“Race Progress and Exemplary Biography” (Chapter 1) explores Pauline Hopkins’s cultivation of an audience for revisionist race history at Boston’s *Colored American Magazine*. Transcending the journal’s bourgeois arts context by writing for “those who never read history or biography,” she hoped that, within the imitative, commodified culture of the magazine, an intellectual construction of race history could thrive. She wrote in the certainty that her biographical texts would inform her fiction and social notes, even as they were informed by the larger textual whole. This chapter investigates the significant role played by biography in shaping this century’s race history through public lives and critiques the inherited rhetoric of New England’s transcendental liberalism.

“Reading Riot” (Chapter 2) draws upon four sources – Robert S. Abbott’s *Chicago Defender* editorials, Carl Sandburg’s stories for the *Chicago Daily News* (with their pamphlet introduction by Walter Lippmann), the Chicago Federation of Labor’s broadsides in its *New*

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*Majority*, and Charles S. Johnson's scholarly race advocacy in *The Negro in Chicago* (Chicago Commission on Race Relations [CCRR 1922]) – to consider the rhetorical implications of these separate linguistic communities as they construct complementary and competing historical records of the post–Great War riot in Chicago. The war had become the very calculus of democracy, spawning an array of First Amendment activity. It was a time when, as Robert Kerlin noted in his introduction to *The Voice of the Negro 1919*, “the Negro seem[ed] to have discovered his fourth estate, to have realized the extraordinary power of the press” (1920: ix). Each of these responses to the city's race crisis exposed alternative agendas in their dialogues with sociologically definable constituencies too complex to speak with a single voice. Within this rhetorical chorus, the race solidarity of the *Defender* and the white liberal agency of the *Daily News* inscribe the most sharply defined constituencies of the riot.

“Rendezvous with Modernism, Fascism – and Democracy” (Chapter 3) reads Melvin B. Tolson's first collection of poetry, *Rendezvous with America*, in the light of his editorial “Caviar and Cabbage” column in the *Washington Tribune*, examining his aesthetic and political digression from nationalism to Pan-Africanism during the Second World War, a war that for black America began with the Italo-Ethiopian War. Because the Marxist communitarianism and esoteric spiritualism of Tolson's modernism derive in part from a reaction to Euro-modernism and, in particular, to Ezra Pound's politicized aesthetic, his “Caviar and Cabbage” columns serve as crucial intertexts to his evolving theories of democracy, leadership, and the state. Though journalistic in expediency, the columns share a lyrical and historical ambition to place the New Negro “in *his* America” through participatory discourse in the public sphere and circumspect analysis of citizenship in a time of global war and fading empire. What begins as a disquisition into the very “matrix of America,” celebratory in its historical fervor and epic in scope, turns into the challenge of “America?.” His once epic “magnificent cosmorama,” when considered in relation to nativist epics by Carl Sandburg and Archibald MacLeish, turns into a subversive and dissembling question for the Black America of Tolson's *Rendezvous*, abandoning what he called in the Gurdjieff-inspired, race-transcending “The Man Inside” the “common ground, in transfiguring light, / Where man inside is neither black nor white” (1944: 25).

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“If I Were a Negro” (Chapter 4) continues the analysis of liberal forces shaping race news and historiography in a consideration of John Johnson’s feature column for his first periodical venture, *Negro Digest*. Like the transcendentalist rhetoric incorporated into the Hopkins sketches in the *Colored American Magazine* and the admonitions scripted into the Sandburg and Lippmann accounts of the Chicago riot, “If I Were a Negro” assumes the authority of white liberalism. High-minded and earnest, these white authors attempted a dance of elision and masquerade, familiar to Pauline Hopkins and Robert Abbott, while retaining the privilege of agency for social change. And yet, when read in the racialized context of *Negro Digest*, the familiar rhetorical consolation of liberalism performs a paradoxical role. Rather than assuring white America’s “goodness,” “If I Were a Negro” confirms Theodor Adorno’s suspicions that “goodness itself is a deformation of the good” (1951: 94).

Part 2, “Decomposing Unities, Deconstructing National Narratives,” moves beyond the contestatory Americanism of the first half of the century to the disjunctive counternarratives of the second. The Vietnam War, waves of political assassination and riot, and the constitutional crisis of Watergate provided the chaotic subtext for the Bicentennial that in itself seemed a theatrical extension of the cold war. “The cold war,” as Donald Pease reminds us, “structured two grand modernist narratives – Russian Marxism and Americanist liberalism – in a relation of opposition” (1997: 14). The threatened collapse of constitutional democracy and the apparent futility of civil rights predicated upon a civil society surprised few in an African-American community that, though aspiring to the “utopian ideals of modernity – the ideas of basic rights, liberty, equality, democracy, solidarity, and justice” (Cohen and Arato 1992: xii), was advancing toward a subnationally constructed, culturally intense communitarian ethos.

Focusing upon the years 1968–76, this section acknowledges the relative failure of the black press to sustain the optimism of earlier political, definitional tensions and turns to aesthetic, textual appropriations of the historical present. Hoyt Fuller’s conversion of the bourgeois *Negro Digest* into the revolutionary *Black World* represents a rare instance of an editor’s power to channel rhetorical *disintegration* into a new aesthetic. Televisual and feminist challenges to such textual constructs jeopardize the national narrative as well. Nationalism here is at once local and global, as the black community seeks its

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definitional anchor outside of a received text. Gwendolyn Brooks and Sam Cornish, working within a black urban sphere fighting for its very survival, initiate a communitarian nationalism and a genealogical historical record; Alice Walker and Jay Wright, signifying upon the impoverishment of the Bicentennial – its Enlightenment antecedents as well as its performative display – root historical awareness in the rural and ancient realms of ceremony and orality.

“Reportage as Redemption” (Chapter 5) explores Gwendolyn Brooks’s *In the Mecca* as a reading of the disintegration of American civil society through the ruins of a residential apartment building on Chicago’s South Side. The Mecca Building, itself twice-mediated through articles in *Life* and *Harper’s*, signified for Brooks a social and economic as well as textual failure of white representations of black America. Read as lived – from the inside out – by its black inhabitants, the Mecca was subjectively a home; viewed as reported – from the outside in – by white dailies, planning commissions, and reporters, it was objectively a slum. Such competing textualities foregrounded for Brooks the oppositional realities of official renderings of her life in Chicago, declared by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in 1959 to be “the most residentially segregated large city in the nation” (quoted in Hampton and Fayer 1995: 298). Reports on civil unrest (in language remembered and found to be as good for a riot in 1968 as it was in 1919 or 1943), planning commission “master” plans, and mainstream journalistic accountings of her neighborhood constructed the “official” discourse that inspired the counterdiscourse of (and would serve as the intertext to) *In the Mecca*. Comprised of two sections – In the Mecca and After Mecca – the volume is both a retrospective and a prophetic accounting of an aesthetic evolution and community revolution that entails Brooks’s cooptation and insistent intertextualizing of the “master’s” ideas of order. Sequences of recognition, deployment, and dismissal typify her response to Western objectifications of religion, art, and law, as she moves to embrace a subjectifyingly redemptive force that will convert the ruins of the Mecca into a place of “Construction.”

“Kinship as History” (Chapter 6) reconsiders the contribution of African-American ancestral narratives to the news of black history. Because kinship rituals and imbedded genealogies serve as surrogate historical texts, *Generations* (1971) reports historically as well as poetically. Consideration of Sam Cornish’s decision, in the heat of the

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Black Arts Movement, to publish with the liberal Beacon Press contributes to this study's ongoing discussion of liberal agency and the black community, perhaps illuminating Cornish's subsequent omission from scholarly amendments of the Black Arts Movement (most recently, his exclusion from *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature* and Michael Harper's *Every Shut Eye Ain't Asleep*). The instability of Cornish's literary reputation serves to illustrate the simultaneous perils of repression and recovery in literary history.

"Nation-ness as Consciousness" (Chapter 7) contemplates Alice Walker's systematic deconstruction of history, personal and national. As the protagonist slips her narrative restraints, so does the novel abandon other received, totalizing narratives. Television must be countered because it insinuates an obstructive focus that frames, edits, and normalizes with its fraudulent narrative certainty. Black nationalism must be rescripted because, in its present form, it offers an inherited, violent patriarchal rhetoric that perpetuates the worst of the "master's" script. *Meridian* occasions peripheral discussions of television's corruption of the national narrative, liberalism's persistent innocence, and patriarchal privilege.

"History as Storytelling" (Chapter 8) examines what Homi Bhabha identifies as "the postcolonial passage through modernity" (1994: 253). In the words of Bhabha's paradigm, "the past [is] projective," and Jay Wright uses a similarly insistent historicism and atavistic cosmology to empower the chronotropic aesthetic of *Soothsayers and Omens*. Walter Benjamin's insight that stories are human history illuminates the potential grandeur and spectacular remove of Wright's poetic, in which he invents a simultaneous historical field in which language, culture, and nation are subsumed by the *telling* of the tale of the tribe. In his reinvention of time, space, and narrative (dependent upon his aestheticization of Dogon cosmology as incompletely apprehended by French anthropologist Marcel Griaule), Wright formulates a historical consciousness independent of nation and narration, retrieving anew the possibilities of history's literal presence.

*Writing America Black* presents more than a case for intertextual readings of African-American mass media and literature; it reveals that narrative is the basis of individual and community conceptions of national identity. The innocence and affirmation with which African-American journalists during the first decades of the century partici-

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## PREFACE

pated in efforts toward Americanization inform the sophistication and disaffection of subsequent black nationalist writers. The contingency of citizenship for black America quickens the pulse of justice in these writings that complement the nation's dominant narrative.

In lieu of the ideal though impossible goal of comprehensiveness, *Writing America Black* relies upon representative case studies from which to generalize about the structures and intentions of African-American historical narratives, and should encourage further investigation into the language of social identity and citizenship. Its theoretical and practical framework for reading, moving beyond the truism that history shapes literature, seeks ultimately to demonstrate how literature informs the national narratives that compose history. Works as distinctive as Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* (1991), Deborah McDowell's *Leaving Pipe Shop* (1996), and LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman's *Our America* (1997) attest to the ongoing role of community journalism in the formulation and transmission of ideas of race and nation and culture. Unlike the novel, which isolates its world for close examination, or television, which as Alice Walker feared becomes the "repository of memory," weekly newspapers and magazines ("pulp" and "slicks") retain the collaborative spontaneity of a unifying textual field that becomes the literature that stays news.

C.K.D.

*Peterborough, NH**July 4, 1997*



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*Writing America Black* owes its very existence to A. Walton Litz, who made possible my early work on Elizabeth Bishop and Gwendolyn Brooks, and to Sam Bass Warner, who introduced me to the drama of the American city; their sense of engagement, proportion, and passion remains a source of inspiration. The study has matured through the ongoing assistance of participants in two National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminars: Eric Sundquist's "The Problem of Race in Afro-American Literature, 1850–1930," held at the University of California at Berkeley in 1990, and Donald Pease's "Slavery, Reconstruction, and the U.S. Civil Imagination, 1845–1900," held at Dartmouth College in 1994. Veterans of those seminars have become friends and colleagues. In particular, I thank Joseph Alvarez, John C. Gruesser, Judith Lockyer, A. L. Nielsen, and Lawrence Rodgers for their comments and encouragement over the years. Ultimately my greatest debt is to Anne Bradford Warner who, during that Berkeley summer long ago, suggested that I look to my peers.

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*Writing America Black* exists because of the timely and repeated intervention of the National Endowment for the Humanities. NEH Summer Seminars at the University of California at Berkeley and Dartmouth College provided the time to research the journalistic ephemera, inspired the theoretical frame of my investigation, and, most importantly, gave me time to think. Composed during the obscure hours between extended commutes to distant and temporary classrooms, the final manuscript was assembled during the early months of an NEH Fellowship for Independent Scholars (its project a direct consequence of this study). The National Endowment's authorization of scholarship during this period of independence from employment has made it possible to imagine the peer approval essential to the success of future research.

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