

**The
BLACK
C o m m e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

October 2 , 2008 - Issue 293

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**In the City of Brotherly Love...
Represent Our Resistance
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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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Life for both sexes - and I looked at them, shouldering their way along the pavement - is arduous, difficult, a perpetual struggle. It calls for gigantic courage and strength. More than anything, perhaps, creatures of illusion as we are, it calls for confidence in oneself. Without self-confidence we are as babes in the cradle. And how can we generate this imponderable quality, which is yet so invaluable, most quickly? By thinking that other people are inferior to one self. By feeling that one has some innate superiority - it may be wealth, or rank, a straight nose, or the portrait of a grandfather by Romney - for there is no end to the pathetic devices of the human imagination - over other people.

-Virginia Woolf, [A Room of One's Own](#)

...destiny had fitted itself to him, to his innocence, his pristine aptitude for platform drama and childlike heroic simplicity...had fitted itself to the swaggering of all his gestures and the forensic verbiage in which he stated calmly, with that frank innocence which he we call 'of a child' except that a human child is the only living creature that is never either frank or innocent...

-William Faulkner, [Absalom, Absalom!](#)

I grew up in a home where family members went about work quietly. Some went out to work and others stayed home. When the ones who went out to work returned home, work on broken chair legs or door sills or electric sockets awaited them. Those who

worked at home during the day worked at knitting or sewing in the evenings.

I am at the center of this home, seated at the dining room table. In this space, there's a table for me to work. At first I am an artist with my paint kit and construction paper. Soon I am introduced to books and a diary. I read about cultures and the world. I write about myself and family. I model the adults and create a schedule for my work. Later still, I have a room where I do my homework and the work I have chosen as my vocation. Even later still, I have a room where I do my homework, my own reading and writing.

In modern times, women have considered Virginia Woolf's discourse on a woman's room, a women's space in which the woman is able to assert her intellect, to express her creativity, and to contribute her insight as a viable member of society. But most of us are confronted with a challenge Woolf didn't and couldn't foresee. Most in our society have come to believe we are living in a post-Civil Rights era in which race has been transcended and women are free to be. Of course, Blacks and women have space, *legally*.

This space is often located in an apartment building where the rent is *reasonable* - which means it is also reasonable rent for the young people and college students who form units of two or three, armed with loud large screen televisions and stereos accompanied with studio-sized speakers. Their schedule doesn't respect the divisions between night and day. Day is night and night is day. Friends come and go at all hours. The existence of other tenants doesn't concern them. For Black women, this room of one's own has been difficult to secure. These young people carry social and cultural baggage. I teach this generation of youth, and I live among them. I don't have children of my own, but I have others' children, sent to the college classroom and sent to live on their own because they have reached a certain age rather than a certain level of maturity. How often do I hear adults speak of the childlike behavior of twenty-somethings? Baby Boomers are still cuddling the six-foot baby. As a result, the generation now trained to be a collective of individuals (of mommy and daddy) knows no end to fun - at other people's expense. For middle-aged Black women, particularly those of us living alone (as in - no witnesses) and teaching part-time to supplement the work of writing, our home often reflects the nation's unresolved issues as well as generational developments meandering in American life.

Add to this generational development, another dimension.

Through the years as a cultural theorist based in the study of literature and a progressive activist and writer, I have tried to understand and acknowledge the rights of gays and lesbians. This is not to say that I haven't been offended when I have heard *white* gays and lesbians equate their oppression with that experienced by Black, Native, Latino/a, Asian, and Muslim Americans. People of color have experienced generation after generation of enslavement and exploitation. If you happened to be gay and white, this historical pattern of behavior by Euro-Americans has benefited you. No one asked the slaveholder or slave merchant to reveal his sexual orientation before purchasing an African man. A few years ago, I entered a Cellular phone store only to be rudely confronted by a young white male clerk. He wanted to know what I wanted before I could even pass through the door! A white customer sat near him at the counter. I pointed out that his behavior (apparent fear) might be because I came through the

door Black! "I'm oppressed," he said immediately. I looked at him. "I'm gay." Should I have felt relieved? Do I look that stupid?

He saw me as a Black woman, a gullible receptacle for *dishonest* narratives.

I heard a young man, confident in the social and cultural privilege, to be *white* first in order to stop and interrogate me and gay second in order to silence my experience as a Black and woman.

And now in my space, my home, I am encountering a young white man whose world (where power and authority resides) looks like him. He was in my class for at least three weeks before he made a point of "seeing me" in my apartment building lobby. He doesn't come alone (as he proclaimed). He lives with a male partner. So there lady, what do you make of this?

The Battle has always been that of *innocence* denying space for racial difference in this country. Race is the ultimate litmus test to determine rights and privileges.

It's interesting that the current "sky is falling" economic crisis that has its usual victims (Blacks, Latino/as, and white low-wage earners and homeowners) reveals the winners, the last *men* standing, jumping up and down like toddlers, demanding more clips to play on - or else - the damn sky will fall on everyone! It's safe to say that in my home, I am dealing with young inheritors of a world in which the *survivor* - the most aggressive and the most ruthless - wins. I'm dealing with the spirit of the dominant cultural narrative's response to "a room of one's own." Not on my watch!

You would think that the rhetoric of opposition to the cultural right's policies on gay culture should inform the young white men above me about the racial experiences that empowered the mantra "We shall overcome." But you would have to assume that young people (gay or straight) are taught history. That young people can distinguish the years of the U.S. Civil War versus the years of the Civil Rights Movement. This lack of knowledge is evident of a certain generational "group think" that sanctions the dismissal of reality in order to maintain a fantasy of superiority. The young and white and male and American have been taught to maintain control and power in every nook and cranny of American life. Smoke out the "bad" guys and bomb them to hell and back. It's your right! Video games and films reinforce this message of conquest-for-the-hell-of-it! The social consequence for such behavior is negligible.

They inherit the knowledge that their rights matter.

And what of my rights?

It's difficult - still - to defend in an atmosphere so empowered by ignorance and fear. I see these young men above me working to re-create the scene where the Black woman tries to explain her experience to management or police. In America, haven't we an image of this scene?

Slaveholders, like their latter day substitutes, photographed smiling and giving the thumbs-up sign near tortured Muslim men, intimidate the chosen victims in order to maintain the fantasy of racial superiority. In the New World Order, like the old, anything goes as long as white is on top. And it's so much fun, too!

It's not loud music or parties; it's the refined torment that remains steady and consistent. Let heavy objects land with a thud above her head every hour or so while she sits at her desk or after midnight when she is falling asleep. Creep about; follow her to the bathroom. It's an open house for friends during the day and night while the tenants work or attend classes or "vacation." There's no vacation for me. I operate on adrenalin and caffeine to work in the classroom and at my desk in my home. Play with her mind! She is, after all, without witnesses and *old*. Invade the space of her home with our presence.

And, of course, there's the ultimate act for my benefit, above my desk, above my bed, in the bathroom. I find it appalling for it's devil-may-care, in-your-face-, take-it-or-leave message to me.

Yet, they remember to look and to sound innocent when responding to the management or the police because it is "understood" that they are always the innocent. She is, after all, Black. Is it a surprise that the young man can inform me of what he *understands* while reminding me of my *place* in the New (Old) World Order: *I come home from work at midnight. I need to wind down. I need to play with my dogs in the hallway (a hallway that runs along the bedroom). I have my partner. I do my homework in the morning. With a look of innocence and a smile, the face will tell me what I need to understand in case I consider my education somehow an exception to the rule! Oh, don't bother talking to management, they already "understand."*

Understand what? *That the privilege, of being white men in a country that wouldn't tolerate one of their various offenses if I were the culprit, will allow them to play!*

So cooperate or else!

Perhaps these young men are responding to the right-winged and cultural hypocritical obsession with others' sexual orientation. Or perhaps they acknowledge unconsciously those same right-wingers and cultural hypocrites about Black Americans and see in me the image of Jezebel and anything-goes morals.

In the city of brotherly love, what of the many ways in which a Black woman is hindered or silenced and made to consider the margins as a permanent home?

Move! Purchase a house, old lady!

I experienced Reaganomics in the 1980's but was too busy working at community centers and at city college campuses, part time, to notice that I was on a financial treadmill, going nowhere. For several years, I was able to rent houses until 2006. Now its King George's economy and renting a house in a large city isn't an option. I have sat at my desk for hours in the evening, writing, despite the waltz of bodies and the thud of bombing attacks - furniture or who knows - bowling balls - thrown down above my head. I run water in the bathroom to provide some privacy, but the young men make sure I am aware of their presence above me. As the sole "breadwinner," making sure there's enough money for rent, phone, internet service, light, gas, and something left over to purchase food, bus tokens, paper, and ink, why should I move - again? What rights of others have I violated in my home? Why do I, in the era of the supposed end of racism and sexism, have to prove my innocence?!

All along the way to try and resolve this matter, I am told by whites who have never experienced racism that race isn't a factor. Your sex is not a factor, but "boys will be boys." Your age? No, we love old folks! Just believe in *our* innocence!

Social, cultural, and legal loopholes are filled with Black women who want a space to live in peace.

I am responsible for believing "in a new day," for holding out hope of securing a space with only my name on the lease in a country where white, wealthy, hockey mom Sarah Palin captures the attention and adulation of many. What am I to expect? (Even old Virginia herself would be appalled that I, a Black woman, would even consider the idea of having "a room of my own").

And yet - I do expect! I do expect to be treated as a human being. I do expect to have peace of mind in "a room of my own." The day I relinquish those expectations is the day I die, even if I continue to walk the earth.

Isn't this the subject of my work, the reason why I write - in order to insist that we Black Women are human?

I bare scars from this encounter already. From the vantage point of my space and my experiences, I struggle to remember that the spirit these particular young men inherit is that same spirit I challenge as a Black woman. They are not representative of all white gay men or the gay and lesbian culture as a whole. But it's a difficult struggle in that I have to remember that fear and hatred has always been in existence in the U.S. before these two men and their friends. My Ancestors knew this spirit of fear and hatred.

As for management, it's a business and its business is to fill up apartments. It needs renters. Over five hundred apartments comprise these two towers where most are workers and respectable people. Of course, in a complex this large, people who have little regard for others slip in. I have talked with several unhappy residents, and there's plenty to be unhappy about with elevators in need of repair and a laundry room with plenty of broken washer and dryers. I give them credit for being available and working to improve conditions in this apartment complex.

The property manager is also young and white. When I described what seems to be a "flop house" atmosphere above me, with friends coming and going, and how I am concerned about my safety, his reply was telling: the ex-student and co-renter seems so "innocent." Yes, there's that innocence! And here it is again: my attempts to notify the property manager of incidents of disturbance, particularly at all hours of the night, this record (notes maintained by security) has landed in the trash can! What is the message - that the young and white can do as they wish with impunity?

Most apartment managerial personnel and the city police don't live in apartments. They haven't had to live in apartments (non-condo or high-rent complexes) in the last few years where the young people consist of those who believe they are escaping the world of adults and responsibility. And, of course, racism, sexism, ageism, ignorance is not the problem. Then what else is it?

Management wants "peace."

I want peace of mind. I want a return of my privacy in my home.

"Life is... arduous, difficult, and a perpetual struggle" and the more so if you as a woman try to manage it alone.


But I am in the dining room, at the center of my home...


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The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog](#)

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, Lenore Jean Daniels, PhD, has been a writer, for over thirty years of commentary, resistance criticism and cultural theory, and short stories with a Marxist sensibility to the impact of cultural narrative violence and its antithesis, resistance narratives. With entrenched dedication to justice and equality, she has served as a coordinator of student and community resistance projects that encourage the Black Feminist idea of an equalitarian community and facilitator of student-teacher communities behind the walls of academia for the last twenty years. Dr. Daniels holds a PhD in Modern American Literatures, with a specialty in Cultural Theory (race, gender, class narratives) from Loyola University, Chicago. Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Daniels.

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