OF LOVE AND LIBERATION: A REVIEW OF *BREAKING BREAD*

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The label "Black intellectual" may be either oxymoronic or redundant, depending on the content one ascribes to the term and the historic context in which it is situated.

The unmodified intellectual, the white intellectual, has historically inhabited a narrow cell within society's matrix. We generally cannot distill him (the gender male is also usually attributed absent specification) from our vision of the academic.[1] Thus we identify the intellectual with ivy and Gothic imagery and all the tragedy and romanticism of isolation associated therein. He occupies a space among our society's elites, grudgingly welcomed to take his seat at the table beside the bankers and lawyers, the politicians and businessmen. His ideas are expected to be provocative rather than applicable, esoteric rather than accessible.

Once modified as Black, the icon "intellectual" blurs.

The work of many "Black intellectuals"—producing scholarship of relevance to communities of color, often attempting to remain accessible to the semi-literate and nonliterate majority of Americans—does not match our initial vision of activity by the "unmodified intellectual." The racial modifier "Black" produces an image counter to our initial one.[2] Even if confused, we incline not to reevaluate the content we initially ascribed to the word "intellectual." Rather, we find a new label for the enterprise of the Black thinkers, and thus leave them unreferenced by the supposedly neutral "intellectual."[3]

However, if we view our icon in a slightly different light, we may perceive that to call someone Black and

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1. Academicism and intellectualism are, of course, two distinct things. Intellectualism is a way of approaching one's life and the world, in a critically engaged and thoughtful way. Academicism refers to the project of teaching, and usually writing, within an institutional context. Not all academics embrace intellectual activity (it is not rare to hear academics condemn a colleague as "too intellectual"), and many intellectuals are not academics. bell hooks and Cornel West discuss this phenomenon in BREAKING BREAD, 28-29 (1991) [hereinafter cited by page number only].

Moreover, there is a profound strain of anti-intellectualism in American culture, somewhat paradoxical in light of the economic market's professed valuation of higher degrees, seemingly associated with the process of learning and being intellectual. *See, e.g.*, RICHARD HOFSTADTER, ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN AMERICAN LIFE (1963); M.P. ROGIN, THE INTELLECTUALS AND MCCARTHY (1967). I thank Donna Hughes-Oldenburg for recommending these books.

2. The problems of deracination and assumption of whiteness (and maleness and certain other forms of privilege) as the norm have been taken up in much recent literature on essentialism. *See, e.g.*, ELIZABETH SPELMAN, INESSENTIAL WOMAN (1988) (certain racial and class characteristics are the assumed norm in discourse about gender); Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*, 1989 U. CHI. LEGAL F. 139 (effects of assumed, unarticulated standards on legal doctrine); Angela P. Harris, *Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory*, 42 STAN. L. REV. 581 (1990) (pervasiveness of essentialism in legal feminist writing). However, at least two authors have recognized some of the dangers of the anti-essentialism critique, taken to its most logical conclusion. They have moved to what I call post-essentialism, a methodology and positioning which acknowledges the dangers of universalizing, but also underscores the need to speak of oppression in its multiple forms. *See* Catharine A. MacKinnon, *From Feminist Practice to Theory, or What Is a White Woman Anyway?*, 4 YALE J.L. & FEMINISM 13 (1991) (Professor MacKinnon's article should be read within the context of a larger academic and feminist debate about anti-essentialism and relationships between white women and women of color. In the piece, she rejects constructions of white womanhood. Many feminists (white and non-white) have objected to her characterization, presentation, and seeming dismissal of critiques by women of color feminists and there will soon be many replies. However, MacKinnon's central point, that gender oppression affects all women albeit manifest in varying forms and to vastly varying degrees, should not be missed.) *see also*, Mari J. Matsuda, *Pragmatism Modified and the False Consciousness Problem*, 63 S. CAL. L. REV. 1763 (1990).

Before essentialism had a name, bell hooks, and a number of other women of color theorists, described this phenomenon. *See, e.g.*, BELL HOOKS, AIN'T I A WOMAN? (1981); BELL HOOKS, FEMINIST THEORY FROM MARGIN TO CENTER (1984); BELL HOOKS, TALKING BACK (1989); BELL HOOKS, YEARNING (1990); ALL THE WOMEN ARE WHITE, ALL THE BLACKS ARE MEN, BUT SOME OF US ARE BRAVE (Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott & Barbara Smith eds., 1982).

3. I am reminded of a teaching interview I had with a prestigious law school. I made many faux-pas, but what stands out most strongly in my mind is the way the interviewing committee became cold and indifferent after I described (now-Congresswoman) Eleanor Holmes Norton as a role model. I told them how I wanted to teach, write, work in the community or in politics, and bring the experience of each endeavor to bear on the others. I was perplexed by the shift in the atmosphere upon saying this. I was enlightened later by a female member of the committee who advised me to keep my non-academic aspirations to myself if I wanted to teach at an elite school. Eleanor was great, but not welcome there. Neither was her work. Neither were the people for whom she did her work. Neither, clearly, was I.

intellectual may be to restate the same fundamental approach to the world.

Systemic oppression is institutionalized economic, political, psychic, or physical subordination implemented on the basis of, and often rationalized by, the mere presence of a characteristic shared by the targeted group.[4] In Western culture, there are a number of interlocking systems that subjugate people, usually based on immutable characteristics.[5] For every group subjugated, at least one group is privileged; yet the dynamics of these systems are such that the privileging itself becomes unseeable.[6] For the subordinated, however, our stigmatized characteristic(s) dictate an on-going engagement at the crux of the juxtaposition, an engagement constantly exploring and examining the paradox of nonness (nonwhiteness, nonmaleness, nonChristian, etc.). We are locked in a ceaseless struggle over the power to define and categorize.[7]

Breaking Bread focuses our gaze upon the icon of the intellectual yet again. The dialogue between hooks and West functions as a prism, casting a discerning light through the seemingly narrow image of the intellectual and enabling us to see that the term does include within it those who bring a critical world view and a commitment to oppressed communities.

Brilliant critics of pop culture themselves, hooks and West eschew traditional academic artistic elitism: in their search for oppositional content, they obliterate the established hierarchies of artistic form. They note that artists concerned with accessibility will employ styles and make choices of media long considered unworthy of academic criticism. Penetrating, visionary messages will come in multiple, unorthodox forms from those sensitive to the manifold levels of literacy in our society.[8] We cannot dismiss or demean these decisions; the unorthodoxy may be working toward the subversive purpose of engaging the audience as subjects.[9] We must support through our willingness to recognize them, those artists committed to creating and implementing forms of communication predicated on reconceptualizing liberation for a postintegrationist, postindustrial, and increasingly postmodern Black community.

hooks and West embody a rarity in our historic moment: theorists willing to inhabit the ugly terrain of postindustrial capitalism. They have embarked upon a tripartite project of theory, practice, and love that leads me to label them postmodern liberation theorists. They prompt us to see that the act of enlivened and enlightened critical conversation assists in building a mentality of resistance. They remind us of the central role of popular culture in producing dialogues, antecedent to crystallized ideas, about liberation. They illuminate the destructiveness of an uncritical embrace of liberal capitalism, vividly revealing the addictive practices in which Blacks of all classes are absorbed. And they demonstrate through loving and affirming dialectic engagement the way back to spiritual community and the fight against subordination.

I.

One of the most emancipatory messages in *Breaking Bread* comes not from the printed words, but from the act creating the book's structure. hooks and West publish *Breaking Bread* in a series of dialogues and interviews, exploding our traditional images of the alienated, lonely theoretician.[10] They thoroughly debunk this pervasive and dangerous myth of the intellectual as a solitary, asocial intellectual, isolated from community.[11] I label this mythology dangerous because adherence to it creates vast schisms between those dedicated to the life of the mind and others interested in establishing communities of resistance. As history instructs, the creation of ideas is a prerequisite for effective liberatory practices. In structure and form, the co-authors prove and lovingly affirm the value of community in intellectual life, and in Black life more generally.

Intra-academy conventions require much of the isolated activity associated with traditional images of intellectualism. These conventions privilege written texts over oral ones. The many hours someone in the academy spends talking (over coffee, in offices, informally at conferences) have no value if not transformed into the

4. Although hooks and West speak specifically about the experience of Black people in this nation, they both understand oppression as something far broader, which implicates imperialism and class subordination. Their critique of the role of the intellectual in the Black American community has much to offer intellectuals within other subordinated communities, inside and outside of the United States.

5. *See infra* notes 17, 35 and accompanying text.

6. Crenshaw, *supra* note 2, at 150-51. The process by which this simultaneous privileging and erasure take place is taken up in a larger work-in-progress I am coauthoring with Trina Grillo and Stephanie Wildman. We explore the dynamics underlying the current debates about intersectionality, *see* Crenshaw, *supra* note 2, and essentialism, SPELMAN, *supra* note 2, and Harris, *supra* note 2. Adrienne D. Davis, Trina Grillo & Stephanie M. Wildman, Intersections: Categories and Koosh Balls: Rendering Privilege Visible and Other Subversive Practices (September 14, 1992) (work-in-progress, on file with author).

7. P. 38 (noting current Black academic capitulation to white conceptions of Blackness); *see also supra* note 6.

8. *See infra* note 26 and accompanying text.

9. I am aware this word has somewhat of a taboo quality in postmodern discourse. Still, I do not think the concept of "subjecthood" and its relationship to "object" can be excised from the lexicon of liberation just yet. The subject/object distinction, while theoretically passé, still describes a very real distinction between those who are privileged, and those who are subjugated, those who participate in discourse, and those who are discussed. It is indeed a fluid concept: one who is a subject in one arena may be very much an object in another (a white woman, for instance). I, like hooks and West, think it is not for the privileged to reject such a concept as "subject." *See infra* text accompanying notes 16-17.

10. The last two pieces in the book are in solo, essay form. These are the weakest portions of the book, not for lack of insight, but rather because much of the book's energy and insight derives from the reader's captivation by the interplay of these two voices, providing constant perspectival shifts. In comparison to the dialogic material, the essays seem asynchronous and somewhat cursory.

11. *See supra* text accompanying note 9; *infra* notes 18-21 and accompanying text.

expected written format. Rarely are these critical conversations documented in the written work, apart from the standard thank-you's. We are a part of a scholarly market in which rewards are given based on individual worth; hiring and promotion are rarely done on a group or "team" basis. Adhering to academic dictates, particularly for non-scientist theoreticians, means working alone.

hooks and West note academic communities need not be the sole judges of theoretical production. Non-academic intellectuals as well as the people *being written about* are also potential readers of our work. Expanding our audiences in this way suggests the possibility for alternative scholarly and intellectual methods and presentation.

The book establishes its dialogic foundations from the beginning: the authors introduce each other and discuss the significance of their decision to co-write in this particular dialectic form. Many academics who co-author books write through "one" voice,[12] but hooks and West talk *to* each other as distinct voices. To read *Breaking Bread* is to witness the rich, personal process of the creation of theory. As they discuss their ideas about living a responsible and enriched life, we see the best of their cultural criticism, neomarxism, and feminism, which they bring to bear on the dilemmas facing the Black community. As they interview each other, we see each embrace the role of enabler to provide the other with structured, supportive, yet critically engaged space in which to grow.

Ultimately, we see a Black man and Black woman totally absorbed in each other as worthwhile subjects. In today's Black world, we cannot underestimate the need for the creation of positive imagery of the Black community, particularly in the area of gender relationships. Media images, produced by Black and white interests, have portrayed the Black community as wasted by the erosion of patriarchal values.[13] hooks and West note that much of popular culture depicts Black men and women at each other's throats.[14] Although there are certainly negative media depictions of white Americans, these depictions are counterbalanced by an array of other images; in effect, negative and positive images of whiteness are everywhere. However, images of Blackness are rarer and each, having little competition, strikes us with greater force.[15] *Breaking Bread*, of course, can never compete with the popular visual media; no scholarly work, or written work for that matter, could in our current social context. Still, watching the hooks/West collaboration proves refreshing and reminds those of us who vacillate between multiple media that these depictions often present distorted reflections of reality. Reminding us our praxis need not be limited by existing popular scholarship and culture, *Breaking Bread* issues a call to intellectuals to begin a redefinition of our common endeavor, effort, and end.

II.

Sharing the word: that which is most one's own.[16] At the beginning of her dialogue with West, hooks inscribes the power of their act. In case anyone misses the significance of their colloquy, hooks specifies the centricity of oratory and discussion for subordinated peoples. Subordination is predicated in part on discursive practices which prevent the articulation of dissident voices within structured spaces. A core element of systemic subordination is that the social structure itself does not allow dissident voices to speak or be heard. The act of summoning all of one's pieces into a being coherent enough to sustain the expression of a thought, the act of speech, is itself an act of dissidence. When one dares more, dares to approach and speak to another as a human subject, this explosion of oneself as other-defined is the genesis of real resistance.

hooks challenges other critical theorists, namely marxists and feminists, and in doing so exposes an unwitting elitism that pervades much of both ideologies as currently practiced. In marxism and feminism, labor and sexuality respectively (but not exclusively) are at the

12. I certainly am not trying to diminish the project of attempting to co-write in one voice. Reginald Robinson commented that for two people, writing as one voice may mean a sort of violence or silencing is done to one (or both) voice(s) for the sake of univocality. This is a significant point. Yet, I have co-written one piece and am in the process of doing another; my colleagues and I have noted that our collective writing is richer, precisely because of this struggle to meld and yet not overwhelm. As we sit together, talking through ideas or editing at the computer, we find that our individual voices build on one another, much in the oral tradition of the Black church which utilizes call and response to include all members of the congregation in the process of creating and learning the text. hooks and West repeatedly discuss the impact of the church tradition on Black intellectual activity, emphasizing its legacy. Pp. 1-4, 30, 51-52 & 106.

Creating a truly singular voice out of multiple ones is a personally enriching process, not unlike the creation of single structures in agrarian life (quilting, barnraising, etc) in which each individual's effort is distinct, and yet blends into and enhances the whole.

13. hooks and West question our community's desperate quest to "regain" patriarchal family structures, even as white people recognize the need for more egalitarian partnerships to survive economically. Pp. 103-05.

I was heartened to see a move away from this ideal in the recent movie *White Men Can't Jump*. Although there was much negative imagery in the movie, it attempted to portray a loving Black, working-class couple, living without pathology and violence. At the end of the movie, Wesley Snipes, playing a construction contractor and sometime basketball hustler, realizes that for him and his wife to "make it," he will have to allow her to get a job. The couple progresses to an understanding: if their mutual futures are to be secure, they must operate as partners, rejecting outmoded, traditional notions of marriage and gender relationships.

14. In the past year alone (1991-92), demeaning representations of Black women and, more broadly, Black gender relationships have flooded the media. Consider the imaging of African-American women and our relationship to African-American men in cross-over rap music, the Mike Tyson trial, the Hill-Thomas hearings, television shows such as *In Living Color*, and Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever*. The role of white audiences in popularizing, and entrenching through their consumption, these types of images of our community should not be overlooked.

hooks and West discuss gender relationships in the Black community at pp. 3, 9, 56-57, 95-96, 98, 102, 106-07 & 114-29.

15. On the production and consumption of Blackness as a commodity, see *infra* note 40 and accompanying text.

16. P. 2.

core of repressive practices against which we must struggle. By definition, theoretical and activist followers of these methodologies have predefined the source of exploitation. However, in redirecting our attention to speech, hooks focuses our view on the production of dialogue, *through which* oppression is named and defined, and the terms of struggle are set. Those who cannot speak, who have been taught not to speak, cannot then participate in this crucial definitional process.

We then notice a pervasive silence in communities where people are without the language to describe their circumstances. They accept other people's definitions of the meaning of oppression; their ability to define for themselves the meaning of liberation is thus circumscribed.

Feminism and marxism are both predicated on a group's ability to recognize and name gender and class oppressions for what they are.[17] Without this first step of envisioning their subordination, oppressed peoples cannot reach the goal of revisioning their oppression into liberation. hooks and West compel us to realize the most effective methodology will be the one that gives people the tools to name their oppression, and enables others to hear what they call it.

Clearly, one of the most immediate and crucial tasks for the Black intellectual is to facilitate the empowerment of people to join the liberatory project, including the precedent act of participating in this naming process. The Black intellectual's task is to use theory to give us a way of understanding our collective and individual tragedies, beyond the pure emotional feeling of them.[18] From this understanding, we can proceed to revision liberation.

Frequently in Black (and other oppressed) communities a tendency exists to trash theory as unhelpful, inaccessible, and ultimately irrelevant. In some ways, this disparagement of theory functions as a tool of empowerment for communities to define their own project; but it assumes that the process of liberation can proceed without a goal and a defensible strategy, which must emerge from sustained community debate. West reminds us, "ideas are forms of power." Without historic memory,[19] we forget that most of our revered freedom fighters were also deeply intellectual, spending their lives building movements around carefully constructed ideas.[20] Both authors warn of the danger of appropriating past liberatory strategies without incorporating an understanding of the particular historic or global context in which they were situated.[21] If we approach the project of liberation without crafting a profound critique of the world around us, we are bound to replicate past flaws—and subjugations.

To this end, hooks and West are troubled by the current wave of Black neonationalism, wherein new converts adopt 1920s and 1960s icons and ideas without understanding the context in which they evolved.[22] Nationalism has come to be symbolized almost solely by an angry, pre-Mecca image of Malcolm X, which allows neonationalists to fall prey to the errors earlier nationalists, including Malcolm, worked through.[23] We must expand our conception of Black politics of independence beyond Malcolm X's early rhetoric, and indeed, beyond Malcolm himself. We cannot import 1960s political theory into the 1990s without critically exploring the changes in our global situation.

Finally, hooks and West urge us to recognize and appreciate articulation of the word in its myriad forms. They remind us that verbal engagement with another individual in critically supportive communication occurs most frequently in nonwritten texts.[24] American culture is increasingly iconographic, preferring symbolic and filmic images rather than printed words. These icons are coded with a meaning so compact and yet singular that there are multinational communities which understand them. Around these icons has been created "a global semiculture," a "single cultural zone" in which a large portion of the *world* is literate in the "cultural fast food" of American popular entertainment.[25] If our concern is to encourage the production of progressive, reconstructive imagery, then we must refocus our critical gaze to include the "lower" yet "hot" media.

Thus, hooks and West caution the self-designated intellectual against traditional artistic elitism, and they do not limit their own critiques, in typical academic fashion, to "high" culture. hooks and West define as relevant and deserving of attention anything and everything that affects the orientation and self-conceptualization of our communities. In one dialogue, they discuss articles from popular and "literary" magazines; artistic European and commercial American filmmakers; popular television shows; books authored by popular writers and academicians; political leaders and pundits; religious leaders; stand-up comics; jazz musicians; and modern day blues balladeers. What do all these things have in common? Each produces imagery which is potentially emancipatory (or damaging) in its content.[26]

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17. The inability to locate one form of oppression within a broader context of interlocking and synergistic systems of subordination has frustrated progressive movement. Communities of color tend to be race-centric, privileged white feminist communities tend to be gender-centric, and the recognition of class as an issue frequently is embedded in racist and sexist rhetoric. Thus, the unification of all subordinated people against the interdependent ideologies of capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy (including homophobia), and imperialism is prevented. hooks and West discuss the narrow focus of the Black community, in particular, on race to the exclusion of other subordinating dynamics within that community at pp. 29-30, 43-44 & 48-49.

18. P. 34.

19. hooks and West call this type of memory "subversive." P. 58.

20. West includes himself within this tradition of "intellectual freedom fighters." P. 27.

21. P. 48.

22. Pp. 46-47, 93-94.

23. P. 94.

24. P. 62.

25. Todd Gitlin, *World Leaders: Mickey, et al.*, N.Y. TIMES, May 3, 1992, § 2, at 1; *see also* pp. 37-38.

26. P. 45. Thus, by refusing to draw distinctions between academic criticism and the films of Spike Lee, they achieve their own goal of not privileging form over content. They send us a

With an incisive sweep, hooks and West categorize progressive works into two forms: thin and thick oppositional art. In response to hooks' question as to whether Black culture radicalizes white American culture, West says:

> It is oppositional, but there are different levels of opposition. . . . Thin opposition is a critique of American society that does not talk about the need for a redistribution of wealth, resources, and power. Thick opposition is an attempt to call into question the prevailing maldistribution of wealth in this society. . . . When you get something like reggae and rap, culturally they function in a thin oppositional mode. They make gestures towards thick opposition—redistribution of wealth, but there is no translation of reggae or rap into a political movement.[27]

Having illustrated the need for more intense artistic critique and depictions of resistance, the authors subsequently envision the potentially pivotal role of committed cultural workers in liberation movements.[28] In focusing on the need for simultaneous "grassroots and televisual" movements, they again direct us to the importance of producing oppositional imagery through enlightened artistic practices.[29]

III.

Most fundamentally, *Breaking Bread* is about our collective recovery. hooks and West issue a powerful exhortation for all communities, not just Black ones, to recover our rapidly fading spiritual interconnection, to revision what it means to be alive and potentially free.

The book opens with a substantive and formal invocation of the metaphor of communion:

> [A] spirit of testimony is a very hard spirit to convey in written text, so when I think about you and me actually doing more dialogues together. . .it struck me that dialogue was one of the ways where that sense of mutual witness and testimony could be made manifest. I link that sense to regular communion service. . .where we would often stand in a collective circle and sing. . . . I liked the combination of the notion of community which is about sharing and breaking bread together, of dialogue as well as mercy because mercy speaks to the need we have for compassion, acceptance, understanding, and empathy.[30]

This serves as a crystalline message that our fates as individuals lie in our collective future.[31] One of the initial projects in fighting subjugation is to transcend the exaltation of the individual and of "privatism"[32] which pervades Western, particularly American, culture.

hooks and West conduct a powerful neomarxist critique of the effects on Black Americans of capitalism as an economic practice and classical liberal theory as a political ideology. The adoption of the economics of capitalism and the politics of liberalism has had a devastating impact on many Black neighborhoods, transforming them into "wasteland[s] and combat zone[s]" brought about by despairing, desperate nihilism.[33]

The embrace of capitalism dulls, indeed empties, our ability to be critical of capitalism's interlocking systems of patriarchy and white supremacy and imperialism. Thus, we find that once capitalism is accepted as the appropriate economic *and ideological* form, participation in it will also mean an embrace of commodification as a principle: judging things by their monetary value. This has created a tendency in our society to view as "objects" that which can be sold for profit. Thus we find commodification of sex, and a corresponding monetary valuation, and human *devaluation*, of women.[34]

Patriarchy and capitalism and white supremacy are predicated on this objectifying and devaluing dynamic. Within our community, attempting to reject white supremacy yet tolerate classism and actually emulate patriarchy has failed as a strategy. Paradoxically, many of us have come to equate our own agency with our ability to subordinate others.[35] All too often, these others are members of the Black community as well.

Liberalism exalts the cult of the individual; capitalism judges his worth through his market value. It is not, however, capitalism itself that creates the problem; it is the obsession with the individual. We frequently speak of Black people as poor, or not privileged, and thus lacking power in market terms. What we lose sight of is our collective control over billions of dollars, empowering us as a *community*, if not as individuals. As West says:

> We are enacting more and more a paradigm of market morality in which one understands oneself as living to consume, which in turn creates a market culture where one's communal and political identity is shaped by the adoration and cultivation of images, celebrityhood, and visibility as opposed to character, discipline, substantive struggle.[36]

We equate life and sensibility with physical stimulation.

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message that all art (and artists) are worthy of our attention and criticism.

27. Pp. 39, 40.

28. In their own previous work, hooks and West have both been instrumental in helping Black scholars to create counterimagery of what it means to be an intellectual. They repeatedly demonstrate that the philosophical ponderings of Black men and women, the critical eye turned to the anecdotal experience—this is scholarship, and indeed, this is theory. *See supra* notes 8-9 and accompanying text.

29. P. 106.

30. Pp. 2-3.

31. P. 9.

32. P. 14.

33. P. 54, 107.

34. Once viewed as economically accessible, women come to be seen as *objects* — objects of male desire. *See, e.g.*, Adrienne D. Davis & Stephanie M. Wildman, *The Legacy of Doubt: Treatment of Sex and Race in the Hill-Thomas Hearings*, 65 S. CAL. L. REV. 1367, 1371-75 (1992).

35. P. 95.

36. P. 95.

The one who is most stimulated is most alive.[37] West notes:

> A market culture will promote and promulgate an addiction to stimulation, it will put forward the view that, in order to be alive, one needs stimulation and he/she who is most alive is the person who is most stimulated. You see bodily stimulation projected through the marketing of sexuality, the marketing of sexual stimulation as the major means by which we construct desire. Along with market forces there has also been a certain collapse of structures of meaning and structures of feeling, reinforcing the sense that the meaning of life resides only in what you produce. But what you conceptualize yourself being able to produce is being shaped by market forces, namely through forms of stimulation.[38]

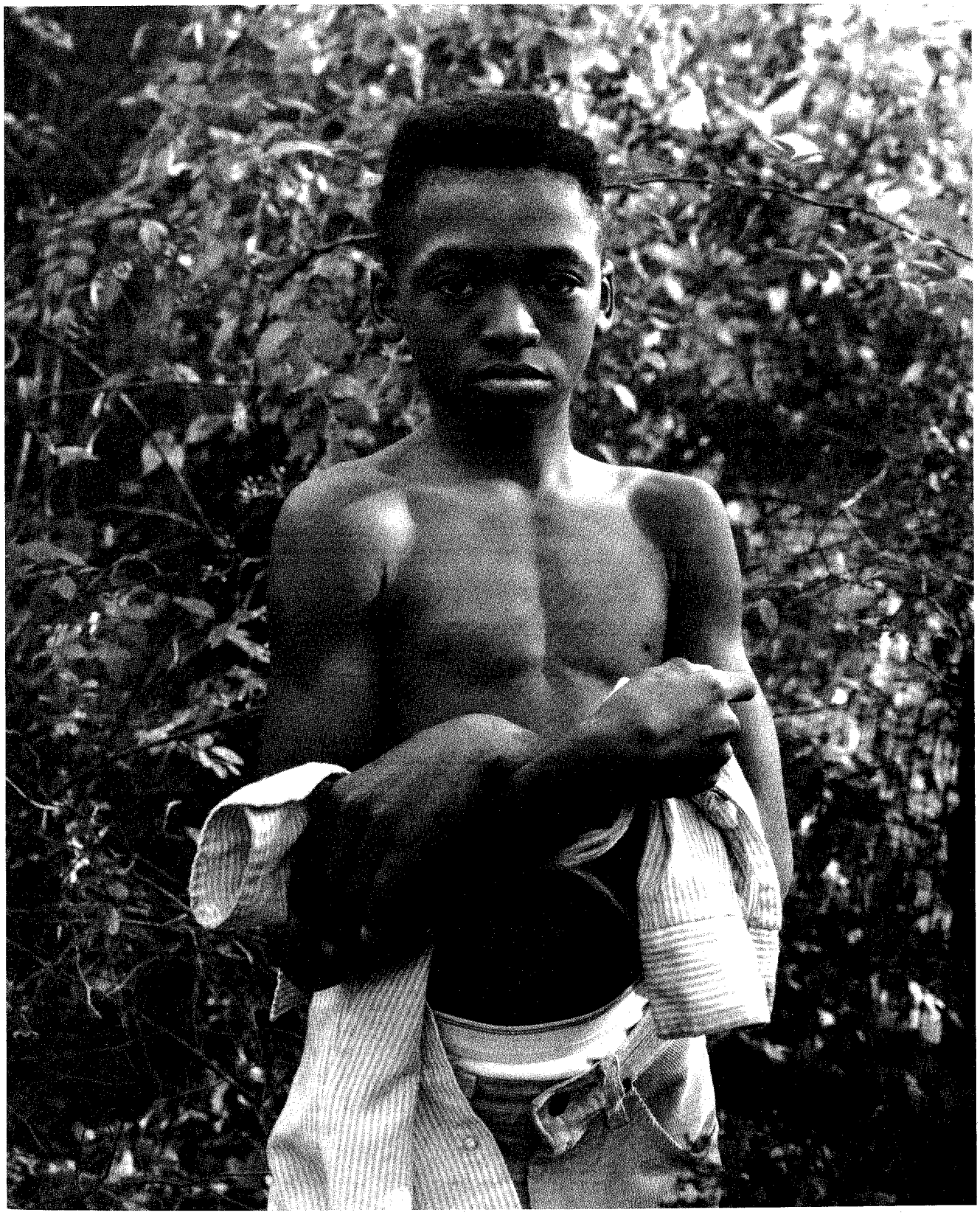
Thus our self-conceptualization is stunted by our participation in a Western cult of consumption and self-commodification, cutting clearly across class lines. hooks and West expose the fallacy of the popular myth that pathology and suffering in Western culture are limited to the poor, noting the many forms addictive practice take in the Black (and nonBlack) economically privileged classes. Alienation, fear of success, erosion of an ethic of service: all these confront the postmodern, postindustrial, postintegrationist Black community. They note that disconnectedness, aloneness, confusion, lead all of us to consume more, stimulate ourselves more, in search of release from the pain of the void. We have lost a critical "moment of accountability," regularly encountered in predominantly Black institutions such as the church, fraternal orders, and predominantly Black colleges. At that moment, Black people were encouraged to recognize that "Black privilege is a result of Black struggle," creating responsibility commensurate with that privileging.[39] Now, the Black economically privileged classes increasingly see themselves as a community apart, exempt from obligation beyond their self-defined community of relevance.

Black people thus have a double-pronged concern. First, we must be aware of addictive practices in our community: the consumption of goods to alleviate our pain. These practices lead to sanctioning individual consumption over collective enrichment, which may at times depend on individual sacrifice. Second, we must be ever vigilant of being consumed ourselves. There is a vast and lucrative market in the consumption of Blackness. hooks and West marvel at the ways in which Black bodies are simultaneously commodified and despised: an economic benefit redounds to the person who markets Blackness (our fashion and music); yet the person who *is* Black still feels despised. Only under liberal capitalism can Blackness be detached, commodified, and marketed in this way.[40]

IV.

For a variety of reasons, some rooted in academic norms and some in societal expectations, *Breaking Bread* startles its reader. Those familiar with hooks and West's previous works expect a sustained, self-reflective and inwardly focused critique; the authors instead present a series of interchanges, dialogues, combined recipes and thoughts on the current crises in Western civilization. And like a joint recipe, *Breaking Bread* combines the best of two progressive, critical thinkers, deconstructing outmoded icons and reminding us of the responsibility of intellectuals to remain grounded in people's actual experiences. They recreate in written, academic form, the praxis of liberatory communities which derives from collective effort and endeavor and which leaves us with a workable, liveable model for intellectual engagement.[41]

37. P. 95.
38. P. 95-96, *see also* p. 84 (commodification of gender).
39. Pp. 15, 16.
40. Pp. 87, 89.
41. P. 109.



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