

13. "Oh, What I Think I Must Tell This World!"  
*Oratory and Public Address of African-American Women*

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✎ Lorraine Hansberry<sup>1</sup> wrote the words that form the first part of the title of this chapter while preparing the manuscript that would become the 1959 hit Broadway drama *A Raisin in the Sun*. In that play Hansberry sought to depict African Americans who possessed, she stated, "the essence of human dignity." In the historical context in which Hansberry lived no African-American woman had ever had a drama produced on Broadway. In fact, very few dramas by African Americans had appeared on the Broadway stage, and when they did the shows were often butchered for the consumption of White audiences as in the case of Langston Hughes's 1935 drama *Mulatto*.<sup>2</sup> African Americans were more often seen on Broadway in the musical revue or in stereotypical roles of servants—formulas that would not offend White patrons.

To tell the world that Africans Americans possessed "the essence of human dignity" within the context of a financially and critically successful drama was a remarkable feat, which Hansberry accomplished with aplomb.<sup>3</sup> More to the point of this chapter, Hansberry's musings about *A Raisin in the Sun* as expressed in her query, "Oh, what I think I must tell this world," reveals an intention on her part to speak to the world via the form of drama, and, in this sense, Hansberry's work can be considered a public address. Drama, however, is not the discursive form studied most often by critics of public address. Usually, public address is confined to studies of oratory. In this chapter I discuss the public address and oratory of African-American women. First, I present an historical overview of African-American women's oratory and I focus primarily on African-American women's struggle to gain access to the masculine-defined space of the speaker's platform. Second, I discuss the paucity of texts by African-American women as a central problematic for the study of their oratory. Third, I argue for enlarging

the scope of public address so that it includes forms other than oratory. The study of oratory tends to produce studies of leadership, which invariably excludes ordinary women. I use naming practices as an example of enlarging the study of public address and creating a more inclusive discipline.

### The Struggle for the Speaker's Platform

African-American women along with White women entered the speaking platform in the early 19th century. One critic has dubbed them "pioneer women" because they were the first to enter the male terrain of the speaker's platform.<sup>4</sup> But before discussing African-American women on the speaker's platform, it is necessary to give background about the importance of public speaking in 19th-century America.

It is difficult for many to imagine the prominence that public speaking held in the 19th century, but it was a major form in both politics and mass entertainment. In politics, oratory became widespread as Jacksonian democracy removed property as a criterion for male suffrage, which ironically expanded the vote among White men but removed Black men from the electorate. The importance of oratory in politics is superbly documented in Robert Gunderson's *The Log Cabin Campaign*, a study of the efforts of the Whigs to capture the 1836 election from the Jacksonian Democrats. Those efforts included feats such as the South Carolina politician and linguist Hugh Swinton Legare teaching himself the patois spoken in the Western states, donning leather and a coonskin cap, and taking to the stump (literally, a tree stump in a clearing in the woods) in order to address White male frontiersmen.

Outside of electoral politics, oratory became a central means of advancing the causes of the numerous reform movements that characterized the antebellum United States. Reforms of every kind conceivable at the time, sponsored in earlier years by individuals, "evolved into well-organized movements for peace, communistic experimentation, care of the poor and of the insane, temperance, universal equality and suffrage, and free inquiry."<sup>5</sup> Blacks, especially, had opportunities in antislavery societies. John A. Collins, an agent of the American Anti-Slavery Society, stated in the *Liberator* in 1842 that "the public have itching ears to hear a colored man speak, and particularly a *slave*."<sup>6</sup>

In the arena of entertainment, "Oratory filled the ears of the city as resonantly as the church bells on Sunday."<sup>7</sup> The subject matter of this oratory was quite broad. For example, Doris Yoakam noted that, "During the 1852 lecturing season alone, New Yorkers might listen to at least thirteen different courses of lectures, ranging from those of Professor Adolphus L. Koeppen, 'of Kentucky Cave memory,' and of Mrs. E. Oakes Smith on women, down to the 'Polyglot Lectures' in Italian, Spanish, French and German."<sup>8</sup> Lecture halls, usually associ-

ated with the Lyceum Movement, were a nearly universal phenomenon. The Lyceum Movement had as its purpose the diffusion of knowledge, the promotion of schools, the creation of libraries, and the establishment of lecture halls.<sup>9</sup> By 1835 there were more than 3,000 Lyceums in 15 states, and by 1840 they were found even at the edges of the frontier, as far west as Iowa and Minnesota.<sup>10</sup>

Lecturing was also quite lucrative. Mark Twain remarks that some lecturers charged as much as \$250 when they spoke in towns and \$400 when they spoke in cities.<sup>11</sup> With fees such as those mentioned by Twain, lecturing could become a career choice that, in the case of women, could provide a means of independence. Lucy Stone, for example, taught school for 9 years while saving funds to enter Oberlin College in order to become a professional speaker.<sup>12</sup>

Oratory was a phenomenon, thus, popular on the frontier and in the city. It could be financially rewarding, and it was a major form in politics, in the many organized reform movements, and in entertainment. Despite its widespread popularity, women were generally not allowed to speak publicly in the United States. By the 1830s, however, the speaker's platform had become a site of struggle and contestation because women wanted access to it. African Americans were instrumental in women gaining access to the platform.

An African American was the first woman to speak before a "promiscuous audience," that is, one composed of men and women, and leave extant copies of her text.<sup>13</sup> In September 1832, in Boston, Maria W. Stewart mounted a lecture platform and spoke out against the colonization movement, a controversial plan endorsed by many prominent Whites (such as Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe) to expatriate free and freed Blacks to West Africa. Her public career spanned barely 3 years—from 1831 to 1834—but she left four extant public lectures that were published in *The Liberator*.<sup>14</sup> In those four addresses, Stewart moves from protégé of David Walker, who had published the incendiary antislavery 1829 pamphlet *David Walker's Appeal*, to proto-feminist. Walker's influence on Stewart can be seen in several recurring themes in her speeches, notably, deep religiosity, that education would help Blacks reverse their fortunes in this country, that American slavery was the most vicious form of bondage known to history, and that Blacks had a great past in Egypt. By the time of her farewell address in 1834, however, Stewart had surpassed Walker and was "urging women to strike out on their own, pursuing education as a means of fulfilling their individual and collective destinies," states Marilyn Richardson in her superbly edited collection of Stewart's works.<sup>15</sup>

Stewart's entry to the platform was not easy. Like other 19th-century women, Stewart's public activities were greatly constrained by restrictive gender expectations for women. A public activity such as speaking, according to one historian, "was outside a mystic geometrical entity called 'women's sphere.'" <sup>16</sup> Because of custom, religion, and law,

many politically active women closely adhered to the "women's sphere" ideal, according to Lillian O'Connor. Mary Lyons, in her efforts to raise funds for Mount Holyoke Seminary, avoided the platform in favor of sewing circles and went from house to house gathering contributions.<sup>17</sup> In securing funds for their schools, educators Emma Willard and Catherine Beecher wrote speeches but had them read by men from the public platform.<sup>18</sup> According to Willard, it was "too great a strain on the properties for a woman to read her own address before such an assemblage" of citizens meeting in behalf of the common schools.<sup>19</sup> Dorothea Dix, noted primarily for her activities for the reform of asylums, prisons, and hospitals, also refused to speak in public to further her causes. In 1848 and 1850 she met the members of Congress privately and individually, for, as she said, she "laid great stress on preserving her womanly dignity" and did not want to "vulgarize a cause and its representative by a pushing and teasing demeanor."<sup>20</sup> The Stone family was deeply divided in regard to Lucy's interest in public speaking. Her mother urged her to go back to teaching or, if she must lecture, to do so "from house to house rather than in public;" Lucy's sister, Sarah, expressed the hope that if Lucy did speak in public, she would "not come into this state [Massachusetts];" ironically, her brothers Bowman and Frank supported her endeavors, encouraging Lucy to do what she felt was her duty.<sup>21</sup>

Opposition to women who violated the ideals of their sphere by speaking in public took various forms. Ministers delivered sermons to congregations against these violators of Pauline doctrine. In July 1837 the General Association of Congregational Ministers decided to make the usual annual pastoral letter the vehicle of an assault on women who dared lead public lives. The letter stated, "The power of woman is her dependence, flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has given her in those departments of life that form the character of individuals, and of the nation," and it asserted that when women assume the place of men as public reformers, public lecturers, and teachers, their characters become unnatural, and they sever themselves from the protection and care that are their right.<sup>22</sup>

Women speakers were also subject to more direct, physical harassment than edicts from pulpits. It was not unusual for mobs to gather, according to Yoakam, when women were scheduled to speak and for them to shout threats, hurl showers of rocks, brickbats, and rotten eggs at the speakers.<sup>23</sup> One such mob, which had been rowdy at Frances Harper's lecture, sabotaged her wagon.<sup>24</sup> The 1840s antislavery speaker Abby Kelley reported that she learned "how to dodge every kind of missile, from rotten eggs on down to tobacco quids."<sup>25</sup> Maria W. Stewart was pelted with tomatoes by Black men for criticizing them for failing to follow Christian principles of thrift, sobriety, and hard work.<sup>26</sup>

The efforts of Black women to speak in public were an especially sensitive issue to embattled and stigmatized African-American com-

munities. Women's rights, Shirley Yee has contended, "seemed to contradict a central goal of Black activism, which was to adopt separate sex roles."<sup>27</sup> Men such as the influential Samuel Cornish regularly denounced Black and White women speakers in the pages of his newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*. Yet, men such as Frederick Douglass and Charles Lenox Remond wholeheartedly supported women lecturers. They saw these women as assets in the campaign to promote race pride as well as allies in creating public opposition to slavery and racism.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to support from influential male allies, other reasons accounted for Black women's ascension to the platform and their eventual acceptance as lecturers. The appeal to race pride by Black women helped to justify their participation in public activities, and, as Shirley Yee has noted, it may "have made it more acceptable for Black women than for White women to engage in non-traditional activities such as public speaking."<sup>29</sup> Black women like Frances Harper, Sojourner Truth, Sarah Remond, Harriet Tubman, and the contentious Mary Ann Shadd were skilled orators and received considerable praise for their abilities from the African-American and the White presses. On one occasion, for example, Tubman "created such a sensation at the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society that James Yerrington [the recorder] was a bit paralyzed and . . . did not give her words."<sup>30</sup> Mary Webb was dubbed "the Black Siddons" in recognition of her considerable skills as an elocutionist.<sup>31</sup> The fact that Black women were praised, Yee states, for exuding "feminine qualities" helped make them more acceptable to their audiences, and such praise must have soothed the concerns of many in the Black community about White attributions of more stigma to their race.

Economics could permit African-American women to participate in public activities, also. Because Black women often worked outside the home—unlike middle-class White women—they could participate in public activities because their lives did not mirror the ideals of "women's sphere" or the aims of the reigning 19th-century ideology of true womanhood—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.<sup>32</sup>

African-American women's ascent to the speaker's platform was a dramatic struggle. They encountered opposition and open hostility from their home communities as well as from the dominant White communities. Their ascent to the speaker's platform is a remarkable story of courage. In the next sections, I discuss the status of African-American women's oratory.

### The Study of African-American Women's Oratory

In her 1990 work *Invisibility Blues*, feminist cultural critic Michele Wallace suggested that Black women be represented by "X," the radical sign of negation; that designation seems appropriate for the study of

African-American women's oratory.<sup>33</sup> Generally, Black women have been excluded from anthologies of orations. The handful of studies of their oratory seem perpetually bogged down by issues such as the degree to which Black women are either "women" or "persons."

*The Public Address Anthology*

The public address anthology is perhaps the most important vehicle for establishing the canon of American oratory. These anthologies tend to be the orations of "great leaders" who have influenced the so-called sweep of history. Carole Spitzak and Kathryn Carter's observation that within this model "female experience is restricted and excluded" is also quite true for African Americans in general.<sup>34</sup> An early work like *Oratory of the South: From the Civil War to the Present Time* (1908) contained no speeches by African Americans. Ernest Wraga and Barnet Baskerville's *American Forum: Speeches on Historic Issues, 1788-1900*, "based on issues underlying the American experience," not surprisingly includes no speeches by either African Americans or White women.<sup>35</sup> The only speech by an African American in Charles Hurd's *A Treasury of Great American Speeches: Our Countries [sic] Life and History in the Words of Its Great Men* is Booker T. Washington's acceptance speech on receiving an honorary Master of Arts degree from Harvard University in 1896.

More recent anthologies are only slightly more inclusive of women and African Americans than earlier ones. Ronald Reid's *Three Centuries of American Rhetorical Discourse* (1988) contained five works by African Americans, one of which is by a woman: Frederick Douglass's "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?," Sojourner Truth's "Speech to the Anniversary Convention of the American Equal Rights Association," Booker T. Washington's 1895 "Cotton States Exposition Address," W.E.B. DuBois's "Of Mr. B. T. Washington and Others," and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have A Dream." Reid's selection of African-American orations is all the more peculiar because of its inclusion of DuBois and Washington. The two are included as counterpoints to each other. DuBois's work is not a speech, however, but an excerpt from *The Souls of Black Folk*. Moreover, no reason is given for the absence of counterpoints for the other selections. For example, King's rhetoric is not contrasted with someone of the caliber of Malcolm X, Fannie Lou Hamer, or Stokeley Carmichael. Johannesen, Allen, and Linkugel's *Contemporary American Speeches* (1988) includes speeches by three African-American men—John E. Jacob (former head of the National Urban League), Martin Luther King, Jr. ("I Have A Dream"), and Jesse Jackson ("The Rainbow Coalition"), as well as Barbara Jordan's Keynote Address to the Democratic Party. King's "I Have a Dream," Jackson's "The Rainbow Coalition," and Jordan's "Keynote Address" are the entries by African Americans in Ryan's *American Rhetoric from Roosevelt to*

Reagan. Ryan's collection seems to strive for some sort of African-American gender parity because by including Shirley Chisholm's "For the Equal Rights Amendment," it's two for two.

"Tokenism" is the problem with these anthologies of American public address. When speeches by African Americans are included at all, they are the ones that Whites know and that have influenced "White society" in some direct, palpable way. That usually means that the works have been included in other anthologies and are reprinted again. It means that the speech was probably given before a White American audience and probably published in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, a weekly periodical that reprints contemporary speeches by figures of national importance.

The model of "great leaders" established by White men is replicated in anthologies that specialize in orations by African Americans or women. From these anthologies it is not clear, however, to what degree Black women are in the ranks of either "great African-American leaders" or "great women leaders." The inclusion or exclusion of African-American women in these anthologies is a shifting terrain.

The status of African-American women as leaders and worthy of inclusion has been unstable since the three anthologies of African-American public addresses published in the first quarter of this century. The first anthology of African-American public address, *Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence* (1914), was edited by Alice Moore Dunbar, a noted African-American scholar, teacher, and writer of fiction and short stories. *Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence* was published to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Proclamation of Emancipation, an event that Dunbar called "the birth of the Negro into manhood."<sup>36</sup> Unlike future anthologists, Dunbar seems to view "manhood" as metaphorical for she includes addresses by herself, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, and Fanny Jackson Coppin among the 49 works in *Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence*. Given the fact that Dunbar had access to a vast network of African-American middle-class activist women, it is not unreasonable to assume that she may have wanted to include more works by them in the anthology. In prefatory remarks to the anthology, Dunbar seems to be referring to the dearth of women in the anthology when she states, "Sometimes it has been difficult to obtain good speeches from those who are living because of their innate modesty, either in not desiring to appear in print, or in having thought so little of their efforts as to have lost them."<sup>37</sup> In *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer* (1920), a resource book for orators and commemorative occasions, Dunbar (-Nelson) includes prose and poetry (including orations) by African-American and White men and women.

In 1925 Carter G. Woodson edited what would be the largest anthology of African-American public addresses for almost 50 years. *Negro Orators and Their Orations* contained 75 entries. *Negro Orators and Their Orations* reflected Woodson's superb academic training in history

and included, he stated, "practically all of the extant speeches of consequence delivered by Negroes of the United States" (Foreword). Unlike Dunbar's pioneering anthologies, Woodson's contained no works by African-American women. An important clue to this absence can be found in Woodson's phrase "of consequence." In praxis, "of consequence," with its debt to causality, is the model of the "sweep of history" and, as has already been stated, is inherently male. Many of the speeches "of consequence" occurred either in contexts in which women were excluded by law or that were at the very least inimical to their presence. Nineteen of the speeches, for example, were delivered by African-American Congressmen elected during Reconstruction.

This exclusion of African-American women repeated itself in the anthologies that emerged from the upsurge of publication due to the Civil Rights Movement. In general, Black women fared better in anthologies that attempted greater spans of time than those focused on the Civil Rights Movement, although Arthur L. Smith [Molefi Kete Asante] and Stephen Robb's *The Voice of Black Rhetoric* (1971) contained no women's voices. Women were absent in Haig and Hamida Bosmajian's *The Rhetoric of the Civil-Rights Movement* (1969), and Robert L. Scott and Wayne Brockriede's *The Rhetoric of Black Power* (1969) but were included (albeit marginally) in Golden and Rieke's *The Rhetoric of Black Americans* (1971), Borman's *Forerunners of Black Power: The Rhetoric of Abolition* (1971), and Foner's *The Voice of Black America* (1972).

Foner's *The Voice of Black America* (1972) warrants special mention for it surpassed all other anthologies in breadth and scope. It contained 198 entries, thus surpassing in number Woodson's *Negro Orators and Their Orations*. Despite its enormous number of entries, only 8 were by women. In other words, little over 4% of the entries were by African-American women. That is also a 4% decline if compared to Alice Dunbar's 1914 *Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence*.

One of the most refreshing works to emerge during this period was Gerda Lerner's *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (1972). *Black Women in White America* was a path-finding anthology.<sup>38</sup> Still in print, it contains an enormous amount of texts in varied forms. Many of the entries were given as speeches, but, unfortunately, it is not always clear from Lerner's annotations which ones were.

Contemporary anthologies are bringing many more texts by African American women into existence. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's *Man Cannot Speak for Her: Key Texts of the Early Feminists* (1989) includes speeches by Maria W. Stewart, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Mary Church Terrell. Marilyn Richardson has splendidly edited *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer*. Richardson includes the four known speeches by Stewart and an extremely informative introduction. One of the highlights of the introduction is her textual analysis of Stewart's addresses showing the influence of David Walker's *Appeal* on her work. Robbie Jean Walker's *The Rhetoric of*

*Struggle: Public Address by African American Women* contains 36 entries. Although Robbie's anthology is problematic, it is the first time that so many speeches by African-American women have been in the same anthology.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, the largest collection of public addresses by African-American women is in Robert Branham's forthcoming anthology, *Lift Every Voice*.<sup>40</sup> It is a significant revision of Foner's earlier *The Voice of Black America*. *Lift Every Voice* will contain at least 237 entries, 60 of which are by women. I note as well that Branham's collection contains more speeches *by women* than any other published anthology in English in the United States to date, a fact that suggests, it seems to me, that African-American women should occupy a central space in the study of women's oratory. Moreover, Branham's method of compilation should serve as a model for future anthologies. Many of the excerpts in *Lift Every Voice* have never been anthologized, and some have never been published before. So, it will be the first time that we encounter in one anthology speeches by seldom studied or almost forgotten African-American women leaders such as Maggie Lena Walker, Mary Ann Shadd, Sara Staley, Sarah Parker Remond, Sara J. Woodson, Fannie Barrier Williams, Mary Church Terrell, Lucy Craft Laney, Mary A. Lynch, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Coralie F. Cook, Henrietta Vinton Davis, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, and Mary McLeod Bethune. The breadth of *Lift Every Voice* makes possible comparisons across gender as well as the continuity of ideas in African-American oratory. Using *Lift Every Voice*, greater possibilities exist for the study of how African-American women have read, heard, and revised the ideas of other African-American women. *Lift Every Voice* will be a significant contribution to contemporary scholarship.

#### *The Study of African-American Women's Oratory*

"Are 'Black women' women?" and "Are 'Black women' persons?" seem to be the two questions that dominate the study of African-American women's oratory. Early studies of women's oratory and their participation in women's rights movements consistently excluded or consigned African-American women to the margins of her-/history. Doris Yoakam's originary essay, "Women's Introduction to the American Platform," completely ignored Maria W. Stewart. This omission is incredible when one considers Stewart's role in American women's oratory as the first woman to leave extant texts of her public lectures. More appalling is that Yoakam's omission of Stewart must be deliberate. Four of Stewart's lectures were published in *The Liberator*, and referring to that journal's importance, Yoakam states, "If the bibliography of the first chapter of women's speaking were limited to one source, it would be the famous abolition weekly, *The Liberator*." In fact, *The Liberator* is so central to Yoakam's study that it accounts for 38 of

its 99 references. One wonders how Yoakam explained away to herself Maria W. Stewart's addresses in *The Liberator*. If Yoakam referred to them in her study, one wonders if William Brigance, an editor of the volume in which Yoakam's essay appeared, suggested that Yoakam delete all references to Stewart?

Whatever the case may be about Yoakam's erasure of Stewart, it foreshadows future studies of African-American women's oratory. In the preface to the 1989 *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric*, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell claims that talking to Black women from the Kansas Association of Colored Women's and Girl's Clubs has "enlarged . . . [her] understanding of feminism, past and present."<sup>41</sup> With this enlarged understanding, Campbell begins a discussion of the oratory of Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells in the following manner:

Given commonalities as well as differences arising from the special conditions confronting Afro-American women, their rhetoric requires special treatment. This chapter examines the ways in which, if at all, it resembled the rhetoric of other women activists, and the degree to which the activities of Afro-American women were related to the woman's rights and woman suffrage movement.<sup>42</sup>

Assertions such as this one by Campbell seem "designed to erase the blackness" from Black women, states Black feminist scholar Marsha Houston.<sup>43</sup> Campbell is unable to think outside of platonist additive concepts of women: women are women (and exist in an ideal [White] body) except some have property x, y, and/or z. The problem with this kind of scholarship is that it almost invariably finds African-American women deficient or lacking. For example, Campbell contends that from women's experience of sexism there emerged a uniquely feminine style of oratory, but she cannot locate or name a style that Black women created that permitted them to talk to White women who were admittedly and avowedly racist. Campbell also cannot conceive that this "feminine style" might be related, in any way, to African-American forms of address such as "call-response." Thus, African-American women are always deficient or on the periphery of the [White] women's movement and Campbell can only conclude that women like Wells and Terrell "felt that the problems of race were more compelling than the grievances of women."<sup>44</sup>

This conclusion by Campbell is patently false, for it suggests somehow that Wells and Terrell did not consider themselves women. This could not be further from the truth, of course. When studying the oratory of African-American women, Houston's suggestions about communication practices in general are appropriate. First, we should have a commitment to "[m]aking women's ethnic culture the central organizing concept for feminist theory and research," which "means thinking of women as enculturated to a gendered communication ideal *within*

specific ethnic groups an organizing concept."<sup>45</sup> Second, we must earn the right to speak about them "by learning who they are as they communicate in their own ethnic cultural contexts, *their* world, not simply ours."<sup>46</sup> In this type of research, women's ethnicity and culture does not disappear.

I also put forth an idea for which Ernest Wraga argued 45 years ago, namely, that oratory is a repository of ideas.<sup>47</sup> Studying oratory from this "angle of vision" can provide some unique insights.<sup>48</sup> Notably, several scholars outside of the discipline of public address have used oratory and language fruitfully in superb studies of the concept of racial and gendered consciousness among Black women.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, one of the problems with studying oratory and public address is its inherent class bias. Seldom are the speeches of working-class or poor people recorded. Inevitably, the study of oratory is confined to a class of leader elites. Public address need not confine itself only to leader elites, however. A clearly avant-garde 1973 essay by Lucia S. Hawthorne—an African-American critic, teacher, and a founder of the Black Caucus of the Speech Communication Association—implies a way out of the bind created by class bias in public address. Hawthorne argued that the public address of African Americans be "any recorded statement of a Black American in an attempt to speak to an overt or covert audience."<sup>50</sup>

Hawthorne's redefinition of public address has several important implications. First, Hawthorne clearly means for language, and specifically language *designed* to create change, to be at the center of the study of public address. Second, Hawthorne subordinates form to language, so public address is expanded to include a variety of discursive practices. Poetry and prose, for example, that seek "to inquire, to disseminate information, to find and/or to substantiate truth" are within the province of public address.<sup>51</sup> The third point follows from the second; namely, Hawthorne was advocating interdisciplinarity. Hawthorne envisioned a study of public address that crossed disciplines and redefined the boundaries of intellectual inquiry within the discipline. Hawthorne's essay itself examined recurring *topoi* or themes in diverse forms that included speeches, poetry, newspaper editorials, letters, and fiction by African Americans. Her essay, thus, examined the disciplines of speech communication, history, literature, and journalism. In this pro-interdisciplinary sense, Hawthorne's redefinition of public address was a predecessor of contemporary developments in the study of public address.

Following the implications of Hawthorne's essay, one could begin to study, for example, naming practices of and by African-American women as a form of public address. Clearly, naming has been a locus of oppositional praxis for African Americans since their enslavement. The term *African* as an ethnic indicator and the maintenance of West African personal names in the slave community are particularly

**Table 13.1** Correspondence of West African Names With the Days of the Week

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Sunday	Quashee	Quasheba
Monday	Cudjo	Juba
Tuesday	Cubbenah	Benaba
Wednesday	Quaco	Cuba
Thursday	Quao	Abby
Friday	Cuffy	Pheba
Saturday	Quame (Kwame)	Mimba

interesting cases of this form of public address. In the late 18th century *African* became the term North American free Blacks most often used to name their institutions. Geneva Smitherman has suggested that, "This early preference for 'African' was logical since the African experience was still very immediate for many blacks, and the tantalizing possibility of returning there haunted them constantly."<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, the return to the use of *African* in the late 20th century to designate the group was suggested by an African-American woman, Ramona Edelin, who in a 1989 speech identified the change as a necessary "cultural offensive" against the debilitating effects on Blacks of White racism.<sup>53</sup>

Naming has played a significant role in maintaining African culture within the slave community. In his study of the enslavement of African Americans in 17th- and 18th-century South Carolina, the historian Peter Wood found numerous cases of Blacks with West African names. One South Carolina master who died before the Revolutionary War listed the following among his slaves: Allahay, Assey, Benyky, Bungey, Colley, Cumbo, Cush, Dusue, Esher, Into, Jehu, Meminah, Matillah, Meynell, Minto, Quamino, Quash, Quashey, Rinah, Sambo, Satirah, Sibbey, Tehe, Temboy, Tiffey, Yeabow, and Yeakney.<sup>54</sup> Linguists J. L. Dillard, Lorenzo Turner, and N. N. Puckett have found the West African practice of naming children after days of the week in slave communities throughout North America and the Caribbean.<sup>55</sup> The most common names and the days to which they correspond are shown in Table 13.1. Scholars such as Wood, Dillard, and Turner argue quite convincingly that maintaining these names was a means of resistance by Blacks to the onslaught of Euro-American culture.

In contemporary U.S. society, it is estimated that 86% of Black children will spend some time in a mother-only household and that 60% of all Black children will be born to unmarried women.<sup>56</sup> To the degree that women have control over the naming of their children, it becomes important to know the names and the reasons that African-American women name their children. This child's name is recorded and pronounced to the world each time the child says its name or someone calls the child and in this sense fulfills Hawthorne's requirements for a public address. To paraphrase Lorraine Hansberry's words,

in the names of their sons and daughters, what is it that these women are trying to tell the world?

### Notes

1. Lorraine Hansberry, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* (New York: New American Library, 1969), p. 107.
2. In *The Life of Langston Hughes*, Arnold Rampersad records Hughes as writing about *Mulatto*: "I sat and watched my first play—which I had conceived as a poetic tragedy—being turned into what the producer hoped would be a commercial hit" (p. 312). According to Rampersad, the producer of *Mulatto* was so anxious for another hit show that, "Soon the actors were reciting lines Hughes would not have written, and playing at least one scene he would not have conceived, the rape of the hero's sister by a White overseer ('Rape is for sex,' Martin Jones [the show's producer] explained. 'You have to have sex in a Broadway show')" (pp. 312-313).
3. *A Raisin in the Sun* ran for more than a year on Broadway, won a New York Drama Critics Award, became a movie, and showcased the talents of Sidney Poitier, Ivan Dixon, Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis, Louis Gossett, Claudia McNeil, Glenn Turman, and Diana Sands. Accorded the status of a classic, *A Raisin in the Sun* has been revived in performances around the world, has been translated into languages other than English, has appeared in numerous literary anthologies, and has continued to inspire scholars of literature.
4. Lillian O'Connor, *Pioneer Women Orators: Rhetoric in the Antebellum Reform Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954).
5. Doris G. Yoakam, "Women's Introduction to the American Platform," in William N. Brigance, ed., *A History and Criticism of American Public Address* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960; originally printed 1943), pp. 155-156.
6. Quoted in John W. Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), p. 123.
7. Yoakam, p. 155.
8. Yoakam, p. 155.
9. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1986), p. 40.
10. Postman, p. 40.
11. Postman, p. 40.
12. O'Connor, p. 70.
13. Olga Idriss Davis, "Maria W. Stewart: A Stalwart Figure of Black American Oratory," Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association (November 1986), p. 2; Benjamin Quarles, *The Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 7; Marilyn Richardson, ed., *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. xiii.
14. Those lectures are: Lecture Delivered at the Franklin Hall (Boston, September 21, 1832); An Address Delivered Before the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of America (Spring 1832; *Liberator* April 28, 1832); An Address Delivered at the African Masonic Hall (Boston, February 27, 1833); and Mrs. Stewart's Farewell Address to Her Friends in the City of Boston (September 21, 1833).
15. Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, p. 20.
16. Frances J. Horsford, quoted in O'Connor, p. 24.
17. O'Connor, p. 25.
18. O'Connor, pp. 25-26.
19. O'Connor, p. 27.
20. Quoted in O'Connor, p. 28.
21. O'Connor, p. 71.
22. Quoted in Yoakam, p. 163.
23. Yoakam, p. 164.
24. Shirley Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study of Activism, 1828-1860* (University of Tennessee Press, 1992), p. 113.
25. Quoted in Yoakam, p. 166.

26. Yee, p. 115.
27. Yee, p. 139.
28. Yee, p. 117.
29. Yee, p. 118.
30. O'Connor, *Pioneer Women*, p. 96.
31. O'Connor, *Pioneer Women*, p. 185.
32. Barbara Welty, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: The Ohio University Press, 1976), p. 21.
33. Michele Wallace, "Who Owns Zora Neale Hurston?" in *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 182.
34. Carole Spitzak and Kathryn Carter, "Women in Communication Studies: A Typology for Revision," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 73 (1987), p. 401.
35. Ernest Wrage and Barnet Baskerville, *American Forum: Speeches on Historic Issues, 1788-1900* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. ix.
36. Alice Moore Dunbar, *Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence: The Best Speeches Delivered by the Negro From the Days of Slavery to the Present Time* (1914; reprinted, New York: Johnson Reprint, 1970), "Preface."
37. Dunbar, *Masterpieces*, "Preface."
38. For example, it was a significant source for Delindus R. Brown and Wanda F. Anderson, "A Survey of the Black Woman and the Persuasion Process: The Study of Strategies of Identification and Resistance," *Journal of Black Studies*, 9 (December 1978), pp. 233-248.
39. Walker's anthology is impressive. Included are addresses by: Maria Stewart, Frances Harper, Sarah Parker Remond, Anna J. Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Fannie Lee Chaney, Constance Baker Motley, Mary Church Terrell, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Sojourner Truth, Lucy C. Laney, Georgia Washington, Fannie Barrier Williams, Mary McLeod Bethune, Shirley Chisholm, Angela Davis, Sadie T. Alexander, Patricia Roberts Harris, Edith S. Sampson, Margaret Walker Alexander, Coretta Scott King, and Barbara Jordan. Many of these addresses have been published and some of the 20th-century speeches are not the most interesting or representative of the speakers. One wishes that Robbie had unearthed more unpublished works for an anthology with such an auspicious title. One also wishes that Walker had devoted less attention to textual analysis; 70 pages are a pedantic discussion of Black women's oratory as a genre. Included in the discussion are uninteresting data such as number of words in sentences, the speaker's word choices, and recurring *topoi*.
40. Robert Branham, *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory From 1787 to the Present* (University: University of Alabama Press, in press).
41. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric*, Vol. 1 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989), p. vii.
42. Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak*, p. 145.
43. Marsha Houston, "Follow Us Into Our World: Feminist Scholarship on the Communication of Women of Color," ERIC ED 337 816/CS 507 510 (April 1991), p. 10.
44. Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak*, p. 155.
45. Houston, "Follow Us," p. 14.
46. Houston, "Follow Us," p. 16.
47. Ernest J. Wrage, "Public Address: A Study in Social and Intellectual History," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 33 (1947), pp. 451-457.
48. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Lynda F. Dickson, "Toward a Broader Angle of Vision in Uncovering Women's History: Black Women's Clubs Revisited," *Frontiers*, 9(2) (1987), pp. 62-68; Darlene Clark Hine, *Organization of American History's Magazine of History*, 3(1) (Winter 1988), pp. 7-13; Gerda Lerner, "A New Angle of Vision," in G. Lerner, ed., *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 11-14.
49. Elsa Barkley Brown, "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of St. Luke," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 14 (1989), pp. 610-633; Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 14 (1989), pp. 912-920; Marsha Stanback Houston, "Language and Black Woman's Place: Evidence From the Black

Middle Class," in P. A. Treichler, C. Kramarae, and B. Stafford, eds., *For Alma Mater: Theory and Practice in Feminist Scholarship* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Women as Culture Carriers in the Civil Rights Movements: Fannie Lou Hamer," in Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *Black Women in United States History* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1990), Vol. 16, pp. 203-218.

50. Lucia S. Hawthorne, "The Public Address of Black America," in Jack L. Daniel, ed., *Black Communication: Dimensions of Research and Instruction* (New York: Speech Communication Association, 1974), p. 54.

51. Hawthorne, "The Public Address of Black America," p. 54.

52. Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (1977; reprinted Wayne State University Press, 1986), p. 36.

53. Ramona Hoage Edelin, "Address to the National Conference on the Infusion of African American Content in the School Curriculum: 'Curriculum and Cultural Identity,'" [October 7, 1989], *Vital Issues: The Journal of African American Speeches*, 1 (Winter, 1991), pp. 25-29. Of course, Edelin was not the only person using the term *African American*, but the conference at which she spoke was widely covered by the United States media. For a good discussion of the group names that people of African descent in the United States have used, see the chapter "Black Nationalism" in Mary F. Berry and John Blassingame, *Long Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

54. Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina From 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Norton, 1974), p. 181.

55. J. L. Dillard, *Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States* (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 124; N. N. Puckett, "Names of American Negro Slaves," in George P. Murdoch, ed., *Studies in the Science of Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1937); Lorenzo D. Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

56. National Research Council, *A Common Destiny: Blacks and American Society* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1989), pp. 512, 522.

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# BLACK WOMEN IN AMERICA

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edited by  
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