



Project
MUSE[®]
Scholarly journals online

The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality

Thaddeus Russell

On May 17, 2004, when the fiftieth anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision coincided with the first legal same-sex marriages in the United States, conducted in Massachusetts, a debate emerged over whether the African American civil rights movement was in any way equivalent to the movement for civil rights for homosexuals. Several commentators eagerly drew comparisons. According to Andrew Sullivan, one of the leading proponents of same-sex marriage, “both *Brown* and this new day revolve around a single, simple and yet deeply elusive idea: integration.” The historic moment in Massachusetts represented “just as *Brown* did in a different way, the hope of a humanity that doesn’t separate one soul from another and a polity that doesn’t divide one citizen from another.” Yet a group of black clergy denounced the attempts by gay-marriage activists to liken their cause to the struggle for racial integration. “African-Americans have to be who we are,” said Bishop Paul Morton Sr. of the Greater St. Stephen Full Gospel Baptist Church in New Orleans. “This is the way we’re going to heaven. They [gays and lesbians] don’t have to go to heaven that way.”¹

There is, however, one way in which the two movements have been strikingly similar: both have demanded that in order to gain acceptance as full citizens, their constituents adopt the cultural norms of what they believe to be the idealized American citizen—productivity, selflessness, responsibility, sexual restraint, and the restraint of homosexuality in particular. Scholars working under the category of “queer theory” have identified these norms as constituting the cultural structure of the heterosexual family, and have thus labeled them “heteronormativity.” Correspondingly, leaders of the African American and gay and lesbian civil rights movements have insisted that nonheteronormative behaviors such as sexual promiscuity, the celebration of the self, the embrace of pleasure, and the avoidance of obligation—behaviors historically associated with both African Americans and homosexuals—will block the path to citizenship.

The belief that the adoption of elements of heteronormativity is required for full citizenship has been evident in recent gay and lesbian civil rights campaigns. According to Sullivan, the movement for marriage rights indicates that “a need to rebel” among gays and lesbians “has quietly ceded to a desire to belong” and to “yearnings for stability and acceptance.” Another supporter of same-sex marriage, Larry Kramer, counsels homosexuals “to move on to a more responsible place in the world” and asks, “what is more responsible than finding someone to love and make a life with?” Making plain the connection between heteronormativity and citizenship, Jennifer Vanasco in the gay and lesbian *Chicago Free Press* rejoiced that the movement had become “boring.”

These days, we're all about kids, and serving our country, and Crate and Barrel. . . . I like boring. Boring is comfortable. Boring is the bulwark behind our endless trill that we are just like straight people, only with same-sex loves. . . . Boring will get us our rights faster than outrageous.²

Unlike the post-Stonewall “Gay Pride” movement, whose annual marches featured masses of naked and seminaked people in celebrations of sexual openness, the gay and lesbian citizenship movement presents its constituents as sexless and their relations as platonic. The suppression of sex and the discourse of responsibility are evident on the Web sites operated by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender civil rights organizations. On the Lambda Legal site, the section on marriage rights features profiles of gay and lesbian couples, all of whom are identified as long-term couples with respectable jobs, and many of whom are described as committed parents and grandparents. In the site’s section on gays in the military, scores of homosexual members of the armed services offer lengthy accounts of their military accomplishments and nothing on their sexuality.³ Indeed, advocates for the acceptance of homosexuals in the military have taken pains to refute the notion that gays and lesbians are driven by desire and have portrayed them instead as patriotic, rational, and chaste, while proponents of same-sex marriage have justified their demand by presenting homosexual partners as devoted, self-sacrificing, and industrious adults.

Queer theorists have identified a dynamic tension between excluded groups who willingly assimilate dominant norms in order to gain admission to society, such as advocates for gay marriage, and those who do not choose to sacrifice their desires for citizenship. In the 1990s this tension gave rise to the self-identification of the latter group among homosexual activists and intellectuals as “queer.” But the conflict between black working-class culture and the twentieth-century civil rights movement suggests that a similar tension can be

found in African American history. It shows that in the civil rights movement, the project of attaining citizenship was constructed upon heterosexuality and in opposition to nonheteronormative behavior.

The following narrative demonstrates that prior to the ascendancy of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, African American working-class culture was far more open to homosexuality and nonheteronormative behavior than was the black middle class, which led the movement, or than white culture generally. This black working-class openness was one indication of a broader evasion of the repression required of “good Americans,” as black homosexuals came to represent all the elements of African American working-class culture that civil rights leaders identified as obstacles to the attainment of citizenship. At the height of the movement for integration, black queerness was replaced in public discourse and popular culture by black heteronormativity.

Queens and Kings

During the 1920s, at the height of the “Great Migration” of African Americans from the rural hinterland to cities, black culture exploded in public consciousness. It is well known that Harlem was the center of this cultural coming-out, but what is less well known is that its art world, street life, and nightlife were decidedly “deviant,” leading George Chauncey to call Harlem a “homosexual mecca” in the 1920s.⁴ One indication of this is the impressive roster of prominent figures in the Harlem Renaissance who were homosexual or bisexual, which includes the writers Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Wallace Thurman, and Augustus Granville Dill; the visual artists Richmond Barthe and Bruce Nugent; and the composer Porter Grainger. As some scholars have noted, much of the work of Harlem Renaissance writers and artists was extraordinarily open about homosexuality and about the repressive nature of heterosexual norms. Yet because they operated within an elite, interracial world where respectability was currency, with few exceptions these figures concealed their sexual desires.⁵

Despite the reluctance of Harlem’s cultural elite to reveal their sexuality, substantial numbers of working-class people in the capital of black America were stunningly open about their homosexuality and created what may have been the most liberated public space in U.S. history. They commonly socialized in cabaret saloons, speakeasies, and house parties, places where bourgeois morality was notably absent. Not only was homosexual activity flagrant and abundant at these gatherings, but the participants often included prostitutes, gamblers, gangsters, and other heterosexuals, who, like gays and lesbians, ab-

rogated the social norms of the day in pursuit of their own pleasure. Perhaps the leading indicator of working-class Harlem's queerness was the tremendous presence of transgender people, most conspicuously the drag queens and kings who were common sights on the streets and on the stages of many of Harlem's nightclubs. The most spectacular demonstrations of this were the many drag balls, notably the annual Hamilton Lodge Ball, which featured hundreds of drag performers, most of whom were young, working-class black men and women, and which attracted thousands of spectators.⁶

In the late 1920s, as the drag balls gained popularity among the African American working class, black queers came under attack from the leaders of the early civil rights movement. It was probably no coincidence that the campaign to purge queerness from black life began immediately after the white moral reform society called the Committee of Fourteen released its first report on Harlem and declared it to be the most vice-ridden neighborhood in New York City. The campaign was initiated by Adam Clayton Powell Sr., pastor of the powerful Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, a leader of both the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League, the standard-bearer for the black middle-class, and perhaps the most famous African American clergyman and civil rights leader at the time.⁷ In November 1929, the black *New York Age* published a series of sermons delivered by Powell on sexual perversion, which he claimed was "steadily increasing" in large American cities and in particular among women and ministers. According to Powell, the individual pursuit of pleasure over the obligations of community was both the cause and consequence of homosexuality. The indulgence in the sensual pleasures that were newly available to the great numbers of recent black arrivals in the cities was "causing men to leave their wives for other men, wives to leave their husbands for other women, and girls to mate with girls instead of marrying." Homosexuality, one of "the powers which tend to debase the race," was a rejection of the familial responsibility that held the black community together and made it a viable political entity. Powell linked it to what he identified as an increase in the number of black ministers who placed their own desires for personal gratification, prestige, and wealth over the interests of their congregations, suggesting that individual license and entitlement were at the root of the problem of homosexuality. From this perspective, homosexuals were the products and purveyors of a broader urban culture that clashed with the ethic of self-sacrifice and communal responsibility at the core of citizenship.⁸ The fact that Powell's attack immediately followed the first exposure of Harlem's libertinism by white authorities indicates that he intended to shape his constituency into the normative structure of the dominant culture.⁹

The project of normalizing African American culture was at least temporarily defeated by the tacit resistance of the black working class. The popularity of the Hamilton Lodge Ball actually increased after Powell's attack and into the 1930s, when it attracted several thousand performers and spectators annually. According to George Chauncey, during this period "perhaps nowhere were more men willing to venture out in public in drag than in Harlem." Though Harlem's drag queens and kings faced constant harassment by the Irish police who patrolled the neighborhood, their ubiquity suggests a relative openness about sexuality in black working-class culture.¹⁰ This openness is also evident in urban blues lyrics of the time, which were far more candid about sex in general, and about same-sex relations in particular, than were white popular songs. Many of the most popular female blues performers of the time were lesbian or bisexual, including Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, Alberta Hunter, and Mabel Hampton; one, Gladys Bentley, performed obscene versions of Broadway show tunes while wearing a tuxedo and top hat and backed by a chorus line of drag queens. Even more remarkable to white listeners, many of their songs spoke frankly about "bulldaggers," "sissies," "mannish-women," and "womanish-acting men." Homosexuals were often mocked in these songs, but they were also acknowledged as a central part of black working-class culture.¹¹

Queer culture among the black working class was not limited to Harlem or to the period of the Harlem Renaissance. From the 1930s through the early 1950s, drag balls and drag cabarets proliferated in African American neighborhoods. A variety of drag balls took place in black, working-class areas of Chicago during this period, most notably the annual Finnie's Ball, which attracted thousands of spectators and thrived at least into the 1960s. As in the Hamilton Lodge Ball in Harlem, the performers in Chicago were especially interested in displaying their clothes, makeup, and jewelry.¹² In its coverage of the Chicago drag balls, *Ebony* magazine observed:

The men who don silks, satins and laces for the yearly masquerades are as style-conscious as the women of a social club planning an annual charity affair or a society dowager selecting a debutante gown for her favorite daughter. Many of the men, some of whom are dress designers by profession, spend months and hundreds of dollars readying wardrobes for the one-night appearances before the public.¹³

Myles Vollmer, a white University of Chicago divinity student who conducted field research on the drag balls in the city's black South Side, noted a connection between the location of the balls in the "grey area" of the South Side, their working-class composition, and their transgressive character:

All types are there, pimps, panderers, blackmailers, “trade,” the oversexed lower classes with no high moral code, ready for a fling, be it man or woman; prize-fighters, the so-called “meat” for homosexuals—and athletes are strangely susceptible to the advances of an effeminate youth, who will make love to them passionately.

There are harlots there; not plying their trade, of course, for competition is too keen, but attending with their own parties. For there is a strange bond which links homosexuals and harlots together. Possibly it is because both are social pariahs. . . .

Negros mingle freely with whites. There seemingly is no race distinction between them.¹⁴

After World War II, the drag balls continued in black neighborhoods in Chicago and Harlem and became prominent parts of the nightlife in Detroit, New Orleans, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and San Francisco. There were white drag balls as well during this period—in New York, San Francisco, and elsewhere—yet unlike the black performances, they were invisible to the broader population. While the mainstream white press did not cover drag balls, black newspapers and magazines regularly featured them.¹⁵ From the mid-1920s through the early 1950s, the coverage by the black press was occasionally derisive but always attentive and sometimes laudatory. The *New York Age* lavished the Hamilton Ball and its organizers with praise just a few years after publishing Powell’s diatribes, calling it “a treat that shall never be forgotten. . . . We say ‘All Hail, Hamilton.’” *The Amsterdam News*, which normally served as the principal upholder of middle-class propriety in Harlem, complimented the “most gorgeous of feminine attire” and “sheer magnificence” of the clothes worn at the ball. Following the 1936 ball, Roi Ottley, then a rising star in black journalism and a columnist for the *Amsterdam News*, found that some of the performers were “mighty beat” and “needed shaves,” but he was not ashamed to admit that others aroused him: “Some of the contestants were some luscious-looking wenches . . . Others were gloriously clad . . . Many pranced like thoroughbred women . . . Every one of them was notoriously effeminate.” Ottley cheerfully reported that “Harlem came through with flying colors” when a black contestant won the costume prize. He also noticed that the ball “outdrew” Elder Solomon Lightfoot Michaux, one of the nation’s most prominent ministers, who had recently and in the same building “preached for five nights to almost empty benches.”¹⁶

In the years between World War II and the rise of the civil rights movement, when Detroit’s African American population grew to become the third largest in the United States, the new black metropolis also became the site of perhaps the largest drag craze in the country. From 1949 through 1954, the city’s leading black newspaper, the *Michigan Chronicle*, featured in virtually

every issue at least one and as many as five advertisements for drag shows in the black business district of Paradise Valley, and regularly gave them enthusiastic coverage. Drag performers such as Janis LaCava, Baby Jean Ray, Zorina LaCrosse, Caledonia Anderson, Patricia Van Dyke, Nina Mae McKinney, and “The Fabulous” Priscilla Dean were celebrities in postwar, pre–civil rights black Detroit. The black press praised them as “stellar artists” who were among “Detroit’s most talented and imaginative entrepreneurs.” Managers of nightclubs featuring drag performers reported having to “turn away customers by the dozens.” Hundreds of performers and patrons crowded into the Elks Auditorium every Halloween and into the Madison Ballroom every New Year’s Eve for extravagant, well-publicized “masquerade” balls. Detroit’s drag queens were not shy about their sexual orientation. They sang songs of lust for men and flirted with male patrons. One of the more popular dance routines was the one performed by Caledonia Anderson at the Old Time Cafe, in which she attached signs to parts of her anatomy that read “For Men Only” and “Please Pay When Served.”¹⁷

In New Orleans in the 1940s and early 1950s, there were at least four nightclubs that featured black female impersonators as performers, and drag queens regularly strolled the streets of the city’s black district. There were also smaller drag cabarets that toured the South and black neighborhoods in northern cities as parts of rhythm-and-blues revues. One of the most popular drag performers on what was called the “showbiz” circuit was an exceptionally talented piano player, singer, and songwriter whose stage name was Princess Lavonne but who would become, in the 1950s, the self-proclaimed “king and queen of the blues”—Little Richard.¹⁸

Both *Ebony*, which began publishing in 1945, and *Jet*, founded in 1951, gave regular, prominent, and positive coverage of the drag balls in Chicago, New York, and Detroit, and through the early 1950s regularly featured articles on homosexuality. *Jet* claimed that drag balls were staged in “nearly every big U.S. Negro community.” The typical article on the balls in the magazines passed no negative judgments, and included several photos of drag queens dancing with and kissing men, as well as detailed descriptions of the performers’ outfits. The “female impersonators” were “dazzling,” “stunning,” “vivacious,” and “more shapely than [a] burlesque queen.” The magazines took special note of the great numbers of interracial couples at the balls—evidence that they were likely among the most integrated social institutions in the United States—though did not acknowledge the irony that the balls’ fiercest critics were integrationist civil rights leaders.¹⁹

In his encyclopedic study of cross-dressing performance, Laurence Senelick found a distinct lack of shame among black drag queens and kings. According to Senelick, while white American drag artists before the 1970s closeted their sexuality when off-stage, black performers “lived as unabashed ‘sissies’ and ‘fags’ off-stage, while the prime exponent of male impersonation, Gladys Bentley, provocatively played ‘bull dagger’ to the hilt.” White gays and lesbians were beneficiaries of the sexual openness of black working-class culture. Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis found that white lesbians in Buffalo in the 1940s and 1950s spent much of their social time in black working-class bars, which were more hospitable than straight white bars and even than some white gay men’s bars. Similarly, in his survey of four hundred reports filed by the Committee of Fourteen on vice in New York clubs during the 1920s, Kevin J. Mumford discovered that interracial homosexual clubs were most often located in Harlem. In Chicago, lesbians and gay men, black and white, frequently patronized blues and jazz clubs on the South Side. Not only were songs about same-sex relations common in Chicago’s black nightclubs, but the clubs also set aside entire evenings for drag shows. Indeed, from considerable evidence that white homosexuals in the interwar period commonly appropriated African American cultural forms, in particular jazz, in their social gatherings, Mumford argues that the origins of queer life in the United States are to be found in Harlem and the “Black Belt” of Chicago²⁰

Anecdotal evidence from testimonies by black gays and lesbians further suggests that homophobia was far less powerful among the black working class in the first half of the twentieth century than within the dominant white culture. James Baldwin claimed to have felt accepted as a homosexual growing up in Harlem in the 1930s, where, he wrote, “the American categories of male and female, straight or not, black or white, were shattered, thank heaven, very early in my life.” By contrast, he experienced militant and pervasive homophobia in predominantly white neighborhoods in New York, even Greenwich Village. An implicit argument in Baldwin’s essay “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood” is that heterosexual masculinity is an American creation, not a black one. Oral histories of black working-class gays and lesbians uniformly support bell hooks’s claim that while gays and lesbians were not always venerated in black families and communities, they were acknowledged and protected. James T. Sears has presented evidence that brazen “sissy boys” and drag queens were common clientele both in rural South Carolina juke joints and in black nightclubs in Atlanta after World War II. In her study of white and black homosexuals in Memphis, Daneel Buring discovered that a majority of her black subjects “have come out to their families, a fact which contradicts widely held

assumptions about homophobia among blacks in social science literature.” Moreover, Buring found that black gay Memphians she interviewed “have faced almost no homophobia within their families.” Similarly, Brett Beemyn’s history of gay life in Washington, D.C., in the 1940s and 1950s shows that while white homosexuals “typically left their families to pursue same-sex sexual relationships,” black lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals “often remained in or near the Washington neighborhoods in which they were raised” and “lived out their sexual preferences within the confines of their home communities.” Fortunately, Beemyn reports, “the African Americans with whom I spoke were largely accepted by relatives and peers, sometimes even receiving their strong support.”²¹

Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Times?

One of the best-kept secrets of modern African American history is that many black gays and lesbians were not only accepted, but also celebrated. In Washington, D.C., much of the underground economy from the 1920s through the 1960s was controlled by Odessa Madre, who called herself “the Queen” of black Washington. Madre operated a network of nightclubs, brothels, and gambling rings and was one of the wealthiest African Americans in the city. She wore mink and diamonds and drove top-of-the-line Cadillacs. When she made her entrance at one of her nightclubs, the patrons would stand and cheer, and when she died, hundreds of people from the poorest neighborhoods in Washington donated money for her funeral. Her celebrity was never diminished by her repeated insistence that she preferred women to men as sexual partners. It was rumored that one of Madre’s lovers was the famous black comedian Jackie “Moms” Mabley.²² Perhaps even more striking than the renown of Odessa Madre is the fact that several ministers were the most visible black queers in the mid-twentieth century. Two of these ministers, James Francis Jones, who was known as Prophet Jones, and Charles Manuel Grace, who operated under the moniker Sweet Daddy Grace, were arguably the most popular religious figures among the black working class in the 1940s and 1950s, even more popular than the rising group of ministers who would lead the civil rights movement.

Prophet Jones headed the two largest Pentecostal congregations in Detroit during this period, but he also broadcast a live weekly sermon over Canadian station CKLW, whose fifty-thousand-watt signal reached several midwestern cities with sizable African American populations. In 1955 Jones began hosting a Sunday-night program on WXYZ-TV, making him the first black preacher

in Detroit to host a weekly television program. The radio and television shows, were, according to several sources, the most popular programs among the city's African American working class. The Detroit-area circulation for the *Saturday Evening Post* jumped 30 percent when the magazine ran an extensive and flattering profile of Jones in 1955. Jones's devotees were almost all poor and working-class, and he was particularly popular among recent migrants from the South. A researcher at Wayne State University who studied Jones's congregants wrote that like most members of the so-called Negro cults who broke from mainline Baptist and Methodist churches during the Great Migration, "the devotees of [Jones's] cult appear to constitute largely that class of persons who are near the bottom of the social and economic ladder."

In the early 1950s, the black press in Detroit rarely missed a chance to publicize "the Prophet's" activities, and nearly always did so approvingly. The weeklong birthday celebrations Jones threw for himself were given full-page coverage by the *Michigan Chronicle*, which detailed his "gracious" welcoming of guests and described him as "exhibiting spiritual radiance" at the gathering. After his mother died, in a front-page headline the paper praised "the internationally famous minister" for continuing to "Serve the Lord despite His Great Loss." In 1953 the *Chronicle* ran a four-part series on Jones's "fantastic rise to popularity and international renown." Rather than shun the Prophet for his extravagant spending, as it would later, the paper celebrated the unveiling of the "Fabulous Interior" of his "New \$500,000 Church," described his \$5,000 gold-covered pulpit as a "breathtaking replica of King Solomon's gilded throne," and pictured Jones "standing regal and proud in his new wild mink stole reportedly worth \$4,000." With the help of sustained national mainstream media attention, including feature articles in *Life*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*, as well as constant exposure in *Jet* and *Ebony*, by the mid-1950s Jones's admirers made up a substantial portion of the national African American population.²³

Like the drag queens and kings, Jones exalted himself and his followers with royal titles. He called his staff "lords" and "ladies," "princesses" and "princes," and for his favorite assistants he reserved the title "Arch Duke." Accordingly, he preached to his black, working-class congregants that they deserved nothing less than a life of leisure and luxury. One common theme in his sermons was the coming of God's "seventh day," a millennium of rest and immortality. "The curse of work is fixin' to leave you now," he promised. "The curse of death is fixin' to leave you now. Why? 'Cause you're livin' in the dawn of the seventh day!" And like the drag performers, Jones reveled in self-glorification. In public he often wore a full-length white mink coat draped over European suits and a turban speckled with diamonds or a wide-brimmed hat adorned

with feathers. At home he liked to relax in satin slippers and a flowing robe decorated with sequins and an Elizabethan collar. He wore enormous jeweled rings and drove a massive white Cadillac. But most impressive of all was his fifty-four-room mansion, called “Dominion Residence,” which included a perfume parlor, a barbershop, a ballroom, and a shrine to his longtime companion, James Walton, who died in 1951. The mansion was painted a different color each season of the year.

Astonishingly, nearly all of Jones’s wealth came from gifts he received from his followers, whose devotion to the Prophet was never cooled by the press’s constant exposure of his feminine behavior and homosexuality. Jones himself unabashedly admitted to his congregation that he “lived a different life from that of most men.”

I have never played baseball; I have never had a baseball in my hands. I have never shot marbles; I have never had a marble in my hands. . . . I have never had sexual intercourse with a woman.

He even interpreted the Book of Genesis as antiheterosexual, preaching that Eve was the forbidden fruit and that the cohabitation of the sexes transgressed the law of God.²⁴

Sweet Daddy Grace was another idol of the black working class who differed sharply from American sexual norms. Beginning in Charlotte, North Carolina, in the 1920s, then expanding into Washington, D.C., New York City, and New England, Grace built a Pentecostal empire along the eastern seaboard that by the 1950s included at least 500,000 members in 300 congregations in nearly 70 cities. His shoulder-length hair splayed across the collar of his gold and purple coats, which often framed chartreuse vests and floral-print ties. Grace always sported a massive diamond ring on the middle finger of his left hand, and the most famous part of his appearance were his five-inch-long fingernails, which he usually painted red, white, and blue. Grace, who immigrated from Cape Verde and worked as a dishwasher and migrant farm laborer before becoming a preacher, said the nails represented both his rejection of work and his own immortality. “I never said I was God,” he once said, “but you cannot prove to me I’m not.” More emphatically, he also declared, “Grace has given God a vacation, and since God is on His vacation, don’t worry him.” The self-appointed deity rode in a custom-built Cadillac limousine and owned some of the most prestigious real estate in Manhattan, including the El Dorado on Central Park West, then the tallest apartment building in the world, as well as a country estate in Cuba. In the mid-1950s his total net worth was estimated

at \$25 million, and like Prophet Jones's fortune, most of it came from donations made by Grace's working-class devotees. In many of his churches, the members constructed enormous, arklike containers covered with dollar bills, behind which sat the minister's throne. Grace's services were sexually charged. They began with him processing down the red-carpeted aisle as his followers pinned ten, twenty, fifty, and sometimes hundred-dollar bills onto his robe. While a rhythm-and-blues band played, the congregants danced ecstatically. Asked why he promoted such libidinous revelry, Grace, who called himself "the Boyfriend of the World," replied, "Why should the devil have all the good times?"²⁵

This kind of behavior was, in the full American sense of the phrase, beyond the pale. Even more remarkable is that Odessa Madre, Daddy Grace, Prophet Jones, and the black drag shows were most popular during the greatest crusade against sexual deviancy in U.S. history. When a State Department official testified to Congress in February 1950 that the department was riddled with homosexuals, it inaugurated a five-year period in which the Senate investigated "perverts" in government, the FBI conducted surveillance of thousands of Americans' sexual practices, the armed forces doubled the number of discharges of alleged deviates, President Eisenhower banned homosexuals from federal jobs, prospective employees were required to undergo screenings of their sexual histories, municipal police departments conducted thousands of raids on gay bars and cruising areas, and newspapers reported the names and addresses of men and women arrested for illicit sexual practices. At no other time were the sexual cultures of black and white America drawn in starker contrast.²⁶

As the civil rights movement crystallized in the 1950s, it launched the greatest and perhaps the most effective campaign to replace the freedom and entitlement of black working-class culture with obligation, discipline, and rejection of the self. This campaign began in earnest in 1951, with the publication in *Ebony* of an article by Adam Clayton Powell Jr., pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church, U.S. congressman representing Harlem, and one of the leading national spokesman for black civil rights. The article, entitled "Sex in the Church," began with a disapproving description of the "fabulous funeral" of a young man "who held a high position in the church." The ceremony, which resembled "a scene out of Arabian Nights," featured "costly and lavish spreads of flowers" and a "rich coffin which had cost a minor fortune." But what Powell found most disturbing was the conduct of the pastor who ministered the service, whose "broken sobs sounded as if they had been wrung from the tragedy-twisted heart of one who has lost his lover." Powell then leveled the charges: "Actually the two had been sharing an unnatural relationship for a

number of years.” Worse still, “The entire congregation knew about it. The whole community knew about it—and yet, that minister was and is today one of the most powerful and ‘respected’ Negro pastors in all America.” Powell did not name him, but that pastor was almost certainly Prophet Jones.

Powell noted the high degree of depravity among both the clergy and laity. In the unidentified church described in the article, “there is a fantastically high percentage of worshippers . . . who blatantly and openly flaunt their sex perversion.” Most alarmingly, Powell found an increasing “trend of parading homosexuals” on the streets as well as in the churches in New York and Chicago. He went on to condemn the alleged rise in the number of ministers who had allowed their “strange sex leanings” to overtake their duty to God and the community. This kind of “undue emphasis on sex” was particularly common among what Powell called “leaders of so-called religious cults,” and he clearly identified Sweet Daddy Grace without naming him.²⁷

Nine months after Powell’s article appeared, *Ebony* ran another feature on homosexuality that held out hope for redemption. The article, titled “I Am a Woman Again,” was authored by Gladys Bentley, the famous drag king of the Harlem Renaissance. Bentley announced that through medical intervention and the love of a “real man,” she had joined the normal world. Several accompanying photos showed the former denizen of the “sex underworld” happily making a bed and cooking dinner “to make homecoming husband comfortable.” Bentley equated homosexuality with individualism: “Like a great number of lost souls, I inhabited that half-shadow no-man’s land which exists between the boundaries of the two sexes.” She and other “furtive humans” had created a fantasy world that enabled them to turn their backs “on the hard realism of life.” Though she had achieved great success, she lived as a “sad, lonely person.” Once reborn as a responsible heterosexual, however, she gave up her white tuxedo and Park Avenue apartment for an apron and a “modest, tastefully appointed home.”²⁸

Civil Responsibilities

The civil rights ideology of the black middle class rose in tandem with a new racial liberalism among white elites that was born out of the discourse of ethnic and racial “tolerance” during World War II. This emergent ideology made explicit that the price of admission to American society for African Americans would be a surrender to heterosexual norms. The foundational text of racial liberalism was Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma*, published in 1944, which argued that black “pathologies” were the product of slavery and segre-

gation. To Myrdal, the most debilitating of these pathologies were excessive emotionalism among male church leaders, sexual perversion, and the “instability of the Negro family.” *An American Dilemma* directed African Americans to seek inclusion within the nation and “become assimilated into American culture,” but warned that they would not be accepted until they embraced the norms from which they had diverged and acquired “the traits held in esteem by the dominant white Americans.”²⁹

Despite the early attempts by civil rights leaders to follow Myrdal’s admonitions, it was not until ten years after the publication of *An American Dilemma* that black sexual deviancy was largely removed from public view. In 1954, when the Supreme Court offered the first real promise of full integration, it ushered in an era of black heteronormativity. In its decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which referenced *An American Dilemma*, the Court suggested why queer behavior was at odds with the integration of black people into the body politic. The nine unanimous justices argued that by depriving blacks of full citizenship, the nation was also depriving itself of the opportunity to create a new class of loyal and productive subjects. White schools should be integrated to seize this opportunity:

Today, education is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment.³⁰

In the same year the Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Brown*, *Ebony* stopped publishing articles about homosexuality and the black newspapers in Detroit, New York, and Chicago ended their coverage of drag shows.³¹

In subsequent years, during the period of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the integration of Little Rock High School, and the emergence of Martin Luther King as a national figure, the civil rights movement deposed Prophet Jones and Sweet Daddy Grace. In January 1955, after years of neutral coverage of Jones, the *Michigan Chronicle*—which a year earlier had changed its motto from “A Community Newspaper” to “A Community, Family Newspaper”—published a broadside attack against the queer preacher, calling him a “circus-type headline-seeke[r] operating under the guise of religion.” Three months later, after NBC scheduled an appearance by Jones on the *Today* program, the Detroit Urban League and the Detroit Council of Churches organized a successful protest to keep the Prophet off the air. The most strident attacks came from C. L. Franklin, pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church and the emerging leader

of the Detroit civil rights movement. Franklin had been friendly toward Jones for many years, but now he called the prophet “degrading not only to local religious circles but[,] more significantly, a setback of hundreds of years to the integration of all races who are this time seeking democratic as well as Spiritual brotherhood.”

Soon after the attacks on Jones began, he was arrested for allegedly attempting to perform fellatio on an undercover police officer who had been assigned to investigate rumors that Jones ran a numbers-running operation. The local black press celebrated the arrest. The *Michigan Chronicle* called it a victory for “an increasingly vociferous element in the community” who demanded that people like Jones, “who exist by the skillful intermixing of religion, fear, faith in God and outright fakery solely for personal aggrandizement be driven from their lofty perches.” In his weekly columns in the *Michigan Chronicle*, Horace White, one of Detroit’s most prominent civil rights activists, relentlessly attacked Jones for leading “the masses of Negroes” astray. “‘The Prophet’ dips into the sexual elements on a very low scale,” White wrote, and was therefore a “menace to the struggles and efforts put forth by the great majority of Negro citizens to gain full equality as American citizens.” Worse still, the Prophet was spawning imitators. “Some of the public displays of homosexuality among young Negro men in our city can be traced directly to the sanction and the encouragement given to this degenerating practice by so-called religious leaders.”³²

The *Detroit Tribune*, which in previous years had praised Jones, now denounced him for giving the impression to whites that the black race was “under the guidance of a sex-deviate.” On the national level, *Ebony* devoted four punishing pages to Jones’s trial, calling it a “day of reckoning.” Ostracized by the civil rights leadership and shunned by the black press, Jones lost his place as a representative of the black working class. Nonetheless, his followers in Detroit remained as loyal as ever. They packed the courtroom every day of his trial, and when the jury declared him not guilty, hundreds of them raucously celebrated and shouted, “All is Well!” Jones’s enduring popularity among his constituency was confirmed by the crowd of more than two thousand people who attended his funeral in 1970, where his bronze casket was draped with his famous white mink coat.³³

Daddy Grace faced a similar fate. In 1957, a retired Georgia schoolteacher named Louvenia Royster filed a lawsuit against Grace, claiming that he had been married to her in the 1920s but had deserted her shortly after the birth of their child. Though the court ultimately dismissed the claim, the black press delivered a guilty verdict. After the trial, *Jet’s* headline read: “The Past That Haunts Daddy Grace—Dismissed Alimony Trial Reveals Secret of 1st Wife.”

The magazine called the preacher “America’s richest cultist” and hopefully speculated that the trial would “shake [the] kingdom of Daddy Grace.” But the subjects of the kingdom were unfazed. Grace’s supporters filled the courtroom to overflowing, and eight months after the trial a crowd of tens of thousands attended his annual parade through downtown Charlotte. However, by the time Grace died in 1960, the queer kingdoms of the country’s most popular black ministers had been conquered by a new generation of leaders.³⁴

The Integrated Personality

In his personal life, Martin Luther King Jr. demonstrated no hostility toward homosexuality, nor did he live according to the codes of heterosexual propriety. He allowed the homosexual Bayard Rustin to be one of his closest advisors during the formative years of the civil rights movement, and in 1957, when James Baldwin was one of the most famously gay men in the United States, King warmly welcomed the author in Atlanta. King’s extensive extramarital sexual activities, documented by the FBI, are now well known. Yet, in his public life, King launched a comprehensive attack on black queerness and did more than any other black leader of the twentieth century to efface the deviance of African American culture. The point here is not to label King a hypocrite, but rather to suggest that he understood that the attainment of full citizenship for African Americans required the creation of a heteronormative black culture.³⁵

In the summer of 1957, King embarked on a national tour delivering sermons in a series under the title “Problems of Personality Integration.” The sermons, which were all delivered in black churches, were intended to prepare African Americans for entry into mainstream American culture. At Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, he addressed the topic of “Conquering Self-Centeredness.” King counseled “those who are giving their lives to a tragic life of pleasure and throwing away everything they have in riotous living,” to “lose [their] ego in some great cause, some great purpose, some great ideal, some great loyalty.” By doing so, King said, they would create in themselves what he called “the integrated personality.”³⁶ In subsequent speeches, as well as in an advice column he began writing for *Ebony* in 1957 and in a book he published in 1958, King merged his Christian asceticism with the imperatives of citizenship as he admonished African Americans, “be honest enough to admit that our standards do often fall short.” He argued that integration required self-reformation. “By improving our standards here and now,” he wrote, “we will go a long way toward breaking down the arguments

of the segregationist.” To this end, he called for African Americans to stop drinking and gambling, both of which, he argued, destroyed the family and the community. He also instructed black people to shun immoral forms of sexuality. He told one audience, “we must walk the street[s] every day, and let people know that as we walk the street[s], we aren’t thinking about sex every time we turn around.”³⁷

To one young man who wrote to the magazine asking what he should do about his homosexuality, King replied that his “problem” was “not at all an uncommon one” but that it did “require careful attention.” The civil rights leader counseled the boy to “see a good psychiatrist” in order to “solve it.” And though King was quite tolerant of private same-sex relations, because Bayard Rustin’s homosexuality was exposed when he was arrested and convicted for lewd conduct with two men in a parked car in Pasadena in 1953, movement leaders kept Rustin out of public view. In 1960, King allowed Rustin to resign from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference when Adam Clayton Powell Jr. threatened to publicly identify the two as lovers. Later, King explained that he was most afraid of being associated with homosexuality. As he told an associate, “I think he [Rustin] controls himself pretty well until he gets to drinking and he would approach these students and they started talking with people about it and there was something of a reflection on me so that was really the main problem.”³⁸

In addition to immoral sexuality, King identified laziness, materialism, and conspicuous consumption as illnesses that destroyed the black community. “Don’t set out to do a good Negro job,” he scolded one audience. “If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets . . . so well that [the] host of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: ‘Here lived a great street sweeper, who swept his job well.’” On black spending habits, he approvingly paraphrased Booker T. Washington. “Well has it been said by one that Negroes too often buy what they want and beg for what they need,” he said. “Negroes must learn to practice systematic saving.” At the height of the scandals involving Prophet Jones and Sweet Daddy Grace, King pointed a damning finger at leaders “in love with money (and) publicity.”

The greatest threat posed by preachers like Jones and Grace was to the cause of integration. They were, according to King, too black. “[If] we’re going to get ready for integration, we can’t spend all of our time trying to learn how to whoop and holler. . . . We’re talking about integrated churches. . . . And we’ve got to have ministers who can stand up and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not a Negro gospel; not a gospel merely to get people to shout and kick over

benches, but a gospel that will make people think and live right and face the challenges of the Christian religion.”³⁹

The construction of King himself as the masculine symbol of the movement was a deliberate attempt to remove the image of black deviancy and show that African Americans could be good citizens. The public King, nearly always clad in a conservative business suit and frequently photographed in affectionate poses with his wife and children, was hailed by *Ebony* as the representative of a “New Negro” who was “willing to go hungry if it means his children would attend decent schools.” The King children did attend decent schools and were raised in a respectably neat and orderly home, but in an indication of just how fundamental heterosexual norms were to the movement, the demands placed on the parents by their work that took them away from the family was partly compensated for by secret payments made by the entertainer Harry Belafonte for the children’s nannies. The immaculateness of the King household allowed the civil rights leader to rail against blacks who fell short of white standards of domesticity:

We must sit down quietly by the wayside, and ask ourselves: “Where can we improve?” What are the things that white people are saying about us? . . . You may not have enough money to take a weekend trip to Paris, France, and buy all of the fascinating and enticing perfumes. You may not be able to do that, but you are not so poor that you cannot buy a five cents bar of soap.⁴⁰

For King, like all the leaders of the civil rights movement, the heterosexual family was the most effective vehicle through which to create citizens. In *Stride toward Freedom*, his account of the Montgomery bus boycott, he argued that oppression had destroyed that vehicle. “Not only are millions deprived of formal education and proper health facilities,” he wrote, “but our most fundamental social unit—the family—is tortured, corrupted, and weakened by economic insufficiency.” To combat crime and antisocial behavior, “Negro parents must be urged to give their children the love, attention, and sense of belonging that a segregated society deprives them of.” King made clear, as did many civil rights leaders, that black women bore the chief responsibility for raising good citizens. “When a mother has to work she does violence to motherhood by depriving her children of her loving guidance and protection; often they are poorly cared for by others or by none—left to roam the streets unsupervised.”⁴¹

The black social scientists who provided the intellectual basis for the civil rights movement were preoccupied with the sexual mores and practices of African Americans. The formative years of the movement saw a proliferation of scholarly works on black deviancy and the urgent need for normalization.

E. Franklin Frazier's work, in particular his landmark study published in 1939, *The Negro Family in the United States*, established the interpretive framework for a generation of black scholars and their allies in the movement. Frazier saw the Great Migration as a journey from a stable, rural family life to "the city of destruction," and he called for the rebuilding of the black family according to modern bourgeois norms. Once freed from isolated homesteads and the country church, the "simple peasant folk could give rein to their repressed impulses without incurring the censure of the elders for their 'sinful conduct.'" On the road, the migrants "led a more or less lawless sex life during their wanderings," and once in the cities their bodies were loosed, as the "romanticization and even glorification of sex were stimulated by the songs and movies that are a part of the social world of Negroes in the slum areas of American cities." Black men lost their masculinity and black women became less maternal: "The attitude of the urban Negro woman changed: sex became divorced from procreation and its pleasurable aspect was enhanced." Even more dangerous was the mixture of emasculated black men and the urban world:

When the Negro male cannot attain his maleness through normal sex outlets, there is always the female role open to him. After all, the Negro woman was able to adjust to American society in a way that the Negro male could not do normally. Not only does the color line tend to disappear among homosexuals, but in the female role the Negro male no longer offers a challenge to white male dominance. Perhaps, and this is speculation, the Negro male homosexuals who publicly exhibit their deviation may represent the sexual adjustment of the Negro male to American society.

But for Frazier, the destruction wrought by urbanization gave rise to a new struggle among African Americans—between the hardworking, churchgoing guardians of social order and the new libertines: "painted and powdered women," "strutting young men, attired in gaudy clothes and flashing soft hands and manicured fingernails," "a girl with her head buried in a book on homosexual love or a boy absorbed in the latest revolutionary pamphlet." To Frazier, the families that survived the new urban culture represented the possibility of assimilation and its promise of citizenship. Founded by "the more stable, intelligent, and reliable elements in the slave population," strong black families maintained "conventional standards of sexuality all over the South" and were the "leavening element for the masses." Similar families in the North have "been the custodian of the gains which the Negro has made in acquiring culture and civilization." Only the full acceptance of white sexual norms would deliver African Americans to the promised land of full citizenship: "The gains in civilization which result from participation in the white world

will in the future as in the past be transmitted to future generations through the family.”⁴²

The domestication of African Americans, both in fact and in the white mind, was no small task, since the general perception that blacks diverged sharply from the model of the American nuclear family was largely correct. Myrdal’s researchers reported that “unattached individuals” and “one-person families” made up 13 percent of the black population in 1930, but only 9 percent of the native white population. Similarly, 30 percent of African American families were defined as “broken families,” compared to 20 percent of white families. Myrdal also noted that a far higher percentage of African Americans lived as lodgers, “another factor contributing to family disorganization.” After World War II the numbers of African Americans living outside heterosexual family norms only increased, and at a far faster rate than for whites. The illegitimacy rate among African Americans rose from 16.8 percent in 1940 to 23.6 percent in 1963, while the rate among whites remained relatively tiny, moving from just 2 percent to 3.07 percent during the same period. Similarly, the number of births per 1,000 unmarried black women increased from 35.6 in 1940 to 98.3 in 1960, while the figure for white unmarried women grew from 3.6 to 9.2. The divorce rate for both groups was 2.2 percent in 1940, but for African Americans it grew to 5.1 percent by 1963, while the white rate increased to only 3.6 percent.

These trends confounded the expectation of many liberals that economic uplift would normalize black culture. During this period African Americans experienced unprecedented material improvements in their lives, relative to whites. From 1939 to 1960, the annual median income of black men grew by 568.5 percent, far greater than the advance of 362 percent for white men. For black women the figure was 418.7 percent, compared to a 275.3 percent increase for white women. The percentage of black men in skilled, semiskilled, managerial, and professional occupations more than doubled between 1940 and 1960, and for black women the percentage increased by more than 60 percent.⁴³

Even more challenging to the civil rights project than the numbers of officially “deviant” African Americans were black attitudes toward the family. Myrdal related the findings of black sociologist Charles S. Johnson that “common-law marriage and illegitimacy are not seriously condemned within the Negro community—except among the upper classes.”⁴⁴ Civil rights leaders took it upon themselves to correct this lack of moralism by creating model black husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers.⁴⁵

“I’m Gonna Get Married”

As civil rights ideology came to dominate official African American discourse in the 1950s, many of the producers of black popular culture adopted the norms of heterosexual citizenship. After 1954, *Ebony* replaced its articles on homosexuality with sections titled “Family,” “Marriage,” “Children,” “Military,” and “Work.” The publisher of the magazine, John H. Johnson, recalled that his decision to “play down sensationalism and sex” was compelled by the emergence of a new race consciousness. “The world was changing, and people wanted *Ebony* to be more serious,” he remembered. “They wanted us to move away from the sensationalism that characterized some of our early articles.”⁴⁶

The mid-1950s were pivotal as well in the history of African American popular music. As Marybeth Hamilton has demonstrated, prior to the civil rights era the music that filled the air of black homes and clubs more often than not violated the standards of middle-class respectability. The blues and its sibling, jazz, which were born in the brothels of New Orleans, were saturated with sexual lyrics during their heyday from the 1920s through the early 1950s. As previously mentioned, many blues songs acknowledged homosexual proclivities, though what should be emphasized is that even songs that were heterosexual were rarely heteronormative. Records such as “Handy Man,” “Kitchen Man,” “I Got the Best Jelly Roll in Town,” “Tight Like That,” and “Empty Bed Blues” celebrated the purely physical pleasures of sex without reference to romance, monogamy, or responsibility, and were consequently labeled as “pornographic” by black moral reformers. *Jet* magazine reported that sales of “dirty blues records” peaked in the early 1950s, when it estimated that 2 million records containing “filthy, suggestive songs” were sold annually. Overtly sexual content in black popular music was not limited to underground records. In the ten years before the implementation of *Brown*, from 1945 through 1954, more than half of all songs by African Americans at the top of the *Billboard* rhythm-and-blues charts contained lyrics extolling drinking, dancing, partying, sexual pleasure, sexual independence, or promiscuity. Typical hit songs during this period were Julia Lee and Her Boyfriends’ “King Size Papa,” Wynonie Harris’s “All She Wants to Do Is Rock,” Amos Milburn’s “Roomin’ House Boogie,” and Peppermint Harris’s “I Got Loaded.” Also reaching the top of the charts were Lucky Millinder’s lament for a prematurely terminated party, “Who Threw the Whiskey in the Well”; “Snatch and Grab It” by Julia Lee, which instructs listeners to “grab it in the morning, grab it in the night, hold it, baby, and hold it tight”; and the Dominoes’s “Sixty Minute Man,” in which

the narrator promises to “rock ’em, roll ’em, all night long.” In contrast, one would be hard-pressed to find any popular song by a white performer during this period that came close to the kind of sexual openness common in African American music. Nearly all of the hits at the top of the mainstream *Billboard* charts before 1955 were childlike ditties or paeans to romantic love.⁴⁷

Soon after the *Brown* decision, when rock and roll and rhythm and blues began to dominate the music charts, Martin Luther King directed African Americans to shun the new music, which, he said, “plunges men’s minds into degrading and immoral depths.” Likewise, A. Philip Randolph’s Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters condemned black popular music for its overt sexuality and its “degrading portrayal of Negro womanhood.” In 1954, the national edition of the *Pittsburgh Courier* cited “the rise of vandalism and wanton murder” as reason to ban “smutty records” and succeeded in persuading a number of radio stations to keep them off the air. The following year, a committee in Houston headed by black sociologist and civil rights leader Henry Allen Bullock published a list of twenty-six rhythm and blues songs that were “suggestive, obscene, and characterized by lewd intonations” and convinced all nine of the city’s radio stations to ban them. The list included “I Got a Woman,” which, despite the ban, launched the career of a young singer and songwriter named Ray Charles.⁴⁸

What followed was the eclipse of raunchy blues records by the sounds of integration. As Brian Ward has noted, the new black musicians of the civil rights era “generally avoided projecting the sort of dark disturbing sexuality which alarmed white adults and often excluded them from pop radio playlists” and instead sang of “insecurity, compassion, fidelity, trust and a sense of personal responsibility for the success or failure of relationships.”⁴⁹ Songs such as “I Wake Up Crying,” “Always,” “Nobody but You,” “Stand by Me,” “Dedicated to the One I Love,” “Will You Love Me Tomorrow,” “Chapel of Love,” “Our Day Will Come,” and “I’m Gonna Get Married” were typically performed by young black men and women whose bodies were covered by neatly tailored suits and tasteful dresses. In the ten years before the implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education*, only 39 percent of top-selling songs by African Americans contained lyrics expressing desire for monogamy or marriage. In the ten years after *Brown*, the percentage was 63 percent.⁵⁰

The most prominent models of black sexual propriety in the civil rights era were Luther Brooks, Gregory Miller, Tommy Tyler, and Noah Cullen, characters played by Sidney Poitier in the four most important Hollywood “race movies” of the 1950s: *No Way Out* (1950), *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *Edge of the City* (1957), and *The Defiant Ones* (1958). These men were devoted to their

families, dressed respectably, danced awkwardly or not at all, and exhibited not the slightest libido. As the film historian Donald Bogle puts it, any character played by Poitier during this period was “non-funky, almost sexless and sterile. . . . And he was almost totally devoid of rhythm.”⁵¹

As the civil rights movement ebbed by the middle of the 1960s, so too did the project of normalizing African American sexuality. So-called sweet R&B was replaced at the top of the music charts with unabashedly libidinal soul music, and Sidney’s Poitier’s ascetic characters were pushed off the screen by a new generation of virile black superheroes in the enormously popular “blaxploitation” genre. Drawing on studies showing increased rates of illegitimacy, divorce, and single-mother households among African Americans, black social scientists and civil rights leaders grieved over the failure of the movement to conform its constituents to the American family ethic. In 1965, C. Eric Lincoln argued that “true integration” could not “be achieved until the nation—and the Negro—solves a crucial and immediate problem: how to ‘Americanize’ the fragile, fractured Negro family.” In the same year, Kenneth Clark, the author of the NAACP’s argument in the *Brown* case that segregation “damaged” the black psyche, lamented that the death of legal segregation did not reverse the emasculation of the black male and the rise of the “pathological” black family. Slavery, discrimination, and poverty “made the female the dominant person in the Negro family,” Clark wrote. “Psychologically, the Negro male could not support his normal desire for dominance.”⁵²

Though it was widely criticized by partisans of the civil rights movement, assistant secretary of labor Daniel Moynihan’s 1965 report claiming that the black family was “at the center of the tangle of pathology” in black culture was virtually identical, in language and logic, to decades of civil rights discourse. According to Moynihan, “the weakness of the family structure” was “the principal source of most of the aberrant, inadequate, or antisocial behavior that did not establish, but now serves to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and deprivation.” Echoing the attacks by King against the seekers of pleasure, Moynihan cited a study showing that “children from fatherless homes seek immediate gratification of their desires far more than children with fathers present.” Other studies “revealed that children who hunger for immediate gratification are more prone to delinquency, along with other less social behavior,” and psychologists “maintain that inability to delay gratification is a critical factor in immature, criminal, and neurotic behavior.” Discipline, the renunciation of desire, and masculine asceticism were necessary to bring the Negro into America. Taking a page from the *Brown* decision, Moynihan urged military service, “an utterly masculine world,” for black men:

Given the strains of the disorganized and matrifocal family life in which so many Negro youth come of age, the Armed Forces are a dramatic and desperately needed change: a world away from women, a world run by strong men of unquestioned authority, where discipline, if harsh, is nonetheless orderly and predictable, and where rewards, if limited, are granted on the basis of performance.

Moynihan noted that “The theme of a current Army recruiting message states it as clearly as can be: ‘In the U.S. Army you get to know what it means to feel like a man.’”⁵³

Seven months after the Moynihan Report was released, King endorsed its recommendations in a speech to a social welfare organization in New York. The Negro family was “fragile, deprived and often psychopathic.” But the movement for civil rights had pointed the Negro in a new direction. “In the process” of fighting for civil rights, he “has learned also how to win battles with himself” and to “make us whole again.” King returned to these themes in his last major publication, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* which appeared in 1967. He merged his calls for moral reform and masculinization with his growing emphasis on government assistance. “While not ignoring the fact that the ultimate way to diminish our problems of crime, family disorganization, illegitimacy and so forth will have to be found through a government program to help the frustrated Negro male find his true masculinity by placing him on his own two economic feet,” King wrote, “we must do all within our power to approach these goals ourselves.” Black poverty caused “fragile family relationships which distorted personality development,” and one solution would be for the government to fund “family counseling to create better personal adjustments.” King hoped that such measures would bring African Americans into what he called “The World House.” Historians have yet to acknowledge what King well understood, that sexual freedom was included in the price of admission to that house.⁵⁴

Notes

1. Andrew Sullivan, “Integration Day,” *New York Times*, May 17, 2004, 21; “Black Ministers Slam Gay Unions,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, May 18, 2004, 10. See also Tony Perkins, “Gender Is Different from Race,” *USA Today*, May 18, 2004, 19A; David Garrow, “How the *Brown* Ruling Led the Way,” *Financial Times*, May 17, 2004, 17; Erin Teixeira, “Gays and African-Americans; Parallels on Rights Case Anniversary,” *Newsday*, May 17, 2004, A7; Bob Egelko, “*Brown vs. Board of Education*: 50 Years Later; 1954 Ruling Seen as Model of Judicial Activism; Landmark Segregation and Gay Nuptial Cases Have Similarities,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 17, 2004, A10.

2. Found at <http://www.andrewsullivan.com/homosexuality.php>; Tamar Lewin, "The Gay Rights Movement, Settled Down," *New York Times*, February 29, 2004, 5; <http://www.indegayforum.org/authors/vanasco/vanasco4.html>.
3. Found at <http://www.lambdalegal.org/cgi-bin/iowa/documents/record?record=1336>. Powerful critiques of rights discourse are presented in Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), and Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
4. George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 244.
5. Bruce Nugent was the most notable exception. Eric Garber, "A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 318–31.
6. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 227–332.
7. The Committee of Fourteen's annual report for 1928 was released on October 14, 1929. Committee of Fourteen, *Annual Report* (New York, 1929). Powell's attack began four weeks later. See "Night Clubs Found Chief Vice Centres: Committee of Fourteen, in Its Annual Survey, Reports Harlem Conditions Worst," *New York Times*, October 14, 1929, 29. Powell's first antihomosexual article, "Dr. A. C. Powell Scores Pulpit Evils," appeared on the front page of the *New York Age* on November 16, 1929.
8. "Dr. A. C. Powell Scores Pulpit Evils," *New York Age*, November 16, 1929, 1; "Dr. Powell's Crusade against Abnormal Vice Is Approved: Pastors and Laity Endorse Dr. Powell's Denunciation of Degeneracy in the Pulpit: Chorus of Commendation Is Heard as Eminent Men Express Approval and Give Promises of Their Support," *New York Age*, November 23, 1929, 1.
9. The heteronormative domestication of African Americans was originally a white project. See Katherine M. Franke, "Becoming a Citizen: Reconstruction Era Regulation of African American Marriages," *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 11 (Summer 1999): 251–309.
10. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 248.
11. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 251; Garber, "A Spectacle in Color," 320; Paul Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning: Meaning in the Blues* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 98–99.
12. Myles Vollmer, "New Year's Eve Drag," 2, Folder 2, Box 140, Series 4, Ernest Burgess Papers, University of Chicago Special Collections Research Center.
13. Allen Drexel, "Before Paris Burned: Race, Class, and Male Homosexuality on the Chicago South Side, 1935–1960," in *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories*, ed. Brett Beemyn (New York: Routledge, 1997), 119–44 (quotes on 132–33 and 136–37, respectively).
14. Vollmer, "New Year's Eve Drag," 3–4.
15. See Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 115; Brett Beemyn, "A Queer Capital: Race, Class, Gender, and the Changing Social Landscape of Washington's Gay Communities, 1940–1955," in *Creating a Place for Ourselves*, ed. Beemyn, 192–94; Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945–1972* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 105–9; Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 10, 242–43, 321–24; and Drexel, "Before Paris Burned," 144n53.
16. "Hamilton Lodge, 710," *New York Age*, March 5, 1932, 9; "Masquerade Ball Draws 5,000 People," *Amsterdam News*, February 20, 1929, 2; "Mere Male Blossoms Out in Garb of Milady at Big Hamilton Lodge Ball," *Amsterdam News*, February 19, 1930, 3; "Hamilton Lodge Ball Draws 7,000," *Amsterdam News*, March 2, 1932, 2; "Snow and Ice Cover Streets as Pansies Blossom Out at Hamilton Lodge's Dance," *Amsterdam News*, February 28, 1934, 1; Roi Ottley, "Hectic Harlem," *Amsterdam News*, March 7, 1936, 13.
17. See *Michigan Chronicle*, April 19, 1952, 10. Quotes are taken from *Michigan Chronicle*, November 10, 1951, 18; November 17, 1951, 18; February 16, 1952, 19; February 23, 1952, 23; November 7, 1953, 24; January 2, 1954, 9; and July 28, 1951, 21.
18. Marybeth Hamilton, "Sexual Politics and African-American Music; or, Placing Little Richard in History," *History Workshop Journal* 46 (Autumn 1998): 161–76; "People Are Talking About . . ." *Jet*, January 10, 1952, 49.
19. For examples of the black magazines' coverage of the balls and homosexuality, see "The Man Who Lived 30 Years as a Woman," *Ebony*, October 1951, 23–26; "Gay Affair Names 'Queen,'" *Jet*, No-

- ember 15, 1951, 63–64; “Male or Female?” *Jet*, December 13, 1951, 35; “Female Impersonators Hold Costume Balls,” *Ebony*, March 1952, 62–67; “The Truth About . . . Female Impersonators,” *Jet*, October 2, 1952, 26–31; “Female Impersonators,” *Ebony*, March 1953, 64–68; “Women Who Act like Men,” *Jet*, April 2, 1953, 26–29; “Female Impersonators Cavort at Chicago Halloween Hijinks,” *Jet*, November 13, 1952, 26–27; “Kiss for ‘Loveliest Female’ Male,” *Jet*, December 11, 1952, 26–27; “2,500 Impersonators Frolic at Annual Ball in New York,” *Jet*, December 10, 1953, 16–17; “Women Who Pass for Men,” *Jet*, January 28, 1954, 22–24; “‘Drag’ Ball Attracts 3,600,” *Jet*, November 11, 1954, 15; and “The Woman Who Lived as a Man for 15 Years,” *Ebony*, November 1954, 93–98. The *New York Age* is quoted in Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 259.
20. Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2000), 338; Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 37–38; Drexel, “Before Paris Burned,” 126; Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 116–17; Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 73–74, 86.
 21. James Baldwin, “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood,” in *Collected Essays*, by James Baldwin (New York: Library of America, 1998), 814–29 (quoted section on 819); Daneel Buring, *Lesbian and Gay Memphis: Building Communities Behind the Magnolia Curtain* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 91–93; Beemyn, “A Queer Capital,” 202–3; Drexel, “Before Paris Burned,” 128–29; James T. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 151, 286, 292; bell hooks, “Homophobia in Black Communities,” *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 120–26.
 22. Courtland Milloy, “The Life and Times of the Queen of Washington’s Underworld,” *Washington Post Magazine*, September 28, 1980, 14; Sharon Harley, “‘Working for Nothing but for a Living’: Black Women in the Underground Economy,” in *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work*, ed. Sharon Harley (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 48–66.
 23. Tim Retzlaff, “‘Seer or Queer?’ Postwar Fascination with Detroit’s Prophet Jones,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8 (May 2002): 271–96; *Michigan Chronicle*: December 9, 1950, 10; September 15, 1951, 1; December 27, 1952, 1; and December 4, 1954, 1. Dates for the four-part series were January 17, 1953, 1; January 24, 1953, 7; January 31, 1953, 21; and February 7, 1953, 21.
 24. *Jet*’s coverage of Jones, which was almost weekly in the early 1950s, tended to uncritically sensationalize his material accumulations. For examples, see “Birthday Cake Awes Prophet,” *Jet*, December 11, 1952, 28; “Throne for a ‘Prophet,’” *Jet*, January 8, 1953, 31; “Prophet Buys \$1,000 Pen Set,” *Jet*, January 29, 1953, 28; “Two Teachers Give \$12,900 Mink Coat to Prophet Jones,” *Jet*, March 5, 1953, 16–17; and “Portable Throne for Prophet Jones,” *Jet*, April 23, 1953, 21. On the “seventh day” sermon, see *Negro Digest*, September 1944, 14. Jones’s admission of his “difference” is recorded in Herbert Floyd McFadden, “The Study of a Negro Cult: Thankful Center Number One, of the Religious Organization of ‘Prophet’ James Francis Jones” (master’s thesis, Wayne University, 1949, 69). On Jones’s interpretation of Genesis and cohabitation, see *Michigan Chronicle*, May 28, 1955, 6, and July 30, 1955, 3.
 25. “America’s Richest Negro Minister,” *Ebony*, January 1952, 17–23; “Daddy Grace’s Cuban Paradise,” *Ebony*, December 1953, 86–90; “Fire Hose Baptism,” *Ebony*, October 1955, 102–6; “Farewell to Daddy Grace,” *Ebony*, April 1960, 25–34; Richard Newman, “Grace, Charles Emmanuel,” American National Biography Online, <http://www.anb.org/articles/08/08-02030.html>, February 2000 (accessed January 18, 2003); Lenwood G. Davis, *Daddy Grace: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1992).
 26. John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 41–51.
 27. Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Jr., “Sex in the Church,” *Ebony*, November 1951, 27–34.
 28. Gladys Bentley, “I Am a Woman Again,” *Ebony*, August 1952, 92–98.
 29. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Transaction, 1944), 928–29; Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938–1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 125.
 30. Waldo E. Martin Jr., *Brown v. Board of Education: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1998), 173.
 31. *Jet*, which was geared more toward a working-class readership and was less concerned with “respectability,” did continue to cover the balls. Gregory Conerly, “Swishing and Swaggering: Homosexuality

- in Black Magazines during the 1950s,” in *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities*, ed. Delroy Constantine-Simms (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2001), 386, 389. Conerly attributes the desexualization of *Ebony* to the economic recession in 1954, not to the ascendancy of civil rights ideology.
32. *Michigan Chronicle*: January 22, 1955, 20; April 23, 1955, 1; June 18, 1955, 3; June 25, 1955, 10; and March 17, 1956.
 33. Retzlöff, “‘Seer or Queer?’” 279–85; “The Rise and Fall of Prophet Jones,” *Ebony*, October 1956, 63–66.
 34. *Jet*: January 30, 1958, 20–25; January 23, 1958, 18–19; and January 9, 1958, 18–19; Davis, *Daddy Grace*, 40.
 35. James Baldwin, “The Dangerous Road before Martin Luther King,” in *Collected Essays*, 638–39.
 36. “Conquering Self-Centeredness,” August 11, 1957, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 4, *Symbol of the Movement: January 1957–December 1958*, ed. Clayborne Carson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 253, 256, 257.
 37. Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 1958), 223; “Some Things We Must Do,” December 5, 1957, in *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Carson et al., 4: 336; Martin Luther King Jr., “Advice for Living,” *Ebony*, April 1958, 104. All quotes from “Some Things We Must Do.”
 38. “Advice for Living,” January 1958, in *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Carson et al., 4: 348–49; John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 372.
 39. *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Carson et al., 4: “Some Things We Must Do,” December 5, 1957, 335–40; “Advice for Living,” March 1958, 374; “The Birth of a New Nation,” April 7, 1957, 159.
 40. Marisa Chappell, Jenny Hutchinson, and Brian Ward, “‘Dress modestly, neatly . . . as if you were going to church’: Respectability, Class and Gender in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” in *Gender in the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Peter J. Ling and Sharon Monteith (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 90–96; Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 317; “Some Things We Must Do,” December 5, 1957, in *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Carson et al., 4: 335–40.
 41. King, *Stride toward Freedom*, 203.
 42. E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States*, rev. ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 191, 205, 210, 231, 363, 368; E. Franklin Frazier, “Negro, Sex Life of the African and American,” in *The Encyclopedia of Sexual Behavior*, ed. Albert Ellis and Albert Abarbanel (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1961), 775.
 43. M. Belinda Tucker and Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, “Trends in African American Family Formation: A Theoretical and Statistical Overview,” in *The Decline in Marriage among African Americans: Causes, Consequences, and Policy Implications*, ed. M. Belinda Tucker and Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (New York: Sage, 1995), 10–11; Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1965); Marion Hayes, “A Century of Change: Negroes in the U.S. Economy, 1860–1960,” *Monthly Labor Review* (December 1962): 1364.
 44. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 932–35. See also Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 72.
 45. Leslie J. Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and the Law in the United States, 1867–1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 136–37.
 46. John H. Johnson, with Lerone Bennett Jr., *Succeeding against the Odds* (New York: Amistad, 1989), 235.
 47. Marybeth Hamilton, “Sexuality, Authenticity and the Making of the Blues Tradition,” *Past and Present* 169 (November 2000): 132–60; “The Truth about Dirty Records,” *Jet*, January 3, 1952, 59–61; Joel Whitburn, *Joel Whitburn Presents Top R&B/Hip-Hop Singles, 1942–2004* (Menomonee Falls, Wis.: Record Research, 2004), 653–58.
 48. Melinda Chateauvert, *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, *Anti-Rock: The Opposition to Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: De Capo, 1993), 18, 23; Martin Luther King Jr., “Advice for Living,” *Ebony*, April 1958, 104.

49. Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 52, 150.
50. Of the 117 songs by African Americans that reached the top of the *Billboard* music charts from 1945 through 1954, 46 songs (39 percent) contained lyrics expressing desire for monogamy or marriage. From 1955 through 1964, 126 songs by African Americans were number one hits, of which 79 (63 percent) expressed desire for monogamy or marriage.
51. Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (repr.; New York: Continuum International, 1999), 176.
52. C. Eric Lincoln, "The Absent Father Haunts the Negro Family," *New York Times Magazine*, November 28, 1965, 60; Clark, *Dark Ghetto*, 70.
53. Online at <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm>.
54. Martin Luther King Jr., "The Dignity of Family Life," in *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*, ed. Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1967), 402–9; Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 107, 125, 161, 162, 167.