When thinking about black female spectators, I remember being punished as a child for staring, for those hard intense direct looks children would give grown-ups, looks that were seen as confrontational, as gestures of resistance, challenges to authority. The “gaze” has always been political in my life. Imagine the terror felt by the child who has come to understand through repeated punishments that one’s gaze can be dangerous. The child who has learned so well to look the other way when necessary. Yet, when punished, the child is told by parents, “Look at me when I talk to you.” Only, the child is afraid to look. Afraid to look, but fascinated by the gaze. There is power in looking.

Amazed the first time I read in history classes that white slave-owners (men, women, and children) punished enslaved black people for looking, I wondered how this traumatic relationship to the gaze had informed black parenting and black spectatorship. The politics of slavery, of racialized power relations, were such that the slaves were denied their right to gaze. Connecting this strategy of domination to that used by grown folks in southern black rural communities where I grew up, I was pained to think that there was no absolute difference between whites who had oppressed black people and ourselves. Years later, reading Michel Foucault, I thought again about these connections, about the ways power as domination reproduces itself in different locations employing similar apparatuses, strategies, and mechanisms of control. Since I knew as a child that the dominating power adults exercised over me and over my gaze was never so absolute that I did not dare to look, to sneak a peep, to state dangerously, I knew that the slaves had looked. That all attempts to repress our/black peoples’ right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: “Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.” Even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one’s gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency. In much of his work, Michel Foucault insists on describing domination in terms of “relations of power” as part of an effort to challenge the assumption that “power is a system of domination which controls everything and which leaves no room for freedom.” Emphatically stating that in all relations of power “there is necessarily the possibility of resistance,” he invites the critical thinker to search those margins, gaps, and locations on and through the body where agency can be found.

Stuart Hall calls for recognition of our agency as black spectators in his essay “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation.” Speaking against the construction of white representations of blackness as totalizing, Hall says of white presence: “The error is not to conceptualize this ‘presence’ in terms of power, but to locate that power as wholly external to us—as extrinsic force, whose influence can be thrown off like the serpent sheds its skin. . . .”

Spaces of agency exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see. The “gaze” has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally. Subordinates in relations of power learn experientially that there is a critical gaze, one that

“looks” to document, one that is oppositional. In resistance struggle, the power of the dominated to assert agency by claiming and cultivating “awareness” politicizes “looking” relations—one learns to look a certain way in order to resist.

When most black people in the United States first had the opportunity to look at film and television, they did so fully aware that mass media was a system of knowledge and power reproducing and maintaining white supremacy. To stare at the television, or mainstream movies, to engage its images, was to engage its negation of black representation. It was the oppositional black gaze that responded to these looking relations by developing independent black cinema. Black viewers of mainstream cinema and television could chart the progress of political movements for racial equality via the construction of images, and did so. Within my family’s southern black working-class home, located in a racially segregated neighborhood, watching television was one way to develop critical spectatorship. Unless you went to work in the white world, across the tracks, you learned to look at white people by staring at them on the screen. Black looks, as they were constituted in the context of social movements for racial uplift, were interrogating gazes. We laughed at television shows like Our Gang and Amos ‘n’ Andy, at these white representations of blackness, but we also looked at them critically. Before racial integration, black viewers of movies and television experienced visual pleasure in a context where looking was also about contestation and confrontation.

Writing about black looking relations in “Black British Cinema: Spectatorship and Identity Formation in Territories,” Manthia Diawara identifies the power of the spectator: “Every narration places the spectator in a position of agency; and race, class and sexual relations influence the way in which this subjecthood is filled by the spectator.” Of particular concern for him are moments of “rupture” when the spectator resists “complete identification with the film’s discourse.” . . . Critical discussion of the film while it was in progress or at its conclusion maintained the distance between spectator and the image. Black films were also subject to critical interrogation. Since they came into being in part as a response to the failure of white-dominated cinema to represent blackness in a manner that did not reinforce white supremacy, they too were critiqued to see if images were seen as complicit with dominant cinematic practices.

Critical, interrogating black looks were mainly concerned with issues of race and racism, the way racial domination of blacks by whites overdetermined representation. They were rarely concerned with gender. As spectators, black men could repudiate the reproduction of racism in cinema and television, the negation of black presence, even as they could feel as though they were rebelling against white supremacy by daring to look, by engaging phallocentric politics of spectatorship. Given the real-life public circumstances wherein black men were murdered/lynched for looking at white womanhood, where the black male gaze was always subject to control and/or punishment by the powerful white Other, the private realm of television screens or dark theaters could unleash the repressed gaze. There they could “look” at white womanhood without a structure of domination overseeing the gaze, interpreting, and punishing. That white supremacist structure that had murdered Emmett Till after interpreting his look as violation, as “rape” of white womanhood, could not control black male responses to screen images . . . . This gendered relation to looking made the experience of the black male spectator radically different from that of the black female spectator . . .

With the possible exception of early race movies, black female spectators have had to develop looking relations within a cinematic context that constructs our presence as absence, that denies the “body” of the black female so as to perpetuate white supremacy and with it a phallocentric spectatorship where the woman to be looked at and desired is “white.” (Recent movies do not conform to this paradigm but I am turning to the past with the intent to chart the development of black female spectatorship.)

Talking with black women of all ages and classes, in different areas of the United States, about their filmic looking relations, I hear again and again ambivalent responses to cinema . . . . Most of the black women I talked with were adamant that they never went to movies expecting to see compelling representations of black femaleness. They were all acutely aware of cinematic racism—it’s violent erasure of black womanhood . . . . Even when representations of black women were present in film, our bodies and being were there to
serve—to enhance and maintain white womanhood as object of the phallocentric gaze. . . .

When black women actresses like Lena Horne appeared in mainstream cinema most white viewers were not aware that they were looking at black females unless the film was specifically coded as being about blacks. Burchill is one of the few white women film critics who has dared to examine the intersection of race and gender in relation to the construction of the category “woman” in film as object of the phallocentric gaze. With characteristic wit she asserts: “What does it say about racial purity that the best blondes have all been brunettes (Harrow, Monroe, Bardot)? I think it says that we are not as white as we think.” Burchill could easily have said “we are not as white as we want to be,” for clearly the obsession to have white women film stars be ultra-white was a cinematic practice that sought to maintain a distance, a separation between that image and the black female Other; it was a way to perpetuate white supremacy. Politics of race and gender were inscribed into mainstream cinematic narrative from Birth of a Nation on. As a seminal work, this film identified what the place and function of white womanhood would be in cinema. There was clearly no place for black women.

Remembering my past in relation to screen images of black womanhood, I wrote a short essay, “Do you remember Sapphire?” which explored both the negation of black female representation in cinema and television and our rejection of these images. Identifying the character of “Sapphire” in cinema and television and our rejection of these images could assault black womanhood, could name us bitches, nags. And in opposition they claimed Sapphire as their own, as the symbol of that angry part of themselves white folks and black men could not even begin to understand.

Conventional representations of black women have done violence to the image. Responding to this assault, many black women spectators shut out the image, looked the other way, accorded cinema no importance in their lives. Then there were those spectators whose gaze was that of desire and complicity. Assuming a posture of subordination, they submitted to cinema’s capacity to seduce and betray. They were cinematically “gaslighted.” Every black woman I spoke with who was/is an ardent moviegoer, a lover of the Hollywood film, testified that to experience fully the pleasure of that cinema they had to close down critique, analysis; they had to forget racism. And mostly they did not think about sexism. What was the nature then of this adoring black female gaze—this look that could bring pleasure in the midst of negation? In her first novel, The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison constructs a portrait of the black female spectator; her gaze is the masochistic look of victimization. Describing her looking relations, Miss Pauline Breedlove, a poor working woman, maid in the house of a prosperous white family, asserts:

The onliest time I be happy seem like was when I was in the picture show. Every time I got, I went, I’d go early, before the show started. They’s cut off the lights, and everything be black. Then the screen would light up, and I’d move right on in them picture. White men taking such good care of they women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses with the bath tubs right in the same room with the toilet. Them pictures gave me a lot of pleasure.
To experience pleasure, Miss Pauline sitting in the dark must imagine herself transformed, turned into the white woman portrayed on the screen. After watching movies, feeling the pleasure, she says, “But it made coming home hard.”

We come home to ourselves. Not all black women spectators submitted to that spectacle of regression through identification. Most of the women I talked with felt that they consciously resisted identification with films—that this tension made moviegoing less than pleasurable; at times it caused pain. As one black woman put, “I could always get pleasure from movies as long as I did not look too deep.” For black female spectators who have “looked too deep” the encounter with the screen hurt. That some of us chose to stop looking was a gesture of resistance, turning away was one way to protest, to reject negation. My pleasure in the screen ended abruptly when I and my sisters first watched *Imitation of Life*. Writing about this experience in the “Sapphire” piece, I addressed the movie directly, confessing:

I had until now forgotten you, that screen image seen in adolescence, those images that made me stop looking. It was there in *Imitation of Life*, that comfortable mammy image. There was something familiar about this hard-working black woman who loved her daughter so much, loved her in a way that hurt. Indeed, as young southern black girls watching this film, Peola’s mother reminded us of the hardworking, churchgoing, Big Mamas we knew and loved. Consequently, it was not this image that captured our gaze; we were fascinated by Peola.

Addressing her, I wrote:

You were different. There was something scary in this image of young sexual sensual black beauty betrayed—that daughter who did not want to be confined by blackness, that “tragic mulatto” who did not want to be negated. “Just let me escape this image forever” she could have said. I will always remember that image. . . .

When I returned to films as a young woman, after a long period of silence, I had developed an oppositional gaze. Not only would I not be hurt by the absence of black female presence, or the insertion of violating representation, I interrogated the work, cultivated a way to look past race and gender for aspects of content, form, language. Foreign films and U.S. independent cinema were the primary locations of my filmic looking relations, even though I also watched Hollywood films.

From “jump,” black female spectators have gone to films with awareness of the way in which race and racism determined the visual construction of gender. Whether it was *Birth of a Nation* or Shirley Temple shows, we knew that white womanhood was the racialized sexual difference occupying the place of stardom in mainstream narrative film. We assumed white women knew it too. Reading Laura Mulvey’s provocative essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” from a standpoint that acknowledges race, one sees clearly why black women spectators not duped by mainstream cinema would develop an oppositional gaze. Placing ourselves outside that pleasure in looking, Mulvey argues, was determined by a “split between active/male and passive/female.” Black female spectators actively chose not to identify with the film’s imaginary subject because such identification was disenabling.

Looking at films with an oppositional gaze, black women were able to critically assess the cinema’s construction of white womanhood as object of phallocentric gaze and choose not to identify with either the victim or the perpetrator. Black female spectators, who refused to identify with white womanhood, who would not take on the phallocentric gaze of desire and possession, created a critical space where the binary opposition Mulvey posits of “woman as image, man as bearer of the look” was continually deconstructed. As critical spectators, black women looked from a location that disrupted, one akin to that described by Annette Kuhn in *The Power of the Image*:

. . . the acts of analysis, of deconstruction and of reading “against the grain” offer an additional pleasure—the pleasure of resistance, of saying “no”: not to “unsophisticated” enjoyment, by ourselves and others, of culturally dominant images, but to the structures of power which ask us to
consume them uncritically and in highly circumscribed ways.

... Despite feminist critical interventions aimed at deconstructing the category “woman” which highlight the significance of race, many feminist film critics continue to structure their discourse as though it speaks about “women” when in actuality it speaks only about white women. . . .

Constructing feminist film theory along these lines enables the production of a discursive practice that need never theorize any aspect of black female representation or spectatorship. Yet the existence of black women within white supremacist culture problematizes, and makes complex, the overall issue of female identity, representation, and spectatorship. . . .

Just as mainstream cinema has historically forced aware black female spectators not to look, much feminist film criticism disallows the possibility of a theoretical dialogue that might include black women’s voices. It is difficult to talk when you feel no one is listening, when you feel as though a special jargon or narrative has been created that only the chosen can understand. No wonder then that black women have for the most part confined our critical commentary on film to conversations. . . .

When I asked a black woman in her twenties, an obsessive moviegoer, why she thought we had not written about black female spectatorship, she commented: “We are afraid to talk about ourselves as spectators because we have been so abused by ‘the gaze.’” An aspect of that abuse was the imposition of the assumption that black female looking relations were not important enough to theorize. Film theory as a critical “turf” in the United States has been and continues to be influenced by and reflective of white racial domination. Since feminist film criticism was initially rooted in a women’s liberation movement informed by racist practices, it did not open up the discursive terrain and make it more inclusive. . . .

Given the context of class exploitation, and racist and sexist domination, it has only been through resistance, struggle, reading, and looking “against the grain,” that black women have been able to value our process of looking enough to publicly name it. . . . Identifying with neither the phallocentric gaze nor the construction of white womanhood as lack, critical black female spectators construct a theory of looking relations where cinematic visual delight is the pleasure of interrogation. Every black woman spectator I talked to, with rare exception, spoke of being “on guard” at the movies. Talking about the way being a critical spectator of Hollywood films influenced her, black woman filmmaker Julie Dash exclaims, “I make films because I was such a spectator!” Looking at Hollywood cinema from a distance, from that critical politicized standpoint that did not want to be seduced by narratives reproducing her negation, Dash watched mainstream movies over and over again for the pleasure of deconstructing them. . . .

Significantly, I began to write film criticism in response to the first Spike Lee movie, She’s Gotta Have It, contesting Lee’s replication of mainstream patriarchal cinematic practices that explicitly represents woman (in this instance black woman) as the object of a phallocentric gaze. Lee’s investment in patriarchal filmic practices that mirror dominant patterns makes him the perfect black candidate for entrance to the Hollywood canon. His work mimics the cinematic construction of white womanhood as object, replacing her body as text on which to write male desire with the black female body. It is transference without transformation. Entering the discourse of film criticism from the politicized location of resistance, of not wanting, as a working-class black woman I interviewed stated, “to see black women in the position white women have occupied in film forever,” I began to think critically about black female spectatorship.

For years I went to independent and/or foreign films where I was the only black female present in the theater. I often imagined that in every theater in the United States there was another black woman watching the same film wondering why she was the only visible black female spectator. I remember trying to share with one of my five sisters the cinema I liked so much. She was “enraged” that I brought her to a theater where she would have to read subtitles. To her it was a violation of Hollywood notions of spectatorship, of coming to the movies to be entertained. When I interviewed her to ask what had changed her mind over the years, led her to embrace this cinema, she connected it to coming to critical consciousness, saying, “I learned that there was more to looking than I had been exposed to in ordinary (Hollywood) movies.” I shared that though most of the
films I loved were all white, I could engage them because they did not have in their deep structure a subtext reproducing the narrative of white supremacy. Her response was to say that these films demystified “whiteness,” since the lives they depicted seemed less rooted in fantasies of escape. They were, she suggested, more like “what we knew life to be, the deeper side of life as well.” Always more seduced and enchanted with Hollywood cinema than me, she stressed that unaware black female spectators must “break out,” no longer be imprisoned by images that enact a drama of our negation. Though she still sees Hollywood films, because “they are a major influence in the culture”—she no longer feels duped or victimized. Talking with black female spectators, looking at written discussions either in fiction or academic essays about black women, I noted the connection made between the realm of representation in mass media and the capacity of black women to construct themselves as subjects in daily life. The extent to which black women feel devalued, objectified, dehumanized in this society determines the scope and texture of their looking relations. Those black women whose identities were constructed in resistance, by practices that oppose the dominant order, were most inclined to develop an oppositional gaze. Now that there is a growing interest in films produced by black women and those films have become more accessible to viewers, it is possible to talk about black female spectatorship in relation to that work. . . .

Critical black female spectatorship emerges as a site of resistance only when individual black women actively resist the imposition of dominant ways of knowing and looking. While every black woman I talked to was aware of racism, that awareness did not automatically correspond with politicization, the development of an oppositional gaze. . . . As critical spectators, black women participate in a broad range of looking relations, contest, resist, revision, interrogate, and invent on multiple levels. Certainly when I watch the work of black women filmmakers Camille Billops, Kathleen Collins, Julie Dash, Ayoka Chenzira, Zeinabu Davis, I do not need to “resist” the images even as I still choose to watch their work with a critical eye.

Black female critical thinkers concerned with creating space for the construction of radical black female subjectivity, and the way cultural production informs this possibility, fully acknowledge the importance of mass media, film in particular, as a powerful site for critical intervention. . . .

Stuart Hall’s vision of . . . critical practice . . . acknowledges that identity is constituted “not outside but within representation,” and invites us to see film “not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover who we are.” It is this critical practice that enables production of feminist film theory that theorizes black female spectatorship. Looking and looking back, black women involve ourselves in a process whereby we see our history as counter-memory, using it as a way to know the present and invent the future.
The chapters in this section apply many of the theoretical concepts discussed in Part I to the analysis of gender, race, class, and other markers of difference in media production, texts, and reception. This book contextualizes theory with an understanding of how media texts may either contribute to or undermine the social, cultural, economic, and political inequalities that persist in the twenty-first century. The linkage of media theory and politics is particularly important within cultural studies, which, as indicated in Part I, is concerned with the lived experience of economically and socially subordinate individuals and groups and with making visible the ways in which media may challenge or reinforce inequalities. Media are one of the primary institutions that socially construct our notions of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, ability, and more.

What do we mean when we say that we view concepts such as gender and race as "social constructs"? To take this approach means to question the explanatory role of biology or "nature" in social arrangements and power imbalances. Instead, we shift our attention to the social, cultural, economic, and political forces that shape and reshape these conceptual categories over time and place. Many examples can be offered of the "instability" (changeable or shifting nature) of these concepts, which are dependent on both historical and cultural contexts that condition how we conceptualize difference. Take race, gender, and sexuality for example. Racial categories have mutated over the decades, as have norms of gender and sexuality, which also differ from culture to culture. Historians have documented, for example, how Irish people in the United States were not always considered to be white. And it wasn’t until the 1980s that the American Psychiatric Association stopped classifying gay and lesbian people as suffering from a mental disorder. The mutability of these concepts offers proof that biology and nature cannot fully explain differences among groups and individuals. Furthermore, we operate from the assumption that none of these socially constructed categories can be considered in isolation from the others. Thus, we advocate for an intersectional approach that recognizes that gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, class, nationality, religion, ability, and other markers of difference all play significant roles in shaping both power relations and our own senses of identity.

We begin this section, then, with an essay that originally appeared in the New York Times Magazine, in which journalist Wesley Morris (II.10) reflects on recent cultural events that have challenged how we think about our own racial, gendered, and sexual identities. Morris writes: “Gender roles are merging. Races are being shed. In the last six years or so . . . we’ve been made to see how trans and bi and polyambi-omni we are.” Looking at a wide range of recent news events and
cultural texts, Morris challenges us to consider what identity means in the modern media age:

For more than a decade, we’ve lived with personal technologies—video games and social-media platforms—that have helped us create alternate or auxiliary personae. We’ve also spent a dozen years in the daily grip of make-over shows, in which a team of experts transforms your personal style, your home, your body, your spouse.

Critical media theories, as introduced in Part I and further illuminated in this section, can provide us with ways to better understand changes in cultural, social, and political trends. Feminist theory, for example, has presented a challenge to centuries of patriarchal culture that seemed to naturalize the dominant position of men in social hierarchies around the world. Femininity in its hegemonic form (white, domesticated, heterosexual) is a powerful ideological formation that, like race, seems “natural” until we begin to explore its historical evolution. As Susan Douglas writes in “Media, Gender, and Feminism” (II.11), feminist media studies is based in

the conviction that sexism and discrimination against girls and women in employment, education, in their relationships—in all aspects of everyday life—were driven and legitimated by dismissive stereotypes of women on the pages and screens of the country. And its analytical framework was both simple yet intellectually transformative: that society was structured, institutionally and ideologically, through patriarchy, the domination of men over women.

Douglas provides a succinct history of feminist media criticism ranging from 1960s activism around beauty pageants to her own critique of the “enlightened sexism” of the twenty-first century on display in advertising, reality television shows, and social media that “insists that women have made plenty of progress because of feminism—indeed, full equality has allegedly been achieved—so now it’s OK, even amusing, to resurrect sexist stereotypes of girls and women” and “sells the line that it is precisely through women’s calculated deployment of their faces, bodies, attire and sexuality that they gain and enjoy true power.”

Just as feminist theory challenges the hegemony of patriarchal ideologies, critical race theory challenges many of our unexamined myths about race and power and asks us to consider white supremacy not as an aberration but as a routine force of domination in modern society. If we look back, in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, the civil rights movement, the Black power movement, and subsequent anti-racist organizing and activism mobilized many vigorous campaigns focusing public attention on denigrating racial representations that buttressed an inequitable economic and political status quo. Academic fields such as Black studies, Africana studies, Latina/o studies, Asian American studies, and Native American studies developed important critiques of taken-for-granted but demeaning imagery originating from the “White imaginary” (the culturally dominant ideas, attitudes, and feelings about “race”). Building on this foundation, sophisticated studies in critical race theory and post-colonial theory critiqued Western European and U.S. historical narratives of “progress,” “civilization,” and assimilation. In such narratives, the politically and culturally dominant (White, Eurocentric) group defined the terms and projected criminality, poor morals, violent behavior, lack of intelligence and sophistication, and a host of other demeaning characteristics upon the racial “Other”—whether African, Arab,
Latina/o, East or South Asian, Pacific Islander, or Indigenous (Native American). These historical and analytical perspectives help us understand the role of “race” both within U.S. culture and globally.

Thanks to the political work undertaken by anti-racist movements, as a society we have developed some awareness of the more overt racist images of the past. But as the late Stuart Hall, one of the key founders of British cultural studies, points out in the classic piece “The Whites of Their Eyes” (II.12), we still need to educate ourselves about “inferential racism,” which he defines as

those apparently naturalized representations of events and situations referring to race, whether “factual” or “fictional,” which have racist premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions.

Hall’s chapter provides an exemplary explanation of how racial ideologies work to shape our perceptions of the world and other people. And, similar to Douglas’s critique of media representations of gender, Hall’s essay reminds us that while many overt racist representations may have faded, their traces still remain in movies, television shows, advertisements, and other forms of popular culture. And sometimes even the most overtly racist images also still persist, in forms such as Native American sports mascots. In the introduction to Redskins: Insult and Brand (excerpted here), C. Richard King (II.13) discusses the continuing use of a racist slur and cartoon image by the National Football League (NFL) franchise based in America’s capital. King demonstrates the important social impact of representation, writing,

The word has deep connections to the history of anti-Indian violence, marked by ethnic cleansing, dispossession, and displacement. It is a term of contempt and derision that targets indigenous people. As much a weapon as a word, then, it injures and excludes, denying history and humanity. Its lingering presence undermines the pursuit of equality, inclusion, and empowerment by American Indians.

The intransigence of both fans and ownership of the Washington professional football team, and their defensive deflection of criticism, exemplifies the slow and uneven nature of social change. Staying with the theme of the slow evolution of sports culture, one of the most powerful forms of popular culture around the globe, Michael Musto, Cheryl Cooky, and Michael Messner chart the development of televised coverage of female athletes in their piece “From Fizzle to Sizzle! Televised Sports News and the Production of Gender-Bland Sexism” (II.14). While the authors believe that the most overt forms of sexism are now rare in televised sports, this doesn’t mean that women have achieved full equality in the still male-dominated arena of athletic competition as popular culture:

[W]e argue that coverage of women’s sports has shifted away from being overtly denigrating to being ostensibly “respectful.” To theorize this shift, we introduce the concept of “gender-bland sexism,” a contemporary gender framework through which sports commentators and anchors make sense of women’s movement into the masculine realm of sport. The current strategy for inclusion in TV news and highlight shows is found in a gender-bland form of sexism, which frames women in a lackluster and uninspired manner. Televised news and highlight shows cover women’s athletic accomplishments
in ways that are devoid of overt sexism but simultaneously perpetuate beliefs about men's inherent athletic superiority.

Like Musto, Cooky, and Messner, Rosemary Pennington (II.15) believes that old patterns of dominant ideology persist in new incarnations in today's popular culture texts. Pennington utilizes an intersectional approach to cultural analysis that takes into account race, ethnicity, and gender. Drawing on the late Edward Said’s conceptualization of the theory of Orientalism, Pennington argues that a music video by the pop star Katy Perry reproduces “a centuries old discourse which frames the culture, people, and objects coming out of the East as things to be possessed, consumed, and tamed by those in the West.” Orientalist representations grew out of Western imperialist policies toward Asia and the Middle East, first manifesting themselves in narrative accounts by European travelers and paintings by European artists. However, media critics like Pennington argue that Orientalist thinking lingers in modern forms of media, such as movies and music videos, that continue to frame the Middle East as an exotic and dangerous place peopled by savage, untrustworthy men and hypersexual women.

Like Edward Said, Pierre Bourdieu is another important theorist for the fields of media and cultural studies. In their chapter “She Invited Other People to That Space,” Amanda Nell Edgar and Ashton Toone (II.16) apply Bourdieu’s concept of habitus to their analysis of audience reception of pop music superstar Beyoncé’s wildly popular video album Lemonade. Habitus, as employed by Bourdieu, refers to the ways our everyday life practices, experiences, and locations shape how we understand the cultural, social, and political environments we inhabit. Edgar and Toone explain: “the concept of habitus ... roots our experiences of the world in the ways we have already experienced the world; ideology is not imposed from above, but organically replicated on the ground.” Examining this idea from the standpoint of critical race theory allows the authors to explore the ways fans built a sense of community around their embrace of Beyoncé’s music videos and how they interpreted and used the visual album to imagine and create new spaces for anti-racist discussions of Black pride and American social justice histories.

Based on our interviews, we argue audiences used Lemonade to imagine and create new spaces for anti-racist discussions of Black pride and American social justice histories. Based on our interviews, we argue audiences used Lemonade to imagine both new habitus positions and new social fields by taking up the symbols in the album in conversation with other historical and popular cultural artifacts of racial justice in the American South.

Another example of social justice community building for marginalized groups is found in the next chapter in this section, Kay Siebler’s “Transgender Transitions: Sex/Gender Binaries in the Digital Age” (II.17). As we discuss further in the introduction to Part V, challenges from feminist and queer theory and activism have changed the very meaning of the terms gender and sexuality. Whereas those categories were once thought of in fixed biological terms, many (if not most) scholars now understand that gender roles and sexual practices are social constructions whose meaning is always contextual and varies widely through time and across cultures and individuals.

While popular culture has, on some level, acknowledged that gender and sexual identities are more fluid than was once thought, and film and TV representations have become somewhat more diverse, Siebler shows that there is still a strong tendency to caricature and stereotype, and in general to “reinforce gender rigidity.” This tendency is especially the case with transgender people who, according to Siebler, “are reduced to very un-queer definitions of masculinity and femininity, maleness and femaleness.”
As she points out, in the context of commercial media products, “the presence of a traditionally marginalized group does not necessarily equate to advancement.”

Siebler also looks at how members of the transgender community construct their own identities, often influenced by the resources made available by commercial media and the internet. Siebler acknowledges that the “digital world has opened up communities for transgender people where none have existed before. There is less isolation and perhaps less struggle because of the resources, social networks, and virtual communities provided on the Internet.” At the same time, Siebler offers an important critique of the ways in which some of these virtual communities and forums “also serve to create a codified version of limited ways of being transgender. A transgender norm becomes established so that even transgender people are no longer queering gender. . .”

Our final category of analysis in this section, social class, is unfortunately less prevalent in media scholarship than issues related to gender, sexuality, and race. This scarcity may reflect the fact that, as a society, the United States has long downplayed the existence of class-based barriers, or even failed to acknowledge class differences at all. This paucity of class analysis in American media scholarship also reflects the history of social justice activism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A robust labor movement arose during the decades of the most intensive industrialization in the United States to challenge the absolute right of capitalism to exploit working people’s labor, but corporate backlash, regressive politics, and a subsequent sharp decline in both union membership and labor movement visibility have been accompanied by a corresponding decline in the national conversation about class-based inequality. In 2010, the Occupy Wall Street movement briefly highlighted the alarmingly severe gap in wealth between the top 1% of Americans and everyone else, and since then some political candidates have attempted to make this a campaign issue. But as of this writing, very little has changed in the national and international policies that advance increasing inequality. If anything, the election of real estate developer and reality television star Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency in 2016, his installation of corporate CEOs at the highest levels of government, and the passing of a huge tax cut for the very wealthy at the expense of social programs for those in need represents a further retreat from the fight for economic equality.

Michael J. Lee and Leigh Moscowitz’s chapter (II.18) offers an unusually strong discussion of the class dimensions of the reality TV series *Real Housewives of New York City*, one which also demonstrates the importance of considering the intersectional aspects of social identity too often discussed in isolation from one another. This chapter is also notable for its focus on the wealthy, rather than the poor, and for its insight into the use of affluent women as the target for a class-based hostility toward the rich that lies just below the surface of envy and admiration. As the authors write, “According to the logic of *RHW-NYC*, rich women, not rich men, spend frivolously, project false appearances, backstab, gossip, and leave their children’s care to paid staff.”

While the authors point out that there is a “populist promise” underlyng the sardonic portrait of the rich as unenviable “figures of scorn and pity,” they see the promise as limited in part by the desired target audience of the show, labeled *affluencers* by the Bravo network itself. (This audience can enjoy judging the badly behaved super-wealthy without having to reflect uneasily on their own material privilege.) Similarly problematic for Lee and Moscowitz is the fact that viewers of *RHW-NYC* are “invited to conclude that the rich are undeserving because these women violate traditional gender roles so flagrantly.”

The issues related to gender, sexuality, race, and class ideologies in media culture highlighted in this section will be important to bear in mind throughout subsequent chapters, where a wide array of media cultural forms, organized into thematic sections, are examined in more depth.