

Swarthmore College

Works

Sociology & Anthropology Faculty Works

Sociology & Anthropology

2000

Outing The Blackness In White: Analyzing Race, Class, And Gender In Everyday Life

Sarah Willie-LeBreton

Swarthmore College, swillie1@swarthmore.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-soc-anth>



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sarah Willie-LeBreton. (2000). "Outing The Blackness In White: Analyzing Race, Class, And Gender In Everyday Life". *Annals Of Scholarship*. Volume 14, Issue 1. 125-136.

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-soc-anth/119>

An [accessible version](#) of this publication has been made available courtesy of Swarthmore College Libraries. For further accessibility assistance, please contact openaccess@swarthmore.edu with the title or URL of any relevant works.

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology & Anthropology Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

Outing the Blackness In Whiteness: Race, Class, And Sex In Everyday Life¹

SARAH SUSANNAH WILLIE

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to race, the United States often resembles Lewis Carroll's Wonderland.² With its unacknowledged legacy of white supremacy, skewed logic of racial purity, largely unquestioned goal of manifest destiny, and absurd racial boundaries, some people are made giants by their racial status while others are capriciously dwarfed. As a person with multiracial heritage, I have on too many occasions wondered, as Alice did, "Is it me or this wacky garden?"

While the racial legacies of this country have often left me dumbfounded, angry, and confused, the purposeful and imaginative thinking of fellow intellectuals has just as often come to the rescue. Several years ago, I came across three texts sequentially, the authors of which served as interlocutors in deciphering this troubling Wonderland: *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989) by Richard Rorty, "Sex Work/ Sex Act: Law, Labor and Desire in Constructions of Prostitution" (1997) by Noah Zatz, and "A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Law and Politics" (1990) by Kimberlé Crenshaw. This paper has been through four versions as I have attempted to reconcile each of these three author's insights with my own thinking about race. My choice to engage Rorty and Zatz in particular—although race is a fulcrum for neither of their arguments—is based on two things. First, that ideas present themselves in our lives outside of a teleologically consistent or knowable plan and can often be enlisted to help us in the challenges, intellectual and otherwise, we are facing. And second, careful thinking about one issue can offer insights into others that seem at first sight to be unrelated.

The first version of this essay begins with an experience of racial alienation that I had a few years ago in a Friendly's restaurant in New York's Hudson Valley. I had the opportunity to share that version with the listeners of my local public radio station. As if putting my ideas out into the universe brought new ones back, a friend gave me Rorty's book *Contingency* just after the radio broadcast. My thinking with and against Rorty's became an addendum to that first essay in a second version. While I was still mulling over Rorty's argument, my subscription to the feminist scholarly journal *Signs* arrived in the mail with Zatz's article on prostitution. I wrote a third version. And just after I thought I had put the essay down for a final time, a colleague lent me David Karyis's edited volume, *The Politics of Law*, from which Crenshaw's chapter called out to me from the table of contents. She offered up more wisdom, the result being a fourth version. Since closing Crenshaw's article, I have continued to talk about these issues with colleagues. Their questions, concerns and insights have led me to this version of the essay.

In each incarnation, the essay took on additional topics—whiteness and the fallacy of racial purity, the persistence of racism, allegiance to mono-racial or multiracial identities, the challenges posed each, the functions of racial boundaries, and the relationship of the race system to other oppressive systems. In this paper, then, I have left the meandering of my thinking in tact as I retrace my way from experience to reflection to meta-reflection and back again.

I. How Friendly?

On a warm and sunny day almost a year ago, my favorite Friendly's Restaurant beckoned me from the other side of the Hudson River. After finishing a quick lunch, I noticed the name tag of the waitress who acted as cashier when I went to pay my bill. Her last name: my mother's maiden name. Although I had only recently moved to New York State, my mother's parents and grandparents were all from this area. Excited by the possibility of familial, if distant, connection, I smiled. The social person in me who makes conversation with tollbooth collectors and fellows waiting-in-line at grocery stores and movie houses started to say something. And then I hesitated.

Some of my friends are men and women of color who rarely make small talk with people they don't know. Having suffered insults from passing cars, received chilly stares in restaurants, and been discomfited when fellow subway passengers stood rather than sit next to them, these friends have decided to avoid small talk with white people altogether in an attempt to keep ill-wishers at arm's length.

Thinking of them, I realized that one of the reasons I speak to strangers is motivated by a similar fear that discourages my friends from speaking: if I can make easy, pleasant conversation with people, especially white people, then just maybe, I will convince those who harbor prejudice that black people are indeed like them—human, normal, real.

One brief, unfocused look at my face and my African ancestry is unmistakable. So is my European ancestry. But in this society, my whiteness is not only less visible to most people, it is also less important and to some less real.

I looked up to the waitress's face from her nametag, and I could not bring myself to speak. I wanted to know if she, too, had Scottish Presbyterians from Long Island in her background; to find out if we might be related; to ask whether any of her ancestors attended the Baptist Church in Saugerties. But she is white and I just did not know how she would react to my queries: "Are you one of my people? Am I one of yours?"

While I am neither paranoid nor naive, not a week goes by when I'm not absolutely sure that I've been treated badly for being black. And I wouldn't even have to rely on my own experiences to know that racial discrimination still exists. I study race and racism. And I know that people still go to prison, make death row, get turned away from hospitals, and are denied loans because of racial prejudice.

Sometimes, in emotional exhaustion, I wonder at my own decision to keep reaching out to white people. Then I remember that half of my family is white; I've grown up with and around white people; I work with white people. I have had white lovers, and I have best friends who are white. I would trust a number of white people with my life. Still, to move in the public spaces of the United States as a black person—espe-

cially those where whites far outnumber any other group—means to risk rejection every day.

I try to remind myself: “Biology is not destiny.” This is a complicated reminder, however, for it takes place within legal structures and social expectations that continue to affirm and condone white supremacy.³

I suppose most black people try not think about these issues on a regular basis and most of them probably do a pretty good job of ignoring or denying the pernicious, constant racism that meets them daily in myriad subtle ways.

What people can put out of mind, however, often shows up in their bodies. Rates of high blood pressure, ulcers, insomnia, addiction to nicotine, asthma, adult-onset diabetes, and fatal breast, throat, and prostate cancer far outnumber those by whites—all indications that life as a black person in the United States is stressful and negatively affects the body.

Fortunately, many African Americans have families, friends, and community and religious organizations that affirm their humanity. Good families, however, are not enough. We all deserve fellow citizens who treat us with dignity.

The racial difference between the waitress and me was not what kept me from reaching out. It was the knowledge that my difference is perceived by so many people not as neutral but as “degraded.”

Reading and rereading the name tag of this woman across the cash register, I realized that I don't just talk to strangers to prove my humanity, I also talk to strangers because we share humanity, because I love finding connection and things in common with other people. I took my change, thanked her and headed to the parking lot. I got in my car and headed away from the anonymity of the restaurant, back over the Hudson, safe from the possibility of rejection, at least for today. Away from the Friendly waitress, the cousin I will never know.

II. Examination

Then I read *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989), by the pragmatist philosopher, Richard Rorty. He argues that human solidarity and compassion are more likely to occur when we reveal to those who do not suffer how much they have in common with those who do, rather than by emphasizing the humanity of the latter. People, he continues, have done each good turns throughout history because they saw something of themselves in the person they helped — a fellow member of the same union or profession, or “a fellow bocce player, or a fellow parent of small children” (Rorty 1989: 190).

Rorty examines the frameworks of Christianity and Kantian morality that, he demonstrates, offer individuals a calculus for responding to the suffering of others. Both methods of analysis fail, Rorty contends, because they are too broad in their assumptions of human generosity—in Christianity, each person is considered a child of God while in Kantian morality one's sense of mutual obligation is based on rationality. Neither paradigm addresses the reality that individuals tend to identify with smaller communities of “we” than “all God's children” or “all rational beings.”

While the Golden Rule and the theory of rational behavior both remain common justifications for individual behavior, Rorty observes that even liberals—"people... more afraid of being cruel than anything else" (1989: 192)—are more likely to respond to the suffering of others based on narrower directives.

Rorty examines a familiar exhortation to help those who are less fortunate and explains in the excerpt that follows how it is frequently altered as a way of increasing its effectiveness.⁴

Consider the attitude of contemporary American liberals to the unending hopelessness and misery of the lives of the young blacks in American cities... Do we say that these people must be helped because they are our fellow human beings? We may, but it is much more persuasive, morally as well as politically, to describe them as our fellow *Americans*—to insist that it is outrageous that an *American* should live without hope... [O]ur sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as "one of us," where "us" means something smaller and more local than the human race. That is why "because she is a human being" is a weak, unconvincing explanation of a generous action (Rorty 1989: 192).

Thus, in my public radio presentation, I had conformed to Rorty's thesis. While I defended my claim to connection with the distant relatives in this region of New York State, "because I am a human being," it was a risk, as an African American, to claim European Americans as kin who might not claim me. That's why I presented those things most of the members of my audience and I had in common, calling upon the constituents of group affiliation and identity with which I expected most members of my audience to identify: Presbyterian, Scottish, Baptist, Saugerties, Long Island, white.

On the one hand, I imagine Rorty might find my story heuristic since it implicitly challenges those white members of my listening audience to expand their definition of "we." I also think that he would like my implicit punch line, "I'm black; I have white relatives; and you might be one of them!" On the other hand, I imagine him wincing when I explain that I make conversation with white strangers "so they might know that black people are like them—human, normal, real." I think he would argue that my summation, "We all share humanity," is less compelling than the specific references I make to actual people and places.⁵

Indeed, I can further imagine Rorty asking, "Why embrace such a broad claim?" And I would answer: it serves a purpose. The story at once makes plain the common cultural understanding that whiteness has been and continues to be defined by its opposition to blackness in the United States, while undermining this powerful, historical ontological duality. My story remains suspect, however, for it raises the question: Is she claiming "We are the world," or is she claiming heir to the privileges that come with whiteness?

The fact that I have white ancestors in this region is uncontested. What can be misconstrued in at least two ways are the reasons why I would wish to make this fact public. First, my focus on shared ancestry implies that familial association is legitimate only when there are provable blood relations, and furthermore that inclusion is or should be genetically based. To the contrary, what I am arguing is that our understandings of *group*, *race*, and even *ancestor* have been and continue to be formulated according to biology, geography, cultural tradition and the times in which people live. This is another way of saying that

these concepts are socially constructed. Second, it may appear that my desire to be recognized and included is based on the possibility that I share common ancestors with the woman in the restaurant *because* she is white. In fact, my desire to be acknowledged and included is based on the universal desire of humans to be acknowledged and included, especially by people of their kin or group, especially in a new or strange land. The story can be misconstrued precisely because the context of the United States⁶ is one in which whiteness is perceived as a privileged status, something that all (non-white) people would want if they could have it.⁷

The purpose of invoking humanity, even if awkwardly then, is to discourage these misinterpretations that locate my argument in genetic inheritance or association with whiteness. My appeal to humanity grows out of a desire to expose the ways in which “black” and “white” depend on geographical, social, and temporal context, as do group definition and membership. Clearly, my argument may be obscured by such a broad appeal. But the only alternative I see is to clarify the implicit threat—that is, *you never know who’s in your group*—and the threat, because it returns to genetic association, muddies the point.

Rorty’s discussion of Christianity and Kantian morality is also about the difficult task of how to encourage compassion without threat, fiat or the parochial response of “you are like me, so I’ll help you.” He suggests that we expand the bounded “we” (1989: 192) so that we can really treat each other better. “We should stay on the lookout for marginalized people—people whom we still instinctively think of as ‘they’ rather than ‘us.’ We should try to notice our similarities with them” (1989: 196).

Although I share Rorty’s objective, I come up against two aspects of his exhortation that frustrate me. First, the tone implies an assumption that his reader—or even American liberals in general—will all have a sense of themselves as privileged or a sense of belonging to the “us” group. I am his reader and I have a multi-lithic sense of myself, marginal in certain respects and in certain places and privileged in others.⁸

My second frustration results from his assumption that Christianity is more about the acceptance of a doctrine than a challenge to earthly hierarchy.⁹ Christianity’s primary focus for many people is not that everyone is a child of God, but rather that God is no respecter of persons (that is to say, their ranks and statuses mean little to God).¹⁰

What is central to the Protestant tradition in which I was raised is the absence of a bounded “we”—in Christ, Paul says in his letter to the Galatians, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female (Chapter 3, verse 28). Some have interpreted this passage to mean that Christ does not challenge oppressive hierarchies and that anyone can be a Christian, regardless of how much they abuse their position. But others (especially blacks who practiced Christianity in the United States from the days of slavery to the days of the Civil Rights Movement) interpreted this statement conversely to mean that Christ does not recognize the status differences imposed by humans (Cone 1975). This is neither a denial that humanly sanctioned inequalities exist nor an erasure of difference, though clearly it can include both. Instead, it confirms that hierarchies, social exclusiveness, and abuses of power are human rather than divine inventions.

My argument—distinct from Rorty’s contention that, “[f]rom a Christian standpoint, everyone, even the guards at Auschwitz or in the Gulag,” is a fellow sinner and must be loved equally (1991: 191)—is that we are challenged to treat those we have been raised to see as our enemies and even those who have treated

us as such as deserving of love. Loving everyone does not necessarily mean treating everyone equally.¹¹ The challenge to love justly is meant to shape how we behave from the moment we begin making decisions. Rather than a protective blanket to avoid challenging cruelty, Christianity¹²—quite apart from the sometimes oppressive myths and occasionally exclusive doctrines that accompany it—can be a calculus for making distinctions based on something other than the statuses that are sanctioned by the cultures and societies in which we live.¹³

III. Examination Redux

Several months later, I return to Friendly's. This time, another waitress, ten years my junior, sets my place, hands me a menu, and calls me "Hon."

I have brought the most recent issue of the feminist academic journal *Signs* with me, and I open to the first article in the volume. The topic: Women and Sex Work by Noah Zatz. "What is prostitution?" Zatz asks (1997: 278). I worry as I eat my fries, cole slaw, and turkey club, "Is waitressing prostitution?" I read on.

"For the purposes of this article," Zatz elaborates, "prostitution might be provisionally defined as attending to the sexual desires of a particular individual (or individuals) with bodily acts in exchange for payment of money" (1997: 279). I sigh with relief; Zatz does not define attending to a person's desires for food as prostitution. And yet I know that eating out meets many desires for people, not the least among them (almost any waitress will tell you about customers who demand sexual attention as well as demonstrations of humility and speed) is the desire *to be served*.

In this small and economically depressed city—compared to the overwhelmingly wealthy, white village where I live on the other side of the river—perhaps twelve percent of the population is African American. I look up from "Sex Work/Sex Act," and I notice that the entire wait staff appears to be white and female, the manager is a white man, there are two white male cooks, and a Latino dishwasher. Is my waitress aware that no blacks work at this restaurant? Perhaps. Would she guess this is the result of race discrimination? I don't know. Do these things weigh on her mind as much as the other challenges of her life? Probably not.

I do know that she is kind to me. And it does not feel like the diffuse abstract politeness of those in the serving professions. It feels intentional; it feels racially motivated; it feels anti-racist; and I am grateful.¹⁴ And suddenly, I'm embarrassed that I can eat out as often as I do, and I'm very thankful that I do not have a job that requires me to stand eight, ten, or twelve hours a day asking people what they want or what I can do for them.¹⁵

This second experience at Friendly's story catapults me back to my memory of the earlier one. The woman with my mother's name was also a waitress. Our interaction could not help but have been affected by the fact that she was paid to wait on me. Our race, sex, and class statuses no doubt entered into this interaction, shaping the way she responded to me as a customer and the way I responded to her as a waitress. But I can't say how. The exchange was formal and without affect. She treated me with the brevity of most of those who serve for a living and are tired (Leidner 1993). I am aware that the race system was salient *for me* as I debated whether to push our interaction beyond formality to a level of intimacy. Even

that private debate, however, took place within the context of our different statuses: I entered the interaction knowing more about her than she knew about me since she wore the uniform and the name tag.¹⁶

Most of these thoughts were neither fully conscious nor clear to me while I was in the restaurant. What became clear to me later was the rather, simple realization that the sustained defense of racial purity has a high cost. Because the purity of any racial identity is a fantasy, maintaining the fantasy requires the perjury of everyone who abides it. White identity has been constructed in the United States as the absence of color (or, to use a phrase from earlier in the century, colored blood). My knowledge that identity is only challenged (and undermined) when it is unable to constantly re-institute itself, as Diana Fuss would say (1991: 24) was a challenge to me I felt I did not meet. So when I left the restaurant I was not only feeling the missed opportunity to meet a distant cousin, I felt as though I had been complicit in maintaining the fiction of whiteness by my silence. Driving home, anger about the racial system and shame about my own racial stigma joined my initial guilt, and I was filled with both rage and remorse. No doubt this cavalcade of feelings—coupled with the fear of racial reprisal—fueled the fervor with which I wrote the first version of this essay.

Only in hindsight have I realized that my decision not to engage the waitress was also mitigated by observing her fatigue and appreciating her position in a low status job. As Rorty might say more pithily, my disengagement was acknowledgment, if only to myself, of her suffering. Rorty's argument could be used to predict that my behavior—both the urge to reach out and the decision not to—would be based on characteristics we had in common. He would not, however, have predicted that one aspect of my calculus would be the biblical imperative to treat another as I would wish to be treated (at least this is not explicit in *Contingency*). At the same time, to explain my decision not to reach out as doing my Christian duty is a slippery slope that allows me to avoid the multiple and less meritorious motivations—conscious and unconscious, altruistic and fearful—at work in what was for me a very uncomfortable moment.

IV. Democratic Ideals and Multivalent Status Systems

When I returned home from the restaurant after the second visit, I was thinking about the challenge of reconciling democracy with this very stratified society in which we live. There is an inherent tension between democracy and stratification where genuine democracy works to undermine the meaningfulness of status difference. Sure Rorty had talked about democracy, or at least about a society that was wrestling with equality, I reopened *Contingency* and located the following passage.

I should like to [make an argument . . . for] a historical narrative about the rise of liberal institutions and customs—the institutions and customs which were designed to diminish cruelty, make possible government by the consent of the governed, and permit as much domination-free communication as possible to take place (Rorty 1989: 68).

I read this and wonder which of “our” liberal institutions he believes were designed to facilitate domination-free communication? Is this a nostalgic reading of the United States', or for that matter Western Europe's, past? What are the implications of the fact that he and I are citizens of the same country and yet are so different in the institutions where we put our faith?¹⁷

I read Kimberlé Crenshaw's critique of discrimination law. She documents the multiple occasions when black women have been denied the right to file complaints based on both their race and sex. Why have they been denied this right? Because, she observes, Congress was composed of those who saw themselves as a monolithic norm, and, quite simply, its members "did not intend to protect compound classes." Of course, Crenshaw acknowledges, in so far as everyone identifies in terms of both race and sex, everyone belongs to a "compound class." She elaborates the ramifications of this Congressional decision below:

The dominance of the single-axis framework . . . not only marginalizes Black women but simultaneously privileges the subjectivity of white men . . . Black women are protected only to the extent that their experiences coincide with [either Black men or white women]. Where their experiences are distinct, Black women will encounter difficulty articulating their claims as long as approaches prevail which completely obscure problems of intersectionality (Crenshaw (a) 1990: 197).

The experience I have reiterated is only one demonstration that Crenshaw's observations transcend the specificity of discrimination law. Here I was in a Friendly's Restaurant, a most pedestrian, outside-the-courtroom setting, hesitating to articulate a claim that would reveal the intersectionality of race, class and gender and the relational ways in which I experience them. Against Crenshaw's revelations, Rorty's historical narrative of liberalism appears as romanticizing both the past and the future as it eschews "for instance," a critical examination of liberalism and of its manifestation in our legal system.

Conclusion

'If any one of them can explain it,' said Alice 'I'll give him sixpence.
I don't believe there's an atom of meaning in it.'

Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll

Living as we do within so many constricted systems of identity and status can truly resemble the absurdity of Wonderland. What Rorty, Zatz and Crenshaw clarified for me is that the multiple statuses with which we label others and ourselves are neither absurd nor capricious. Even when they are unfair and troubling, they are also understandable and predictable, and their meanings and predictability make them easier to challenge.

More than Zatz or Crenshaw, however, Rorty challenges me because he questions the usefulness of the Judeo-Christian admonition with which I grew up, "Treat [all] others as you would wish to be treated."¹⁸ His observation that people tend to treat those others with whom they have something in common as they would wish to be treated is a challenge to those of us who want to encourage compassion among each other while respecting the differences that give our lives meaning. To simply expand the bounded we may not work in a society whose liberal institutions are founded on, to use Crenshaw's phrase, a single axis framework. Furthermore, I am not convinced, as I think Rorty's argument implies, that the Christian idea is synonymous with equal treatment or is incommensurate with the recognition of difference.¹⁹

For those of us committed to the pursuit of domination-free communication and more genuine democratic living, the challenge is to rework the foundation of our liberal institutions while we try at the same time to treat others as we would wish to be treated.

Swarthmore College

NOTES

1. Thanks to Ted Munter for the gift of Rorty's *Contingency*, to conversations with Maris Gillette, Allyson Purpura, Lucius Outlaw, Paul Jefferson and Anna McLellan, and to the specific comments of Darrell Moore, Betty Sasaki, Michelle Hermann, Marie-Rose Logan, and Tiffany Ford.
2. Although racial alienation is not an unusual experience for people of color in the United States, it bears documenting and repeating, especially in this moment when so many European Americans believe that racism is essentially dead. As Kimberlé Crenshaw observes, "Society's adoption of the ambivalent rhetoric of equal opportunity law has made it that much more difficult for black people to name their reality. There is no longer a perpetrator, a clearly identifiable discriminator [This] break with the past has formed the basis for the neoconservative claim that present inequities cannot be the result of discriminatory practices because this society no longer discriminates against blacks" (Crenshaw (b) 1995: 107).
3. "Whiteness as Property" by Cheryl I. Harris (1995) offers a wonderful, though disheartening, examination of the legacy of white supremacist law.
4. Not to be too cynical, but his explanation does leave me wondering whether I fit in to his category of "contemporary American liberal" or of "young black in an American city." Am I, I wondered reading this, included in his original "we"?
5. Indeed Rorty would not be alone if he were to have winced (I realize that I'm taking tremendous liberties here by using the fictional subjunctive when the author I am treating as an interlocutor is very much alive). In one version of this essay, I was accused of presenting a "gendered" and "ineffective" argument—which I translated as "throwing like a girl." Admittedly, my argument conforms to a liberal thesis that locates the encouragement for citizens treating each other well with the Golden Rule rather than with the more progressive or radical thesis that political rights are the dessert of everyone. While I am not someone who thinks that liberals are "like girls" and radicals and conservatives, in other words anyone with a more extreme position, is "like a boy," I have thought about the critique and now make an argument that demands rights while at the same time encourages mutual civility.
6. Some authors (Hall 1992, Gilroy 1993, Winant 1994) have argued that this race hierarchy is worldwide.
7. Indeed, the recognition by non-whites that whiteness garners status is not synonymous with the wish to be white. Similarly, the recognition by women that maleness garners status does not mean that most women want to be men.

8. "[C]reating a more expansive sense of solidarity than we presently have [with others]" (Rorty 1989: 196) is a tremendous but crucial challenge. It is dependent, I believe, on—among other things—a secure sense of ourselves and the many aspects of our identities, secure in our sense of ourselves as entitled and engaged, and secure in the spaces and organizations we inhabit and in which we participate. Indeed, I want to argue that my sense of myself as multi-lithic is both advantageous and problematic for my ability to reach out in solidarity with others.
9. Without argument, Christianity is interpreted broadly by those who consider themselves Christian. Here I am primarily concerned with the message rather than with various doctrines espoused by the many denominations of the Church.
10. Rorty rightly observes, however, that to consider everyone a fellow sinner is an invitation to moral perfection that is emphasized in Christianity (1991: 191).
11. In *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), Iris Marion Young argues that justice is not synonymous with equal treatment. Indeed, she observes, unequal treatment may, especially in cases involving members of disadvantaged groups, be more just than treating such persons exactly the same.
12. I am tempted to refer to Christianity without a capital "c" for the sake of distinguishing between the Church and the message. The Church has, in myriad ways, modeled itself after governmental hierarchies, excluding and denigrating individuals and groups, passing judgement (with occasionally fatal consequence), and stingily doling out forgiveness. The message of Christ is, paradoxically, a challenge against these things.
13. I hope it is clear that I embrace christianity because I find it to be consistent with anti-nationalism, anti-patriotism, and radical democracy. I believe the uncritical and complete embrace of any method for living is dangerous, and I hope to have conveyed as much.
14. To what extent my interpretation of her behavior is my own projection, I don't know. "[W]e just don't know how to really *listen* to Others and absolutely refuse to admit there is any form of the human experience we cannot analyze and comprehend. We confuse sympathy with empathy, and our own constructions for the view from somewhere very else" (Jay Lemke, CUNY, contribution to internet conversation on Ebonics 1/13/97, xmca@weber.ucsd.edu list).
15. "Prostitutes' own testimony that their activities may be just another job suggests, however, that they may not be providing the same thing that the client is receiving... I think women and men and feminists have to realize that all work involves selling some part of your body. You might sell your brain, you might sell your back, you might sell your fingers for typewriting. Whatever it is that you do you are selling one part of your body..." (Pheterson 1989, 146). Of course, her client quite likely *does* think of her vagina as very different than her back or fingers because it is a locus of his erotic desire" (Zatz 1997: 292).
16. Who had the authority in my interaction with the waitress, bodies branded as female, one clearly black, the other clearly working class? "The white male body is the relay to legitimation, but even more than that, the power to suppress that body, to cover its tracks and its traces, is the sign of real authority, according to constitutional fashion. Needless to say, [all] American women and [all] African-Americans have never had the privilege to suppress the body" (Berlant 1991: 113).

17. To Rorty's credit, he specifies exactly what he has in mind in the project. It is not an abstract utopic ideal: "[O]ne [should] give 'we' as concrete and historically specific a sense as possible: It will mean something like 'we twentieth-century liberals' or 'we heirs to the historical contingencies which have created more and more cosmopolitan, more and more democratic political institutions' (Rorty 1989: 196-7).

18. Other religious traditions may also espouse this directive but I am unfamiliar with them.

19. In so far as the message of Christianity (and if we understand it as having its genesis in the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, Judaic morality as well) challenges the authority of one perspective, it is a message of radical inclusion. And radical inclusion is, finally, the goal of those of us attempting to appreciate the intersections of the race, class and sex-gender systems in our analyses of social life.