banter, and music pulsate and take over the public space of the vehicle. They laugh, flirt, gossip, showboat, and generally vie for attention and approval among their peers. Occasionally, a teenager's attention wanders outside the peer group, but mostly they carry on as if we adults are translucent.

On one level, the kids are annoying, and they sometimes mean to be. But on another level, I have often been edified and challenged by the conversations I have overheard. It would be easy to dismiss or avoid this civic experience, as older people often seek to avoid such scenarios. But I am struck by the multidimensionality of what black youth are saying to one another, and also in what they are allowing us adults to overhear. Just because a teenager is ignoring adults in the subway or another venue, as anyone who has been a teenager knows, does not mean that he or she is indifferent to our presence. Cohen's project of providing a structured environment in which the voices of black youth can be heard, overheard, and documented is extraordinary and important for turning the microphone in their direction. All of us owe them our undivided attention, even when we wish they would turn down the volume or give us answers that more closely resemble those of someone with more life experience.

Note

1 Appiah 1992, 14–15.

Reference

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 1992. *In My Father's House: Africa and the Philosophy of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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The statistics on what it means to be young and black in America never cease to roil and rankle, nor should they. An African American male born today will grow up trying to defy the one-in-three odds of spending time in jail at some point in his life. Black teens, who represent one of every six teenagers in the United States, represented more than two-thirds of newly diagnosed AIDS cases in 2009. Black youth are more than three times likelier to grow up in poverty than their white counterparts and, in the wake of the Great Recession, unemployment rates for 16–19-year-old African Americans in the labor market hit nearly 50% in November 2009. And it continues.

Alongside these staggering numbers are focal moments that command Americans of all stripes who advocate for a politics of postracialism and color blindness to open their eyes, their minds, and their hearts and ponder (however briefly) W. E. B. Du Bois' defining question, "How does it feel to be a problem?" As I write this essay, the current flashpoint is set in Sanford, Florida, where 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was killed by gunfire while returning to his father's home from a convenience store. But Martin's senseless death is connected by a lamentable thread of history to Oscar Grant, Derrion Albert, Sean Bell, the Jena 6, Emmett Till, Sam Hose, and beyond.

Such indicia of racial inequality and injustice confronting black youth ought to pose a serious challenge—perhaps even an existential threat—to concepts at the heart of the study of politics like democracy, consent, legitimacy, representation, citizenship, and power. Yet for the most part, youth of color amidst our *demoi* are politely ignored by political science. Political theorists and philosophers, to be sure, give some heed to the moral arbitrariness and ambiguous agency of "children" as a category of personhood, but to my knowledge only in terms irrespective of race (e.g., Archard and Macleod 2007; Schapiro 1999; Shrag 2004). Similarly, there is a rich and reemerging literature on the political socialization of preadults that is focused mainly on the confluence of social environment and familial influence on political learning, again in terms largely irrespective of race (e.g., Jennings and Niemi 1968; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009; see also Levine 2007; Niemi and Junn 2005).

Cathy Cohen's *Democracy Remixed* is—in its conception, construction, and consequences—a radical rethinking of what is political and whose material circumstances and subjective states of mind and aspiration merit the attention of political science. Ostensibly, the book concerns

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the emergent political identities and understandings of African American youth. For Cohen, however, politics is not just about active citizenship in the electoral sphere, or about its antecedents in attitudes about government, or even about what black youth feel about Barack Obama's election to the White House. These elements of politics are present in the book, to be sure. But Cohen is not prone to the sort of reflexive approach that a typical political scientist might take to the animating topic of this work: namely, to take established questions about political attitudes and behavior (à la the American National Election Studies) and see what 18-to-25-year-old African Americans have to say about them. This book is, instead, a *remix*. Cohen's more inclusive, disruptive view of politics stretches from the ballot to the bedroom, encompassing practices and perspectives in private spheres of interaction like intimate sexual relations, the allegedly corrupting influence of gangsta rap, and everyday discourses of respectability.

This move will likely raise some eyebrows, or possibly even invite smirks. Yet Cohen's theoretical and analytic commitments hold the promise of remaking political science inquiry itself. Lest this ring hyperbolic, consider the disruptive force of insisting on the relevance of our everyday understandings of sexuality and cultural consumption to political analysis. The thread that ties politics as observed in acts of schoolyard bullying or unprotected sex in the bedroom to politics as observed in acts of voting, contacting officials, buycotting, and the like is power—the imposition and, at times, insinuation of authority against will and regulation over freedom. Where better to see how power relations are negotiated than among our younglings, especially those who are constantly reminded, from early childhood on, of their alterity, their Otherness? By putting black youth at the front of the bus, Cohen not only studies their empowerment but also empowers them.

As a remix, the book is thus notable for the voices that are sampled into the narrative. While public figures like Bill Cosby, Don Imus, Kwame Kilpatrick, Tyler Perry, and Barack and Michelle Obama play a role here and there, the recurrent themes throughout are composed from the voices of ordinary youth themselves, as they see the world around them and the role of politics in it. Thus, the main findings are set into an empirical foundation made of several unique data sources: a 2003 nationally representative survey of young blacks, Latinos, and whites; a 2006 companion of 40 follow-up in-depth interviews of black youth respondents to the 2003 survey; a two-wave survey of young blacks, Latinos, Asians, and whites conducted in 2008 and 2009; and four qualitative focus-group interviews of youth of varying race and sexual orientation in Chicago conducted in 2004 and 2009. The 2003 survey, 2004 focus groups, and 2006 in-depth interviews comprise the Black Youth Project, and the 2008 survey and 2009 focus group comprise the Mobilization, Change, and Political and Civic Engagement Study.

Nearly eight years in the making from the initial raw data to its publication, *Democracy Remixed* has been well worth the wait. Cohen's writing is beautiful, her analysis lucid, and the substantive body of the book is chock-full of compelling findings and probative arguments. She starts by adapting the concept of "moral panics"—the social processes and institutional mechanisms that result in "irrational and inflated reactions to lesser events." One consequence of moral panics is that a person or group (e.g., "black youth") comes to be feared as "folk devils" disproportionate to that person or group's actual threat. Transposed to the context of African American youth, Cohen observes the dynamic of "secondary marginalization" that she first described in *Boundaries of Blackness* (1999). It is elite African Americans like Cosby who themselves do the "targeting, blaming, and shaming" of black youth, branding them for their purportedly deviant behavior. They do so, moreover, by foregrounding narratives of personal responsibility and keeping mum on structural narratives of class mobility, institutional racism, and the like.

One of many striking findings is how black youth respond to this policing and marginalization from within and without. Data from the Black Youth Project show high rates of sexual activity and direct experience with pregnancies and abortions. Yet far from normalizing or touting these acts of alleged deviance, a large majority of black youth are willing to publicly denounce their peers' "wrong morals about important things like sex and work." African American youth, in comparison to young Latinos and whites, are also the most likely to espouse patriarchy, take a dim view of premarital sex, and oppose abortion. Similarly, African American youth are likelier than others to describe rap music as violent, hypersexual, misogynist, and too apolitical.

These findings are especially notable because Cohen elsewhere (2004) suggests that acts of seeming deviance among African Americans might instead be acts of purposive resistance. Here is one of several points in the book-where her voice of prepotent courage and relevance sings resonantly. Rather than diminuendo from the obvious contradiction that this represents, Cohen amps up a forceful defense of a third possibility other than shaming African American youth for their "deviance" or rhapsodizing about their "resistance." She candidly considers what it would mean to interpret this gap between revealed choices and avowed beliefs as acts of "defiance"—oppositional gestures constrained by an ever-shrinking counterpublic sphere and the ever-expanding reach of neoliberal discourses of personal responsibility. The withering social critique here of the role that Obama's heteronormativity plays in shrinking this space for defiant discourse—both in his own words and deeds and in the mainstream public's construction of the First Family—is a *coup de maître*.

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Through the author's reworking of the dialectics of deviance and defiance—and their relation to moral panics and secondary marginalization—a key underlying element of the book becomes her insistence that the seemingly self-defeating and deviant decisions and discourses of African American youth are rational and prudent in light of the structures and standpoints before them that constrain free choice. This is not a new argument (see, e.g., Shelby 2007), but in Cohen's deft hands they have a fresh moral and political urgency. This is an account of street smarts as *phronesis,* if you will, and recurs as a theme that tethers her analysis of the politics of hip-hop, sexuality, and respect in early chapters with her ensuing analysis of the more "mainstream" meat-and-potatoes of political behavior and racial/ethnic politics in ensuing chapters.

Thus, not only does Chapter 4 show that an alarming number of black youth have tuned out of politics and see government as racially exclusionary and unresponsive; it also presents a forceful account of why this is evidence that black youth are not guileless. Importantly, for Cohen it is equally critical that these same youth continue to espouse and find some hope in the American creed, rather than descend into the sort of nihilism and "full-blown political alienation" foretold by Cornel West in *Race Matters* (1994). Similarly, Chapter 5 not only laments the yawning gap in turnout rates between young voters and more mature citizens but also shows that youth (especially youth of color) can be mobilized to act when there is a glaring absence of accountability (as in 2004) and when there is an opportunity to make racial history (as in 2008). True to Cohen's form, however, the story of the 2008 election in her book is not a Panglossian embrace of post-racial politics. While black youth are buoyed by Obama's election, they do not see this achievement as transforming their relationship to the state or altering the defining role of race and racism in their lives.

There are, to be frank, faltering moments and bits here and there to quibble about. Two in particular bear brief mention. The first is on the inclusion of data and analysis on Latino and Asian American youth. In itself, this is a key innovation and intervention into existing research practice. Given the social processes of racial sorting that result in the resegregation of youth of color in public schools, it is clearly no longer self-evident that white youth should be the default group to compare to young African Americans. Yet the integration of these up-and-coming groups into the narrative flow is at times uneven. Perhaps more pressingly, some findings on Latino and Asian youth are presented somewhat routinely, leaving this reader begging for more time and deeper analysis. Some of these findings are eye-popping. The "politics of invisibility" that Cohen discusses in Chapter 5, for instance, describes roughly 12% of African Americans in 2008, but fully 41% of Latinos and 35% of Asian Americans. This shortfall in the book, however, seems an unavoidable consequence of the fact that the author's theoretical and empirical sights are set first and foremost on African American youth. In this context, the expeditious availability of raw data from the Black Youth Project and the Mobilization, Change, and Political and Civic Engagement Study is laudable, and hopefully future scholarship will pick up where Cohen leaves off on other youth of color.

Another complaint on a minor register regards the balance between the aims of social criticism and empirical rigor found in the book. These aims, of course, need not work against one another. In fact, much of the strength of this work lies in bringing cold, hard facts to the table of public discourse riven by speculation and ideology, and parsing these facts to adjudicate competing claims. All of this is done with virtuoso precision. The quibble arises with what at times reads like a sequential recital of predicted probabilities in the presentation of multivariate analysis. To this reader, there is sometimes an insufficient differentiation between curio and crux, with the effect of interrupting the exegetical arc of a chapter.

This is a small, perhaps idiosyncratic, cavil. I should note that a more forcefully put variation on this negative theme might be cast against this work. Namely, not everyone will be convinced by parts of the empirical analysis. The wellspring of data and statistical analysis will not unmoor some critics from the clutches of attributing the unequal outcomes and opportunities that black youth find to their poor individual decision making or the pathological culture of the groups to which they belong. Yet other critics might raise the banner of causal inference and question Cohen's success at executing an explanatory mode of social science inquiry. To my reading, these sorts of well-practiced modes of scholarly and political criticism are diversions from the great triumph in *Democracy Remixed*. Standing astride the polemics of racial discourse and the dialectics of explanation and interpretation, it achieves the uncommon aspirational and transformative aims of social science research.

On a very personal note, the net result is that Cohen pulls off something uncommon at the hands of a scholar (especially a political scientist): her work evokes emotions. I do not mean here the eruptions of ire, petulance, and provocation that often result when one academic finds the work of another to be inept, polemical, or mean-spirited. Rather, in reading the book, one cannot help but feel the sense of hope and despair, anger and pride that comes from kindling the bonds of human connection. Cohen achieves this by being unafraid of making a mess: She willingly mixed the politics of her personal convictions with the science in her data analysis; she looks for agency where others might be content to find only structure; she sees in the dimly lit margins shadows of seldom heard, yet at times luminous, voices. In short, she brilliantly performs the dictates of a remix: to breath new life into a tune by sampling fresh beats and, by doing so, extending

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that tune's relevance and improving the fidelity of its original aspirations.

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In 2009, in the city of Chicago where Cathy J. Cohen lives and teaches, at least 290 school children were shot. Most of the people on both ends of the guns were young African Americans. If the fundamental responsibility of a government is protect citizens' lives, then such violence puts the very legitimacy of the regime in question, to say nothing of the human tragedy that each gunshot represents.

An epidemic of violence also raises a contested and troubling question of responsibility, or (in more academic terms) of agency versus structure. From one perspective, firing a gun at another young person is a choice. The vast majority of young black Chicagoans would never do such a thing. If citizens see the perpetrators of gun violence as having agency, they are likely to blame them for their choice and respond with surveillance and punishment. They may also be tempted to direct moral disapproval at the group to which they mentally assign the perpetrator: in this case, young African Americans. Dropping out of high school, using illegal drugs, and having premarital sex can also be seen as condemnable individual choices requiring discipline, deterrence, and moral suasion.

Structural explanations, in contrast, look to large social and institutional factors—not only intentional policies but also examples of inaction or inertia. From this perspective, the huge and lightly regulated market for hand guns; the poor performance of urban public schools and police; the strikingly low ratio of adults to children in some poor urban neighborhoods;[1] the vast prison system that provides economic benefits to companies, employees, and communities; the persistence of racial discrimination in labor markets; the lack of after-school opportunities and programs; the broad public glorification of violence; and even the disappearance of 650,000 manufacturing jobs in the Chicago metropolitan area since 1960—all would rank as background causes of teen violence.[2]

Cohen does not deny young black people's agency but believes that structure at least shapes and constrains their choices and raises the price unreasonably high if individuals choose unwisely. As an example, African American adolescents are more likely to bear children than are white teenagers. A survey conducted by Cohen's organization, the Black Youth Project, finds that young blacks are more likely to condemn premarital sex and report using condoms at a higher rate than whites. But they are somewhat less likely to believe that having a child would hamper their prospects. Thus, their values are relatively conservative, but their perception of the social context increases

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