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Rebellion, experimentation, and political alienation are age-old attributes of youth, as is the finger wagging of older people who condemn the music and sexual behavior of the younger generation, while often viewing their own youthful exuberances through the gauze of nostalgia. For African Americans, this intergenerational discord has forever been complicated by pervasive stereotypes at the heart of American culture that depict blacks in general, and black youth in particular, as more morally "out of control" than other racial groups, and whites in particular. Black adults, via elite and grassroots organizations, have often responded to this cultural violence by resorting to a conservative "politics of respectability" that focuses on moral correction, rather than on challenging the political and economic struts that support racist stereotypes.

What has changed, according to Cathy Cohen, is the political environment in which this politics of respectability is produced and consumed. In our "post-post-civil rights era" (p. 47), she argues, the terms of the moral panics to which democracies are prone have been remixed in ways that make it especially hard for today's young black people to express, and for us to hear, their astute and sometimes contradictory interpretations of the political issues that most affect their lives, such as sex education and neighborhood violence.

Conceding that "self-policing in black communities" is nothing new, Cohen argues that what is now different is "the access some black elites have to the dominant media, where construction of black pathology by black elites is able to reach a broader public, including various white communities and public officials" (pp. 27–8). Changing political conditions provide "remixed" soil for the politics of respectability to sprout, but the description of these new conditions, albeit important, is not the book's most significant contribution. Cohen "remixes" our understanding of American democracy by asking black youth about their relationships to politics in ways that are remixed. For instance, in discussing sexual politics, she gives her respondents the opportunity to register not just what they do sexually but also how they feel about themselves when they are engaging in sex. Do they feel "in control," and do they feel good about themselves when they have sex? These are important questions that we rarely pose to adults, let alone youth. Yet such questions are democratically vital because they humanize the data that will drive policymaking and serve as fodder for pundits to bandy about. What we learn via Cohen's remixed data is that the human stories behind black teen pregnancy rates, to take just one example, are the perennial stories of youth that we can all relate to if we realistically recollect our own youth: peer pressure, impulsivity, equivocation, hubris, and self-contradiction.

Young black people make good and bad decisions because they are young and human, not because they are black. The difference is that black youth "often do not have the resources, buffers, and opportunities to recover from [their mistakes]" (p. 79). This is not a new insight, but it is one that bears repeating and emphasizing because we older people forget it so often. White adults publicly reprimand white youth, too, of course. But young white people are not up against stereotypes that cast them as innately licentious and criminal. In short, the "respectability" of white youth is firmly established in the dominant bourgeois public sphere, and so a political project in that regard is unnecessary. All that white youth need is "parental guidance," accompanied by numerous second chances. Cohen contrasts the mainstream media's reporting of Bristol Palin's unwed teen pregnancy against the portrayal of black unwed teen motherhood by the same media (pp. 57–8). With whiteness and class privilege, the hall pass of "youthful indiscretion" can last well into full-fledged adulthood. Think of the alcohol and drug abuse, not to mention extramarital sex scandals, that countless affluent white middle-aged male politicians predictably bounce back from, repeatedly.

The politics of respectability is a reaction to this double standard. In its most generous light, it strives to arm young blacks with the sort of good behavior that will inoculate them against the pernicious stereotypes aimed their way by the broader U.S. culture they must learn to navigate. But the intraracial policing that constitutes the politics of respectability produces further marginalization, what Cohen calls "secondary marginalization," by drawing prejudicial distinctions between morally good blacks and those deemed deviant. Rectitude is a tenuous negative status that requires the public denunciation and punishment of the wayward. Indigenous organizations, institutions, and leaders within the black counterpublic mark and patrol the boundaries of black communities by attaching stigma and denying resources to those who are politically weak (p. 28). In her previous book, Cohen focused on the failure of black community organizations to respond to the HIV/AIDS health crisis due to homophobia. In *Democracy Remixed,* she applies the same diagnostic framework to black youth, pointing out the ways in which black elites often attempt to shore up the boundaries of "respectable" blackness by publicly condemning black youth as deviant. Oddly enough, today's young people always seem to be "worse than we were at that age."

I find the trope of secondary marginalization cogent and theoretically helpful in a macro sense. The two-tiered process reminds us that black marginalization is more complicated than dialectical and top-down models of oppression would have us believe. Politics also occurs among the

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oppressed, as they jostle and compete for power and resources. This macro description of racial power is fairly intuitive, and thus uncontroversial. But the simplicity of this model also cries out for complication. The tough questions pertain to the micro processes of *how* secondary marginalization functions, both inside and outside of the black counterpublic. What difference does the kind of "secondary" black identity make for the way that secondary marginalization plays out? What sort of identity is youth, and how does it differ from other "secondary" axes of oppression, such as gender and sexual orientation? Is intersectionality a helpful metaphor for theorizing secondary marginalization that involves more than one other social identity?

Cohen invokes the trope of intersectionality to describe the "complicated" answers that many of her respondents articulate concerning the "multiple regulating systems" that shape their contexts of choice (p. 89), but she does not complicate the descriptive framework of intersectionality itself. Does intersection describe a "tertiary marginalization," such as class, age bracket, gender, sexual orientation, and regional location? While all young people are politically weak, they are also in the process of aging out of that particular vulnerability. Whether, and to what extent, a young black person becomes politically strong(er) will depend on his or her other "secondary" identities. Is youth an oppression intensifier, or its own axis of perceived deviancy?

Deviancy is a capacious concept, and it strikes some black people with more force and consequence than others. Cohen brings into focus Don Imus's notorious 2007 description of the black members of the Rutgers University women's basketball team as some "nappy-headed hoes" to illustrate how the politics of respectability clamps down especially hard on black women, and young black women in particular. The defense given by Imus was that the epithetic language he used was already widely circulating in the larger American culture, and so was fair game. If black men use these words in their cultural productions, and black public intellectuals do not speak up to criticize these artifacts as misogynist, then why should Imus be singled out for censure? Cohen finds that most youth believe that rap music videos are too sexual and violent, and depict both black men and women in demeaning ways (p. 74). At the same time, young black women understand that the images of black women in these videos affect them directly, no matter their class or education status. Oprah and most of America were surprised to learn that most young black women have been the direct targets of these epithets (p. 35). This goes to Cohen's point about the lack of a protective buffer between rampant stereotypes and the lived experiences of black youth.

If we step away from the moral panic button, we hear black youth articulating complex understandings of the interplay between structural racism and individual choices, including their own. All in all, Cohen's prescriptive argument seems directed mostly, if not wholly, at older blacks with mainstream media access. This makes sense on at least two accounts. First, she claims, in line with many other students of black politics, that blacks share a "linked fate." Consequently, they should better represent young black political interests out of concern for their own reputations and life chances. Secondly, one might argue that one has a greater moral responsibility to care for the members of one's own racial group than for members of other racial groups because racial groups have moral statuses—what philosophers refer to as "moral proximity" and Kwame Anthony Appiah labels *intrinsic racism*.[1] Cohen does not explicitly make this latter claim, but in the absence of a counterclaim it is a logical deduction.

Neither claim is indisputable. Do nonblack older people have an equal moral responsibility to stand up for black youth when their political interests are being discussed publicly? The linked-fate premise is supported by the agelessness of many of the stereotypes of moral deviancy attached to black youth. The urban jungle "super predators" of commercial rap videos transform black professors into burglars of their own homes in the eyes of white neighbors who are primed for black male criminality. And the "nappy-headed hoes" scorned by Don Imus make it difficult for older black women to achieve the kind of femininity that many white women take for granted, even as they grapple with the sexism built into feminine standards. Witness Anita Hill, whose conservative feminine aspirations were all too easily undone by the readily available stereotype of black female sexual wantonness. When asked whether the government cares about "people like me," the largest gap was between white and black women respondents (p. 117). All of this ties into the timeless stereotype that blacks, in general, are morally underdeveloped. We are forever young in the worst sense of that nostalgic turn of phrase.

As I read and thought about this book, I pondered the places, beyond campus, that I hear black youth talking. I use public transportation to commute between Temple University in North Philadelphia, where I work, and a gentrified neighborhood in Center City, where I live. Some afternoons, my "flexible" academic schedule puts me onboard the "sub" or bus with a gaggle of young people just released from their school day, and headed home, or elsewhere. The difference that timing makes in the civic experience of public transit is remarkable. The middle-aged work commuters of rush hour emanate fatigue as we quietly slump, stare into space, maybe even close our eyes, lulled, as we give ourselves over to the propulsive force of the vehicle. When the middle and high school kids enter the subway, trolley, or bus after school, the atmosphere of the public vehicle changes entirely. Clad in uniforms of khaki pants and polo T-shirts, now modified in subtle stylish ways for after-school wear, their energy, high-decibel

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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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