

A Dirty South Manifesto

*Sexual Resistance and Imagination
in the New South*

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Honeysuckle, Not Honey Sucka! Manifesto

The calls for a moral revival ...

.... moral arguments

.... and moral choices

..... in the South

Seem sweet

Like honey

In a cup of tea

More or less the same

Unchanging

Soothing in routine

And familiar

.... are for an Old South

What has been offered up for the New South, the Nuevo
South, and the Dirty:

.... a Slow tongue

..... Dirt

a Red Worm Deity

and a Honeysuckle God

By WeUsIOurU
Is neither immoral or amoral
Female, Queer, and Trans Insurgency
Is natural
Like all life-sustaining living things in nature
Must grow, sometimes wildly, above ground and below
ground
Like vines that shade, hide, coddle, and embrace
Like roots that stretch out further below than the eye can
see
Rise up honeysuckles, burrow deeper red worms
Threaten all that lie in your path
Nourish what has been displaced
Suffocate with floral and musk the cleanliness
Their perfume pretends to be
Shit all over what has been starved and emaciated
Choke it with your vines,
But offer your sweet dew to your peril
Men, moral or immoral, are not bees or hummingbirds
Be the red worm in the dirt. Be the honeysuckle on the vine
Honeysuckle ... Not a Honey Sucka!

Coda

Despite public rhetoric that stridently insists upon the apolitical nature of teaching, teaching and learning have never been apolitical. Not for the colonizers and enslavers, and not for the colonized and enslaved. The dismantling of public liberatory education, be it defunding or privatization through chartering or diversity initiatives, intends to cease the process of decolonization that was initiated with the intervention of Black studies, ethnic studies, and women's studies in communities and learning institutions. Moreover, a divestment from arts, music, and performance in all centers of learning has also lessened the strides that might be made by those previously mentioned areas of study. Together, these factors encroach upon movements of sexual resistance in less visible and deadly ways.

Years ago, Gloria Anzaldúa explained that “We are taught that the body is an ignorant animal; intelligence dwells only in the head. But the body is smart. It does not discern between external stimuli and stimuli from the imagination. It reacts equally viscerally to events from the imagination as it does to

real events.”¹ What might our twenty-first century bodies need to remember? How significant is the imagination to resistance about gender, sexuality, and violence? In an undergraduate class on intimate partner violence, I have taught three short fictional pieces together—Zora Neale Hurston’s “Sweat,” Estela Portillo Trambley’s “If It Weren’t for the Honeysuckle,” and Lynn Nottage’s “POOF!”—alongside Critical Race Feminism law articles, and critical essays on intimate violence. I do so because these short pieces teach how, even in the face of violence, magic and imagination must be a first and last resort. Hurston’s female protagonist in “Sweat” is saved from an abusive husband by a poisonous snake in a laundry basket. Nottage’s female protagonist is delivered from her husband’s abuse when she wishes him to hell and he spontaneously combusts. Trambley’s female protagonist delivers herself and other women from an abusive man because she believes the honeysuckle gods cultivated and offered up to her the poisonous mushrooms that end his life.

In each story, women writers present nature as a magical and ethereal force that supersedes any religious institution’s moral authority over their lives. For women of color, the fantasy of ending physical, mental, and sexual violence is both a militant and a magical process that is not captured by public protest, campaigns for votes, or reliance upon systems and structures whose foundation is male patriarchy sustained by white supremacist colonization. When the hope for something between political structure and anarchy or between morality and immorality paralyzes the less powerful, the magic makers find a way to convince them that radical action does not have to be violence by their own hand: that it can be the establishing of systemic confrontation with the fiction of moral authority. Their stories insist that the practice of magic can become a mode of fugitivity, a creative force to imag-

ine the world away from the violence of men. Radical nonviolence is not passive. Radical nonviolence is knowledge, learning, and teaching magic. *A Dirty South Manifesto* began with thoughts on intersectionality, but it ends with a coda on bridges and tunnels.

As in the past, the work of Gloria Anzaldúa continues to be important in building bridges between multiple and diverse communities. When Anzaldúa insisted that “I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds,” she was describing the burden that women of color are tasked with in saving themselves and others.² Her words certainly seem prophetic today as new whirlwinds threaten to break bridges that have already been built. Though Roe v Wade is still legal, the ramifications of “legal” and “moral” seldom apply to girls and women of color. Brett Kavanaugh’s Senate confirmation proceedings for the vacant Supreme Court justice seat brought to the forefront of America the lives of three different women: Anita Hill, Christine Blasey Ford, and Jane Doe. Their stories demonstrate the ways in which the sexuality and bodily autonomy of women continue to be contained, controlled, disregarded, and misrepresented by white male patriarchy.

Before and during Senate confirmation hearings of Kavanaugh, it was revealed that an unaccompanied and undocumented seventeen-year-old immigrant girl, given the pseudonym Jane Doe, who had escaped abusive parents was denied access to abortion after she was told she was pregnant by doctors in the border internment camp. Kavanaugh issued the dissent that impeded her from having the abortion earlier in pregnancy, rather than later. Understanding the significance of this dissent, Jane Doe’s attorney, Rochelle Garza, testified on behalf of Jane Doe and other immigrant women about the threat that Kavanaugh’s

appointment to the court poses to women's lives and bodily autonomy. She began with these words:

There is no other way to describe the borderlands than a place where absolutely everything converges, and everything coexists. The reality is that our communities sit at the intersection of local, state, national and international policy, and as a result, our communities are complex. Our families are complex. It's perfectly normal to find a U.S. Border Patrol Agent with a non-citizen grandmother that he or she visits over the weekend in Matamoros, our sister-city in Mexico, or even siblings that aren't all U.S. citizens and fear being separated from each other should an immigration official happen to learn about their status.³

Garza provides insights about the borderlands that depict people still externally and internally struggling with settler colonialism. Her perspective exceeds the vision of African American former president Barack Obama, who in 2012 issued the executive branch memorandum DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), an immigration policy that provided temporary deferral of deportation for up to two years, renewable, for children who entered the United States before they were sixteen years old. As many less than optimistic and concerned citizens noted at the time, the application process could become a surveillance tracking system of children and adults that could prove harmful to them if a xenophobic president or House came into power. Such is the case now in the era of MAGA. The people who put children in cages do not believe in the snake god of Gloria Anzaldúa, or in Gloria Anzaldúa as a minor god. Otherwise we would not be here, trapped in a moment, debating and defending mostly brown children's right to live as fully in the world as we do in our dreams and imaginations. I want to believe in the covert existence of spies and infiltrators in ICE and the

Border Patrol, but there are too many journalists reporting stories about white, Black, and brown agents who rape and kill, and kill and rape women in the internment camps and away from them.⁴

Anti-immigration measures in the Southwest, when coupled with border militarization, produce human trafficking, sexual terrorism, and violence on immigrant women and children, in addition to exploitative labor practices along the borderlands and in the interior of the southeastern United States. For example, over the last few years, the state of Georgia has passed a number of bills that directly target immigrants. The Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act (SB529), which passed in 2006, states that employers must “verify the legal status of all new employees and . . . provide documents on each person working for them” when requested by local and state governments.⁵ Another example, Georgia’s Illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act (HB87), is an immigration act that requires employers to verify immigrant status and use citizenship as an employment eligibility factor, makes it possible for local police to randomly check the status of anyone they suspect of being unlawfully in the country, enables local police to enforce federal immigration laws, and makes it a crime to intentionally transport undocumented people or offer false affidavits about undocumented immigrants’ status.⁶ Alabama has passed similar laws.

In Georgia, these acts are complicated by a history that positions race in a Black/white binary, particularly in cities like Atlanta. In border states there has been a longer history of cultural exchanges between African Americans and Latinas/os: for example, Los Gorras Negras (the Black Berets) were a multiethnic group that fought for social transformation starting in 1969 in

New Mexico. Elsewhere in the South, however, dynamics of race are complicated with regards to industry and to historical politics. In their essay examining how Latino individuals are being racialized in the Southeast, Irene Browne and Mary Odem “argue that in moving beyond the Black/White binary, state laws that racialize Latinos create a two-dimensional category, with a homogenized ‘Latino’ category as one axis and an illegal/legal distinction as the second axis.”⁷

In addition to these concerns regarding racial formation and immigration policies, there are also other factors to consider. In his speculative examination of labor and futurism in the Nuevo South, Curtis Marez attends to considerations of labor and technology when discussing agriculture robots and drones, particularly to the “struggle between agribusiness corporations and farm workers over technology—especially visual technologies such as cameras—as means for projecting competing futures.”⁸ Marez’s study has implications for how the logics for and against immigrant labor have shifted and changed, while xenophobia and racism remain.

Calls for a moral revival or reliance upon moral authority also often overlook crucial populations such as LGBTQ youth. Currently, LGBTQ youth homelessness is at an all-time high. Churches and state agencies continue to ignore the problem for clear-cut reasons. As one national report noted, “the most prevalent reason for homelessness among LGBTQ youth was being forced out of home or running away from home because of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.” More than half of the surveyed homeless youth (55.3 % of the LGBQ youth and 67.1 % of the transgender youth) reported this as the reason for their homelessness, and LGBTQ youth of color are disproportionately represented in these statistics.⁹ Runaway and homeless

LGBTQ youth who engage in survival crimes are then at a greater risk for contact with the criminal justice system. When the True Colors Fund partnered with the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty to compile their *National Index on Youth Homelessness*, they ranked New Orleans eighth in the nation in efforts to prevent or end youth homelessness, and positively highlighted that Louisiana's decriminalization efforts focused on lessening runaways' contact with the juvenile justice system; but the report also suggested that the state needs to improve efforts centered on LGBTQ youth.¹⁰ Fortunately, community organizations in New Orleans have offered an example of how to address racial and sexual justice around young people. Congress of Day Laborers and BreakOUT! created the From Vice to ICE campaign, which provides a decolonial approach to addressing the complications that arise from nonnormative gender and sexualities. In the booklet, organizers explain, "Vice to ICE is now the name we use for our campaign or areas of our work that recognizes the intersections between our struggles for liberation, as well as our intentional building with those whose lives are at the intersections of these identities—LGBTQ undocumented communities in New Orleans."¹¹

Congress of Day Laborers was founded by immigrants and day laborers who were involved in the reconstruction of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Led by men and women of color, the organization provides grassroots organizing addressing exploitative labor practices that pit communities of color against each other. BreakOUT! was incubated in 2010 by founding members Milan Nicole Sherry, Jonathan Willis, Lhundyn Palmer, Kenisha Harris, Amhari Alexander, and De-De Jackson, along with founding director Wes Ware, who later formally organized to create an organization committed to ending the

criminalization of LGBTQ youth and their survival practices. In addition to working with Congress of Day Laborers, the organization has worked closely with Women with a Vision (see chapter 3). BreakOUT!'s We Deserve Better and From Vice to ICE campaigns have emphasized discriminatory policing practices in New Orleans as major political issue. The group's efforts are significant because they are led by and comprised of mostly Black transgender and gender-nonconforming youth. Their mission prioritizes individuals who are seldom considered in discussions of sexual rights and sexual citizenship, young people between the ages of thirteen and twenty-five.

Coauthored by BreakOUT! and Congress of Day Laborers, the From Vice to ICE Toolkit was created to address the Criminal Alien Removal Initiative, which was an Obama-era initiative that authorized raids of racially profiled communities. The toolkit also addresses the quota-based arrest practices of ICE and the New Orleans police and sheriff's departments. Interspersed with personal accounts of members' experiences with state violence, the booklet includes vital statistics and notable summary information: "Louisiana has the highest deportation rate per capita than anywhere else in the country, and New Orleans has the highest incarceration rate per capita than anywhere else in the world. Louisiana is also home to the highest per capita immigration arrest rate in non-border states and new data continues to show the disproportionate arrest of LGBTQ youth, specifically Black and Brown transgender and gender nonconforming youth."¹² The toolkit centers decolonial literacy practices that emphasize language and culture as relevant to activist praxis involving gender and sexuality, while also challenging the foundations of moral authority that might invalidate the prioritizing of gender and sexual marginalized communities

and their sexual praxis. Understanding that its potential members may be monolingual or bilingual (English or Spanish), the tool kit begins with a statement about language justice, but it also includes instructions for carrying out nonverbal icebreakers to navigate the language barrier. From there, exercises to develop consciousness and community—such as story circles, a dance activity offered by a founder of *Two Spirit Journal* utilizing Whitney Houston songs, and a workshop curriculum—are introduced. Often assessed as secular practices elsewhere, dance and song are notable tools of spiritual and political intervention throughout the toolkit. The toolkit prompts individuals to engage their bodies and space differently than in political organizations where the secular and sacred are axiologically opposed. Notably, the toolkit does not critique religion or religious institutions. An appendix containing a glossary and brief histories of slavery, colonization, and gender and sexual discrimination (in English and Spanish) completes the toolkit. From Vice to ICE demonstrates the importance of transformational coalitions, multiple literacy practices, and a transnational lens.

Years ago, another southern writer offered a belowground perspective on the Black and brown coalitions she deemed necessary for what was coming based on immigration policies from the 1980s. It took Kentucky writer Gayl Jones decades, five other critical, creative, and poetic books, and words from her mother's creative writing to produce her last published novel, *Mosquito*. The novel is about protagonist Sojourner Nadine Jane Nzingha Johnson, aka Mosquito, a Black woman truck driver and conductor of a new underground movement, who "wants you to know the truth of the story, for the purposes of the revolution."¹³ For Jones, transformative coalitional politics among Black and Latino people cannot only happen in the public, political aboveground space

where prying white normative gazes look longingly, hoping for these groups' assimilation into the majority population.

As Mosquito travels the Southwest, becoming more deeply involved in the sanctuary movement of getting immigrants into the United States, a history and future beyond the current Black/white binary unfolds. When she talks to Father Ray, who is not an actual priest, about the sanctuary movement, she quips "But for a organization so secretive as y'all, y'all got a lot of books about y'allself. Seem like if y'all such a secretive Sanctuary movement wouldn't be all them books on y'all." The dialogue continues, stressing the importance of underground work:

He replies, " ... We ain't really the mainstream Sanctuary. The mainstream Sanctuary think that the more they're known the safer they are. That's why most sanctuaries declare themselves. We're more like the what they'd call the Nicodemuses of the movement. We don't declare ourselves."

Say What? What's a Nicodemus?

The ones who believe the more secret we are the safer we are.¹⁴

Throughout the novel, Jones makes sure to assert that transformational coalitional politics must begin in imaginations that situate histories, memories, and bodies in a place and time far away from those created by slavery and colonialism. The stream of consciousness novel drops nuggets of knowledge about Black and Latino histories and connections before and after conquest, as well as during colonization. As her Mexican and Black characters engage each other on their own terms, they learn more about each other. There is no successful insurrection without language, spirituality, and culture that have survived or have been decolonized. Once mutual comprehension is addressed, someone must risk being misunderstood for further truths to be unveiled.

The misunderstanding between these characters about the sanctuary movement(s) provides a fitting way to conclude this work's celebration of and thankfulness for sexual resistance in the South and its critique of moral authority in contemporary progressive southern politics. Jones's representation of the Nicodemuses of the movement as a nod to secrecy, or to secret societies within movements, suggests that the publicness of decolonization and resistance is not the only tactic. The pursuit of sexual and gender equity and freedom requires declaration and action, but it will also require a particular type of vulnerability. The Dirty South has proven as much. Thus, if we begin with the premise that decolonial sexuality and gender are as important to insurgency as weaponry and intelligence gathering, especially as it relates to what have been classified as asexual or non-sexual political issues, then maybe the foundation of insurgency becomes a type of vigilante justice that understands that law and legal measurements are already corrupt and cannot be the basis of change alone. Once the bridges have been built, we must have cultural architects who can transition those bridges into tunnels in opposition to the walls now being built. This is not simply about quests for citizenship and safety, but about new modes of being human and embodying freedom.

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