

*Chicago* (Scarecrow Press, 1997); Jeffrey T. Sammons *Beyond the Ring*; Thomas Hietala, *The Fight of the Century: Jack Johnson, Joe Louis and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002). Of the extensive scholarship on the Negro leagues see Sol White *Sol White's History of Colored Base Ball, with Other Documents on the Early Black Game* (1868) (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball was White*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970); John Holway, *Black Diamonds: Life in the Negro Leagues from the Men who Lived It* (Westport, Conn.: Meckler, 1989); Linda Ziemer, "Chicago's Negro Leagues," *Chicago History* (Winter 1994-95); Donn Rogosin, *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues* (New York: Kodansha International, 1995); Michael Lomax, "Black Baseball, Black Entrepreneurs, Black Community," (unpublished PhD Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1996); "Black Entrepreneurs in the National Pastime: The Rise of Semiprofessional Baseball in Black Chicago, 1890-1915," *Journal of Sports History* 25 (Spring 1998) and *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs, 1860-1901: Operating By Any Means Necessary* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003); Larry Lester, Sammy J. Miller and Dick Clark, *Black Baseball in Chicago* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2000); Brent Kelly, *The Negro Leagues Revisited: Conversations with 66 more Baseball Heroes* (Jefferson N.C.: McFarland, 2000); Robert Cottrel, *The Best Pitcher in Baseball: The Life of Rube Foster, Negro League Giant* (New York: NYU Press, 2001); Larry Lester and Joe Black, *Black Baseball's National Showcase: The East-West All Star Game, 1933-1953* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002) and the Baseball Hall of Fame, Research Division, Cooperstown, New York. On Football, see John Carroll, *Fritz Pollard: Pioneer in Racial Advancement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the weekly and the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) and the Football Hall of Fame, Research Division, Canton, Ohio. On basketball see, Robert Peterson *Cages to Jumpshots*; Nelson George, *Elevating the Game*; Gerald Gems, "Blocked Shot: The Development of Basketball in the African American Community of Chicago," *Journal of Sports History* 2 (Summer 1995) and The Basketball Hall of Fame, Research Division, Springfield, Massachusetts.

55. The idea of "make over" here responds to Urban League attempts to turn migrants into efficient, ambitious workers. See Helen B. Sayre, "Making Over Poor Worker." *Opportunity* 1, no. 2 (February 1923).

## Comments on "Chicago's New Negroes"

### Beth Loffreda

It's a risky proposition in American studies to call scholarship "new"—it can invite some vociferous upbraiding in response (Djelal Kadir, for example, has recently critiqued a range of American studies scholars who lay claim upon what he calls "new newness").<sup>1</sup> You might just end up being told how old, or even superannuated, you actually are. Feeling new, of course, can also be thrilling (one need look no further than the New Negro Renaissance for an example of that); but for the purposes of this response, I'm going to sub usefulness for

newness; I hope it's both a more generous and more productive standard for talking about developments in American studies scholarship.

In many useful ways, for example, Davarian Baldwin's work tackles head-on an issue that has for generations made intellectuals and scholars a little squirmy, and still often does: pleasure. We know this drill pretty well (and what follows is an exaggerated sketch): pleasure—the pleasure of consuming commercial, sometimes mass-produced things—is a form of false consciousness, or pleasure is the tool of patriarchy, or pleasure in commercial things and settings is a problem unless it is an ironic pleasure that wraps quotation marks around its source. We might be able to enjoy ourselves in a rather astringent way if we're transgressing, or measuring our distance from the bourgeoisie—if we're indulging in the self-admiring pleasures of anti-pleasure, in other words—but otherwise, pleasure has clearly often been posed by the academy as the encroaching antithesis of championed thought. Thus, over the past century scholars have developed a heck of a critique, often useful, of the bad things pleasure can do; and lately, over the past thirty years or so, there's been a fruitful reaction to that critique that tries to say pleasure isn't all bad—that enjoyment, even in the most commercial of venues, doesn't necessarily entail capitulation to ideology, lost agency, or the diminution of self-reflection. That pro-pleasure work has run into its own problems, however, because often it has too simply tied the recuperation of pleasure to political rectitude: fan pleasure in something like "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" isn't "bad" pleasure, because we can find a way to characterize it as leftist pleasure. One thing that Davarian's work is figuring out for us is another way to think about pleasure: rather than saying pleasure is simply politics in another guise—rather than too-quickly collapsing pleasure and politics into one and the same thing—he instead asks us to see how pleasure, the taking of pleasure, can be a form of thought, can be a way of making sense of the contradictions and complexities of the very commercialized, industrialized world that produces and constrains that pleasure in the first place.

In thinking about pleasure as thought, Davarian has employed elsewhere in his writing a lovely phrase: "the dialectic of disgrace and desire." That dialectic, he argues, shapes both black working-class and black middle-class experience in places like Chicago in the early twentieth century. That the crux of that dialectic generates an intellectual life rather than a fallen life or a purely subjugated life is a helpful claim; and it gives us a way of thinking about The Stroll—and other heady places of mass-produced risk and sensation—that does not position The Stroll as the seductive abyss *against* which intellectuals give birth to thought and critique (a positioning that worked nicely for white modernists, and which thus should make us nervous). As Baldwin shows us, a certain strain of black middle class thinking and action sets itself against places like The Stroll as well, and it's interesting how the black middle class tries to create a privatized public sphere—all those balls and luncheons—and how that creation is linked to a muzzling of both a certain kind of sexual frankness and a certain kind of

commercialized pleasure. I like that this work doesn't, in response to those problematic positions, merely, easily, take the side of *The Stroll*—doesn't simply say that if it freaked out the white modernists and the black middle class, among others, then it must be good—but instead takes the *Stroll* as a point of departure for thinking about intellectual life; and also as a point of departure for another useful dialectic that animates this work.

That dialectic is one of the local and the large: how we both can't know a thing like race or a thing like America until we know about black migrants in Chicago in the early twentieth century; but also how we can't know black Chicago until we know about the great migration and what Davarian calls the "combined economic and cultural race consciousness that was emerging all over the country." The first current of that dialectic—that to assume that "blackness," or "America" (or "the New Negro" for that matter) comfortably denote stable, familiar, obvious things, is to be richly mistaken—is precisely what is driving certain culturally conservative commentators nuts about American studies. But Davarian's work helps us see how intellectuals during the early twentieth century invest categories like race and nation with their own meanings, and then use them. It's work, in other words, that is willing to assume that the Harlem Renaissance, for example, might really have been the *Harlem* Renaissance, and that—as canonical and influential as the texts and figures of Harlem might be—they might also not be the only or the last word on black experience or identity.

Too, this isn't work that decides that "identity" is best theorized as a product of labor rather than leisure, for example, then takes a series of historical figures to task for getting it wrong (or congratulates them for getting it right). Such a scholarly approach makes history into a series of shallow analogies at best. Instead, Davarian's work reminds us that cultural theory is most helpful when applied paradoxically. Cultural theory has provided us with exceptionally powerful categories—so powerful, in fact, that the risk (and perhaps the seduction) of cultural theory is that it can make everything, everywhere, the same. That is after all what theory is, in a sense, for. It abstracts, it distills, it finds the same bones—"hegemony," for example, or "resistance"—under what otherwise appear to be very different skins. That distillation is often illuminating, but, when done in rote fashion, thuddingly reductive. In Davarian's hands, cultural theory seems less about the automatic application of categories and more about a skepticism of categories themselves, both past and present—a paradox, but a fruitful one, because it allows a place like *The Stroll* to bloom in all of its labyrinthine exuberance.

Lastly, "Chicago's New Negroes" doesn't presume that theory is the property of scholars or a creature that exists only within the precincts of the academy. Instead, it shows us how old settlers and new settlers, men and women, uplifters and enterprisers, scolds and sports, debated the question of identity themselves, worked out for themselves what a race-consciousness might be, and did so in the unlikeliest of places—gospel music and cosmetics both. And in doing that,

"Chicago's New Negroes" begins to restore to us a history of pleasure as well as of thought, and also begins to restore to us a more pleasurable and more useful history of American studies itself.

### Notes

1. Djelal Kadir, "Introduction: America and Its Studies," *PMLA* 118:1, January 2003. 9-24.