Book Reviews

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The Man-Not defies neat summation. Tommy Curry demonstrates his wide-ranging expertise in laying out a multidisciplinary historiography of black male theorizing. He alleges that feminist scholarship has used caricatures of black manhood to stand in for legitimate theory and that the careers of gender researchers themselves have profited off those caricatures. The author grieves that "[t]he prison, like death, prevents our ability to observe and study Black men and boys as they live" (p. 111). *The Man-Not* introduces a progressive black male studies that is decidedly nonfeminist, and the book demands a radical rethinking of the category of "gender" itself.

The term "man-not" captures the historical negation of black male humanity and how traditional gender theorizing has been complicit in this process. Curry challenges the *mimetic thesis* that black men aspire to the tenets of white patriarchy. According to Curry, black mimeticism has been anchored to gender theorizing since Michele Wallace's 1979 book *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. Curry faults two gender frameworks in particular for continuing to advance the mimetic thesis. The first is Raewyn Connell's original formulation of hegemonic masculinity. Curry argues that the caricature of black hypermasculinity, promoted by Wallace's text, is the product of imperial gender frameworks such as hegemonic masculinity which claim that all men yearn to assimilate to an ideal form of (white) manhood. Instead, Curry finds in a contemporary of Wallace's text—Robert Staples's *Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Role in American Society* (1982)—the overlooked insight that black men and white men have different cultural and gender expectations and ideals.

Curry, however, levies his strongest critiques at intersectional feminism. As Curry sees it, intersectional accounts overwhelmingly portray black women as

victims and black men as perpetrators of violence. Curry's analysis "dares to theorize Black males as victims and, in some cases, as more disadvantaged than their female counterparts" (p. 232). Moreover, Curry accuses scholars of promoting a false progressive gender politics that masks what he calls "racist misandry," a form of sexual racism aimed at black male bodies. Curry asserts: "When these long disproven stereotypes are given the label of theory, the racist generalizations offer the illusion of specialization to the Black men and women building their careers as experts of Black masculinity and protects whites against charges of racism, since their hatred and fear of, and discrimination against, Black males can be rationalized as theoretical advance" (p. 25).

While *The Man-Not* dips into a deep well of literature for inspiration, I found it most helpful to place the text in dialogue with two major concerns behind Afro-pessimism: to elucidate manners of death and dying across black social life and to dislodge black epistemology and ontology from colonial taxonomies of race. *The Man-Not* seeks to inaugurate a "black male studies" where black men and boys are not "theorized only as the antecedents to their own deaths" (p. 224). To accomplish this task, Curry borrows Sylvia Wynter's notion of "genre" to replace "gender," a term more fitting European categories of manhood and womanhood. "*Genre* differs from *gender*," Curry observes, "by this distance Black males share with Western men a priori, and by consequence, patriarchy," and genre "expresses how the register of nonbeing distorts the categories founded upon white anthropology or that of the human" (p. 6). In foregrounding a destructive history depicting black men as subjects and objects of sexual desire, Curry's adds nuance to what Afro-pessimists have called a "libidinal economy," the whole structure of psychic energy. Curry, however, is critical of Afro-pessimists such as Saidiya Hartman for focusing on black women as paradigmatic victims of sexual violence. Instead, a black male studies takes seriously how black men and boys have been victims of sexual violence and that white women have been perpetrators of that violence. The captivating chapter "Lost in a Kiss" addresses these themes in the writings of the Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver.

It is impressive to watch Curry build arguments and the seamless manner in which the philosopher moves between sources across disciplines. However, the book's own grand ambitions rest on some exaggerated claims. For instance, *The Man-Not* laments the scarcity of empathetic, asset-based, and antiessentialist accounts of black male lives, but there is much important work that meets these criteria. Gail Garfield's life histories of black men, for example, demonstrate how these men rearticulate notions of manhood by confronting and rejecting violence. In the field of educational studies, Tyrone Howard and others have nurtured non-deficit-based accounts of black boys. Curry's effort to advance a progressive study of black manhood untethered to feminism recalls Staples's book *Black Masculinity*, in which the author famously attacked black feminists like Wallace for taking up a pen "as a sword" against black men. I wondered here if the target of Curry's criticism was misplaced, and if the real work is not in decoupling a black male

studies from feminism but in seeking better tools for understanding how the forces of white supremacy deepen divisions between black men and black women. Instead of moving beyond intersectional accounts, perhaps the better move is to learn from intersectional work that is explicitly profeminist *and* male affirmative, such as Athena Mutua's work on "progressive masculinities" in the field of legal studies.

Despite these reservations, it was refreshing to read a book that has little time for academic pleasantries and is so eager to transcend the boundaries of traditional gender theorizing. As a gender scholar who engages with the very theoretical frameworks of which Curry is skeptical, I found myself taking a hard look at my own work and the assumptions behind it. Curry closes *The Man-Not* by acknowledging that many readers will view his text with suspicion. I agree, but readers from diverse academic backgrounds can still learn much in its pages. My only hope is that engagement with *The Man-Not* will seek out coalitions between black male studies and black feminism. A progressive study of black male bodies need not operate separately from black feminism since the true promise of black feminism is to liberate all black people—female, male, or otherwise—from the shackles of white patriarchy.

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Men and Masculinity: The Basics is an introduction to the studies of men and masculinities and explores how men are "made" through various discourses and contexts. The book is written through a poststructuralist lens and seeks to address theories that view masculinity as being in a flexible state, explaining contradictory accounts of masculinity through social construction. Because this book is a contribution to Routledge's "The Basics" series, it is written for those approaching men and masculinity studies for the first time. Throughout the book, Edley successfully argues for the disruption and resettlement of masculinities constructed through discourse.

Part 1 is comprised of the chapters "Man-watching" and "Coming to terms with men and masculinity." "Man-watching" begins with anecdotes, giving the reader an opportunity to reflect on how we view men and masculinity in everyday scenarios. Edley briefly covers the development of gender studies, providing context for those new to the field. The argument that masculinity is in a state of flux and crisis is also introduced.