

Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.



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to the contemporary situation in which some 1,000 art collections are found in American corporations (p. 3). Not only do corporations collect, but they provide support for art-related activities, such as sponsoring tennis matches or art education. Unlike the National Endowment for the Arts, whose support peaked in 1982 at \$220 million (and has fallen considerably ever since), corporate support amounted to \$500 million in 1987 (pp. 11–13).

One consequence of this growth is that it has led to the emergence of the new profession of art advisors. Major corporations recruit them from among directors and curators of museums; minor firms hire them from art schools. Art is an investment but, in a sense, all visible corporate art and art support is also high-class advertising or public relations, serving, as does the corporate headquarters building, to represent the image its directors wish to convey to its clients and the public more generally. It provides an opportunity for corporate polluters or cigarette companies to paper over or drown out their insalubrious effects on the environment or health.

Corporate styles range from homey nostalgia, especially in the Midwest and South, to abstract forms of (largely) Northeastern, major financial institutions, and multinationals. Martorella reminds us that most corporations merely buy art to decorate their offices. Because of image goals, however, corporations tend to be timid collectors. Even more than federal arts agencies, they avoid art that might shock their public. Whereas abstract art was once daring and rebarbative, for major corporations, neat, decorative nonfigurative art projects a sophisticated image without the problems that political or religious content or nudity have tended to raise.

Martorella's book is informative and rich in empirical data. Although she makes no attempt to link her finding to theoretical ideas, she has opened the path to an important area of concern with both symbolic and economic ramifications.

Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. By Patricia Hill Collins. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990. Pp. xvii + 265. \$44.95 (cloth); \$14.95 (paper).

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Black Feminist Thought is a rich and valuable book. It is a book of reclamation, rearticulation, of synthesis and empowerment. Patricia Hill Collins more than achieves her goal "to describe, analyze, explain the significance of, and generally further the development of Black feminist thought" (p. 16).

Collins skillfully calls forth the voices of black women writers and activists of the 19th century, of blues singers, of poets and artists, of

everyday workers, and political luminaries. In reclaiming and legitimizing the ideas of women of such diverse backgrounds, Collins demonstrates that there is indeed a distinct philosophical tradition among African-American women that is both Afrocentric and feminist in its themes and approach.

The distinct origins and epistemology of black feminism is precisely why Collins uses such dissimilar sources of knowledge. Black feminism is "subjugated knowledge" (p. 18) which has emanated from both the African worldview and the gender/race/class oppression of black women in the United States. A part of that oppression has been the suppression of ideas threatening to the dominant (white, male) power structure. Credentialed scholars who have challenged masculinist, Western assumptions and methods, who have refused to become one of the "safe outsiders" (p. 204), have risked their credibility and positions. "This suppression . . . in traditional sites of knowledge production has led African-American women to use alternative sites such as music, literature, daily conversation, and everyday behavior as important locations for articulating the core themes of Black feminist consciousness" (p. 202).

And these alternative sites, these "safe spaces" (p. 95) where black women have intellectually resisted, have allowed for the retention of an African philosophical tradition within the Euro-American setting, and of black women's positive self-definition and valuation within a system that consistently, in theory and practice, objectifies people of color and women.

Collins devotes two-thirds of the book (pt. 2) to an exploration of the themes that emerge from the oral and written expressions of 19th- and 20th-century black feminists. In chapters that can each be used independently, Collins summarizes the major ideas of African-American feminists on work, family, images of black women, motherhood, political activism, and relationships (especially with one another, black men, and whites). And she does more: in discussing the reasons for the neglect of certain issues important in the lives of black women—such as domestic violence, pornography, and prostitution—she begins the discussion of these topics and points the way for further research.

Collin's final section, "Black Feminism and Epistemology," is, by far, the most thought-provoking and creative. Collins delineates what constitutes knowledge for black feminists and how such knowledge is gained, justified, and validated. Black feminists, she contends, emphasize the importance of wisdom gained through experience, of dialogue and connectedness to others, of the ethics of caring and personal accountability in the production and justification of knowledge. Collins explores each of these processes carefully, guiding the reader through the sources and consequences of each component, noting, where applicable, the fascinating congruencies between African and feminist values.

Throughout this book on "thought," Collins makes it clear that the ideas of black feminists are one element of their resistance to domination. She shows that from the writings of Maria Stewart in the early 19th

century to those of Angela Davis today, black feminism has been a part of political activism, its existence both rooted in and generating black women's desire for change. "Thus black feminist thought aims to develop a theory that is emancipatory and reflective and which can aid African-American women's struggles against oppression" (p. 12).

"Black feminist thought's emphasis on the ongoing interplay between Black women's oppression and Black women's activism presents the matrix of domination as responsive to human agency. . . . The existence of Afrocentric feminist thought suggests that there is always choice, and power to act" (p. 237).

Collins's book expresses that power. By making risky choices—by putting black women at the center of her analysis, by refusing to limit her sources to credentialed "experts," by refusing to distance herself from the women about whom she writes—Collins empowers herself, begins a deconstruction of "scholarship," and inspires other outsiders to build on her challenge. *Black Feminist Thought* is a well-researched, thoughtful, and comprehensive coverage of the little-known intellectual tradition of black women in the United States. But, more important, *Black Feminist Thought* is itself an act of resistance.

Health, Race and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870–1945. By Paul Weindling. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Pp. x + 641. \$69.50.

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How much must an insurance plan pay for high-technology medicine to sustain a terminally ill or very elderly patient? May such a patient decide to end his or her life? When amniosentesis reports Down's syndrome, what will Catholic parents decide? If the test predicts "it's a girl" in India, what may parents choose? What about voluntary access to RU 486 in France, required use of Norplant in St. Louis, or "granny brigades" in China? In only a few years, it seems, we have had to confront unprecedented questions about the value and indeed the definition of life. Our astonishment is due in part to historical amnesia. The precedents exist, but they lie buried in the discredited endeavor of eugenics. As soon as Hitler made eugenics into a central Nazi tenet, international enthusiasm faded—as did the subsequent memory of our flirtation with racial purification.

Paul Weindling's superb historical analysis of health, race, and politics in Germany provides nonspecialists and medical scholars alike with a thorough grounding in the origins and politics of these bioethical questions. This is a tour de force of research drawn from individual papers, institutional and public archives, and primary literature. In the resulting intellectual and political history of medical solutions to social and political