

torical performances. After anchoring hush harbors historically and establishing linkages to contemporary versions of hush harbors, this essay provides examples to illustrate the implications of hush harbor rhetorics for the classroom.

In “Both Print and Oral’ and ‘Talking About Race’: Transforming Toni Morrison’s Language Issues into Teaching Issues,” Joyce Irene Middleton uses Morrison’s nonfiction (including her Nobel lecture), to analyze her language issues as teaching issues, exploring the usefulness of theories of orality to student discussions about personal and cultural language use. Middleton examines Morrison’s theories of language in a racialized society, locating them in dialectical relations with literary studies, language and literacy studies, and rhetorical education for social justice. In this way, Middleton’s essay reflects a new vision for research in African American rhetoric(s).

Finally, William W. Cook’s essay “Found Not Founded” guides us from West Africa to the New World and to America as he connects the West African background of African American cultural productions as varied as poetry, dance, religion, literature, and Hip Hop lyricism. For Cook, these art forms are connected by the force of the cultural use of language, the masking function and effect of Black discourse, which seeks to resist oppression and domination. Cook’s essay is in direct conversation with Tal’s. While Tal’s work evokes the question, where are Black popular culture productions located in African American rhetorics of struggle? Cook’s discussion locates them on the continuum of subversive art forms in the vernacular tradition.

Arguments such as those by Cook, Tal, Banks, and others in *African American Rhetoric(s): Interdisciplinary Perspectives* support one of the reasons that we chose to identify the study of persuasive language use by African Americans as rhetoric(s), rather than rhetoric. There is a continuum of African American rhetorics within the universe of Black discourse. Putting a twist on the words of Adam J. Banks, not only must we “look back as we look forward” but we must emphasize the scope of diversity within African American(s) and how these are themselves always already intertextual.

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## Introduction: Aspects of African American Rhetoric as a Field

Keith Gilyard

TO ENCAPSULATE ALL THE VARIOUS EFFORTS IN THE SCHOLARLY study of African American rhetoric would be a task virtually as daunting as if the object were to summarize all reportage and analysis of the Black experience overall. Voluminous attention has been devoted to Black discourses because such discourses have been the major means by which people of African descent in the American colonies and subsequent republic have asserted their collective humanity in the face of an enduring White supremacy and tried to persuade, cajole, and gain acceptance for ideas relative to Black survival and Black liberation. So immediately one recognizes the impracticality of trying to write definitively about such a vast network of activities in such limited space. What I attempt, therefore, is a meaningful historical sketch of a particular body of rhetorical scholarship, a choice that necessarily implies certain critical sacrifices. For example, I will forgo formal discussion of linguistics and the creative arts, although I possess impressive arguments why such truncation of rhetorical inquiry should not be carried too far. The very existence of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) inscribes a significant rhetorical situation, and the prevailing functional character of African American artistic expression renders problematic any move to divorce its production and any criticism thereof from the realm of rhetorical inquiry. Nonetheless, I maintain that it is useful, in order to actually get through one essay, to focus on what there is to say about Black persuasive or associative verbal practices beyond the specific linguistic items of AAVE, or Standard English for that matter, or on what is left to say of public discourse if one agrees to bracket texts that are literary or musical. What is left to say of strategy and method? The answer comprises the terrain that this essay explores. The focus is on what scholars

working taxonomically and employing rhetorical perspectives ranging from Aristotelian principles to Afrocentric conceptions have made of oratory by those of African descent in the United States. Of course, this approach also ignores what normally would be regarded as interpersonal communication. I am aware, too, how ultimately indefensible that decision is in the long run given that even one-on-one verbal interaction designed to elicit cooperation is surely rhetoric as well. However, some of the collections I mention, such as *Language, Communication, and Rhetoric in Black America* (A. Smith, 1972), do include such work that extends beyond the scope of this project. In addition, I recommend Thomas Kochman's *Rappin' and Stylin' Out* (1972) and Michael Hecht's *African American Communication* (1993).

Serious analysis of African American oratory dates back to the nineteenth century. In the 1850s and 1860s, speeches by the likes of Frederick Douglass and Charles Langston were published and commented on in publications such as the *Liberator* and the *Anglo American Magazine*. By 1890, anthologies such as E. M. Brawley's *The Negro Baptist Pulpit* were being produced. However, the first standard reference work on African American rhetoric, *Negro Orators and Their Orations*, was compiled by Carter G. Woodson in 1925. Woodson reveals himself to be of a classical bent methodologically. He liberally invokes such authorities as Demosthenes, Quintillian, and Cicero. He employs Aristotelian classifications, categorizing speeches as judicial, deliberative, or epideictic. Nonetheless, Woodson does move beyond the classical by positing Christian pulpit oratory as a fourth major category. Of course, Black orators did not get much practice with speeches of the judicial type, or the deliberative when *deliberative* is narrowly defined as being before legislative bodies. But by Woodson's reckoning, Blacks excelled at the epideictic, or the occasional speech, and in the pulpit.

By use of chapter headings, Woodson traces a movement from "The First Protest" to "Progressive Oratory," with stops along the way that signal "More Forceful Attacks," "Further Efforts for a Hearing," "The Oratory of the Crisis," "The Oratory of Defiance," "Deliberative Oratory—Speeches of Negro Congressmen," "Speeches of Negro Congressman Outside of Congress," "Oratory in the Solution of the Race Problem," "The Panegyric," "Optimistic Oratory," and "Occasional Oratory." He cites as first examples of public protest against enslavement two speeches: one titled "Negro Slavery" by "Othello," which was subsequently printed in 1787, and a second titled "Slavery," which was signed "By a Free Negro" and printed in 1788. For more forceful ap-

peals, he offers such examples as Peter Williams's 1808 "Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade" and James Forten's 1813 "A Late Bill Before the State of Pennsylvania," in which Forten argued against a proposed bill to bar free people of color from entering the state. The chapter "Further Efforts" includes James McCune Smith's 1838 "The Abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the French and British Colonies," which was celebratory of the political event and designed to spur hope and further the cause of abolition in the United States. As abolitionist activity gathered force, Charles Lenox Remond and then Frederick Douglass became the most famous Black orators, and a dozen or so speeches by the two between 1841 and 1863 are Woodson's main examples of those who spoke to the "crisis" and to the issue of "defiance." Speeches by congressmen during the Reconstruction era include, in session, John Willis Menard's 1868 "The Negro's First Speech in Congress, Made by John Willis Menard in Defense of His Election to Congress when His Seat Was Contested and Won by His Political Opponent" and, out of session, James Mercer Langston's 1874 "Equality before the Law." Douglass's 1879 "The Negro Exodus from the Gulf States" is noted as an example of "solution" rhetoric; Bishop Reverdy Ransom's 1905 centennial oration in appreciation of William Lloyd Garrison is included among examples of the panegyric. Optimistic oratory is most closely associated with Booker T. Washington. C. V. Roman at various times delivered "A Knowledge of History Conducive to Racial Solidarity," which is presented as an excellent example of the occasional address. Progressive oratory, to Woodson, is symbolized by the likes of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, William Monroe Trotter, James Weldon Johnson, Mordecai Johnson, Archibald Grimké, Francis Grimké, and William Pickens, who delivered at several venues the notable address "The Kind of Democracy the Negro Race Expects."

Woodson was a historian by training; thus, he attempts little in the way of technical or structural analysis of the speeches themselves. His emphasis is on documenting and cataloging, a tendency that is again evident in *The Mind of the Negro* (1926), which includes more than 250 letters, most of which had been published in the *Journal of Negro History*, of which Woodson was editor. The letters, in Woodson's view, help to round out a conception of the Black mindset. But he views the letters as shapers of perspective, not merely as reflective. Authors include several who were known for their oratory as well, such as Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, Douglass, Remond, Henry Highland Garnet, and William Wells Brown.

Religious oratory, as Woodson affirms, has been central to the African American rhetorical tradition from the outset and was the primary channel by which millions of Blacks came to comprehend and speculate about the social world of which they were part. Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, Henry Highland Garnet, and Francis Grimké, for example, were all preachers. Therefore, the study of Black pulpit oratory as well as scholarly treatment of the Black church in general are necessary components of research in African American public discourse. As early as 1890, anthologies like E. M. Brawley's *The Negro Baptist Pulpit* were published, and W. E. B. Du Bois wrote about Black religious practices in *The Negro Church* (1903) and *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903/1989). James Weldon Johnson's 1927 *God's Trombones* is based on the "stereotyped sermon" he identified that moves formulaically from creation to judgment day. However, the first thorough treatment of Black preaching is William Pipes's *Say Amen, Brother! Old-Time Negro Preaching: A Study in American Frustration* (1951/1992). In this work, based on seven sermons recorded in Macon County, Georgia, Pipes classifies such preaching according to the following scheme derived from classical rhetoric:

#### Invention

##### A. Purposes

To persuade the sinner to "take up the new life" according to the Bible, the real world of God.

To impress the audience, so that there will be an outburst (escape) of emotion in shouting and frenzy.

To give religious instruction, according to the Bible.

##### B. Subject Matter

The Bible is the source of all ideas, information, and truths: God is good; "the more we suffer in this world, the greater will be our reward after death"; morality, social obligations, and religious fidelity are to be emphasized; there are evidences of fear and superstition.

##### C. Modes of Persuasion

*Personal Appeal*: the minister is uneducated but is "called" by God; his word is the word of God; the preacher is usually an impressive person, has a dramatic bearing and a melodious voice.

*Emotional Appeal*: by means of rhythm, sensationalism, rhetorical figures, imagery, suggestion, etc., the minister puts the audience into a mood to accept his ideas; this is the greatest appeal.

*Logical Argument*: not as important as emotional appeal; the best argument is that "it's true because the Bible said so."

#### Disposition

There is no logical organization because there is little preparation.

The emotions determine everything.

#### Style

Familiar, concrete, narrative, ungrammatical language; Biblical; humor; deals with *things* rather than with *ideas*.

#### Delivery

Awkward, spectacular, dramatic, bombastic; musical voice; rhythmical and emotional; enthusiastic; sincere. (p. 72)

Pipes's work remains significant for the rigor with which he treats Black sermons and for his insights about the continuing importance of old-time preachers to the African American struggle for equality. However, he bases much of his analysis of Black religious practices on an acceptance of stereotypes about "primitive" Africans who, restricted to the "jungles of Africa," lacked opportunities to develop sophistication. Given his perspective, Pipes sees early Black religion as primarily an escapist adaptation to servitude. He ignores its rebellious, in some cases multilayered, meanings. Other scholars avoid this mistake, most notably Henry H. Mitchell, whose *Black Preaching* (1970) now arguably stands as the best book on Black religious oratory.

General historical treatments of Black oratory include Lowell Moseberry's *An Historical Study of Negro Oratory in the United States to 1915* (1955) and Marcus Boulware's *The Oratory of Negro Leaders: 1900-1968* (1969). Moseberry, trained in a department of speech, brings a broader array of rhetorical methods to his task than does Woodson. Like Woodson, he regards his primary objective to be "a historical report on the platform activities of the Negro" (p. iv). However, differing in method, he seeks to "discover areas in the eloquence of the Negro that seemed to deviate from standard oratorical practice" (p. iv). After painting the familiar social, political, and economic backdrop against which African American oratory up until the death of Booker T. Washington took place, he turns his attention to what he perceives to be a Black expressive and signifying difference. He argues that while Black orators used the same degree of induction, deduction, and causal reasoning employed by White rhetors of similar training and educational levels, they made a distinct departure from Anglo-Saxon patterns of oratory

in terms of pathetic proof and style (p. 147). Black orators relied on keen invective, humor, and distinct—what Moseberry was willing to call African—brands of rhythmic phrasing. These observations are similar to those made by Pipes about Black sermons—evidence that sacred and secular African American rhetorical practices are interpenetrating. According to Moseberry, the most striking display of Black form is what we may call a jubilee rhetoric. As he explains:

A stylistic device of the Negro orators that, perhaps, was contrived as much for its appeal to the emotions as for its rhetorical value was an antithetical refrain that strongly resembles the “jubilee” tones of the Negro spirituals. This “jubilee” consists of a series of ideas containing a major undertone of tragedy, alternating with a contrasting jubilant response. The pathetic appeal of the “jubilee” builds in emotional intensity until it explodes climactically in an exultant “shout” of challenge. (1955, p. 150)

As Moseberry further indicates, Douglass’s 1852 “Fifth of July Oration” is a clear example, one in which the optimistic notes precede the tragic:

**Jubilee**

The sunlight that brought life and healing to you

**Tragic Undertone**

Has brought stripes and death to me.

**Jubilee**

The Fourth of July is yours,

**Tragic Undertone**

Not mine.

**Jubilee**

You may rejoice

**Tragic Undertone**

I must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illumined temple of liberty and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. (p. 151–152)

The same technique, in reverse pattern, is demonstrated by Francis Grimké:

**Tragic Undertone**

The way is certainly very dark. There are many things to discourage us.

**Jubilee**

But there is a brighter side to the picture, and it is of this side that I desire especially to speak.

**Tragic Undertone**

Before doing so, however, it may be well for us to notice in passing some of the things which seem to indicate the approach of a still deeper darkness . . . and first, lawlessness is increasing in the South.

**Jubilee**

After thirty-three years of freedom.

**Tragic Undertone**

Our civil and political rights are still denied us. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution are still a dead letter. The spirit of opposition, of oppression, of injustice is not diminishing but increasing. (Moseberry, 1955, p. 152)

Boulware’s study is the first major historical treatment of African American rhetoric devoted exclusively to texts of the twentieth century. He takes as his major tasks a chronicling of Black oratorical output and the creation of classification schemes. For Boulware, the mission of the Black orator invariably revolved around six goals: (1) to protest grievances, (2) to state complaints, (3) to demand rights, (4) to advocate racial cooperation, (5) to mold racial consciousness, and (6) to stimulate racial pride. He sets the pursuit of this mission in the twentieth century against the backdrop of, in his view, the century’s six great American presidents—Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson—and their presidencies as popularly labeled, that is, the Rooseveltian Era, 1901–1909; the New Freedom Period, 1913–1921; the New Deal, 1933–1945; the Fair Deal, 1945–1953; the New Frontier, 1961–1965;<sup>1</sup> and the Great Society, 1965–1969. Guided by his typologies, Boulware spins a history of African American oratory that begins in 1900, when Booker T. Washington was the dominant African American figure and orator in the country, up until the summer of 1968. He traces or alludes to such

public careers as those of Washington, Mary Church Terrell, W. E. B. Du Bois, Mordecai Johnson, Marcus Garvey, Sadie Mossell Alexander, James Weldon Johnson, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Langston Hughes, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Paul Robeson, Mary McLeod Bethune, A. Philip Randolph, Zora Neale Hurston, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Benjamin Mays, Gardner Taylor, Walter White, Roy Wilkins, Father Divine, Daddy Grace, Roy Wilkins, Malcolm X, James Baldwin, and Martin Luther King Jr.

By the time Boulware's study appeared, African American political and cultural expressions had reached a high point in terms of their impact on the national consciousness. Major civil rights protests had been featured prominently for more than a decade on television, as were, more recently, the inner-city rebellions and Black Power pronouncements. It was also evident that civil progress, ongoing demands, and violent civil unrest by African Americans were driven largely by passions and rhetoric little known or understood by the nation at large. Of course, some folks never cared to know or understand, but public and academic gatherings relative to African American issues, including artistic and overall communication issues, attracted significant audiences. From this context stemmed a large wave of books on the Black experience. Among that wave were several major works of rhetorical scholarship such as Haig Bosmajian and Hamida Bosmajian's *The Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement* (1969), Robert Scott and Wayne Brockriede's *The Rhetoric of Black Power* (1969), Arthur Smith's *Rhetoric of Black Revolution* (1969), and James Golden and Richard Rieke's *The Rhetoric of Black Americans* (1971).

The Bosmajians' work is intended for use as a textbook; they refrain from offering rhetorical analyses of the individual pieces in the collection because they planned to leave those tasks to prospective students. However, they impressively frame their volume with rhetorical and historical commentary. In particular, they describe how African Americans and their allies mounted a massive persuasion campaign aimed at securing equality and justice on the heels of the Supreme Court desegregation decision and the Montgomery bus boycott. Actions themselves were decidedly rhetorical in that campaign; the sit-ins, freedom rides, picketing, marches, wade-ins, read-ins, and jail-ins were perhaps the more effective forms of persuasion. Yet the speeches, songs, and pamphlets were indispensable in terms of, as the Bosmajians term it, "a rhetorical or suasive function" (1969, p. 5). The authors also indicate a continual situation with which the activists were confronted:

The civil-rights leaders faced a formidable rhetorical problem; several questions about their persuasion had to be answered: To whom was their persuasion to be directed? Segregationists? Moderate whites? Negroes? What form should the protest take? What effect would the persuasion have on the audience? For example, on one hand the Montgomery bus boycott was directed against city authorities and the bus company with their segregation policies; yet, on the other hand, the boycott, with the accompanying mass meetings, speeches, songs, and demonstrations, had a persuasive effect upon the thousands of Negroes who had to become united participants in the boycott; unless the Negroes of Montgomery could be persuaded to stop riding the buses, the boycott was doomed to failure. Further, because the nation and the entire world had their attention focused on Montgomery and the actions of the civil-rights leaders, this larger audience also had to be considered, for they too were watching and being persuaded. (p. 5)

The Bosmajians highlight the words of Martin Luther King Jr., James Farmer, and Roy Wilkins as examples of the mainstream, integrationist civil rights campaign. But because the editors' view of the Civil Rights Movement allows for a certain indeterminacy, they show how those speakers were in dialogue with competing and challenging rhetorics, that of conservative Alabama clergy on the one hand and Black power advocates on the other. Thus King's April 16, 1963, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is reprinted as is the April 12, 1963, "Public Statement by Eight Alabama Clergymen." Also included are the transcript of the debate between Farmer and Malcolm X that took place at Cornell University on March 7, 1962; Wilkins's July 5, 1966, "Keynote Address to the NAACP Annual Convention," in which he condemned the idea of Black power; and Floyd McKissick's July 1967 "Speech at the National Conference on Black Power," in which he advocated the concept.

Two selections by Stokely Carmichael are presented: a pamphlet, *Power and Racism*, which was distributed by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and his January 16, 1967, "Speech at Morgan State College." Carmichael is the person most associated perhaps with both the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the slogan "Black Power." *Newsweek* reported in its May 15, 1967, issue that he was speaking at various campuses and "soaking whites \$1,000

for a rather tame exposition of black power, charging Negro colleges \$500 for the gloves-off treatment" ("Which Way for the Negro?" 1967, p. 28). The pamphlet is intended to illustrate the former approach; the speech at Morgan State College is meant to indicate the latter.

Scott and Brockriede also present civil rights and Black power discourses as integrally connected. Just as the statements of Black power advocates constitute much of the Bosmajians's "civil rights" book, the arguments of King, and even Hubert Humphrey, and accompanying critical perspectives by the editors constitute a sizable portion of the "Black power" book. In particular, the editors/authors detail Humphrey's technique as he denounced Black power at the NAACP Annual Convention in 1966 one day after Roy Wilkins had done so. But they feel that while Humphrey managed to establish great ethos with the 1,500 delegates, mainly by parroting Wilkins's address, in doing so he missed an opportunity to complicate and enrich a discussion of Black power. It is an opportunity that King himself never missed. Although he never embraced the slogan, he was never simplistically antagonistic toward it and always considered carefully its rhetorical effects and the premises behind it. This is illustrated by the selection "Martin Luther King, Jr. Writes about the Birth of the Black Power Slogan," which is a reprint of the second chapter of his *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (1968). The complexity of King's thinking and the influence of Black power proponents upon him is also evident in his last speech to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) on August 16, 1967, "The President's Address to the Tenth Anniversary Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference."

Contrasting speeches by Carmichael are included in the text; in this case they represent a talk given before an African American audience in Detroit and one given before a White audience in Whitewater, Wisconsin. Background essays on Black power are provided by James Comer and Charles V. Hamilton.

Smith's book, along with two subsequent works, *The Voice of Black Rhetoric* (1971), edited with Stephen Robb, and *Language, Communication, and Rhetoric in Black America* (1972), represent some of the most in-depth work in the area of African American rhetoric. Smith, now known as Molefi Asante, developed a specialty in agitational rhetoric as part of his doctoral studies at UCLA. He was well equipped and positioned, as a theorist and a witness, to assess the agitational Black rhetoric of the 1960s. He sees Black nationalist and Black power rhetorics to be essentially aggressive (toward Whites) and unifying (toward African

Americans). To move the Black masses, the Black rhetor must, as Boulware suggests, posit grievances. Of course, given America's treatment of Black folks, that is the easiest part of the job. The harder task is to fulfill the requirement that the rhetoric be consistent with or overcome an audience's mythology. King, for example, could always count on a large audience, particularly in the South, to hear an appeal based on Christian love. Malcolm X, on the other hand, had to overcome Christian beliefs to attract disciples to the Nation of Islam.

Smith employs several classification schemes regarding strategies, themes, and audiences to enhance his descriptions. Particularly useful is the four-part strategic structure that appears as part of all long-term agitation campaigns: (1) vilification, (2) objectification, (3) mythication, and (4) legitimation. *Vilification* is to create an antihero by attacking the ideas, actions, and being of a conspicuous member of the opposition, mainly by charging that the person is a key agent of domination. *Objectification* is to blame a specific but ill-defined group, such as the White power structure or, simply, Whitey for the audience's suffering. This gives the rhetor more flexibility to denounce, tap into his or her audience's mythology, and arouse them. *Mythication* is the suggestion that "supra-rational" forces support the audience's struggle; this often means using religious symbolism to convey a sense that triumph has been ordained. This is exemplified by King speaking of the "coming of the Lord"; Malcolm asserting that the government, that which oppresses, is against God; or numerous speakers' likening the Black struggle to the story of Exodus. *Legitimation* is the attempt to justify one's own actions or those of fellow activists, usually by reversing blame and citing the oppressor's "original sin." It is generally the only defensive strategy employed by revolutionists, who characteristically remain on the offensive.

Smith also identifies a four-part thematic structure that is basic to Black secular, agitational rhetors: (1) all Blacks face a common enemy, (2) there is a conspiracy to violate Black manhood, (3) there is pervasive American hypocrisy, and (4) Black unity is requisite for Black liberation. With respect to the nature of the Black audience, Smith (1969, p. 67) proposes the following table:

AUDIENCE COMPOSITION	
Characteristics	Type of Audience
Age	
Adults	Religious
Youth	Secular

<b>Sex</b>	
Female	Religious
Male	Secular
<b>Education</b>	
Less	Religious
More	Secular

Adult audiences, then, are seen to favor and be more apt to respond to religious oratory than would Black youth. Females are seen as more religious than males, and those less formally educated are seen as more religious than those with more education. Broad tendencies, of course, can always be complicated. There have always been old, secular, informally educated radicals around in the 'hood, some of them women. Smith, however, feels that the table is an accurate indicator of where audible support is likely to emanate from during a speech.

In *The Voice of Black Rhetoric*, Smith and Robb describe the general characteristics of African American rhetoric considered historically. Twenty speakers are offered as exemplary, ranging from David Walker, who keynoted a meeting of the First General Colored Association in Boston in 1828, to H. Rap Brown, who spoke on colonialism and revolution in Detroit in 1967. An interesting methodological development involved the editors' discussion of Nommo, the African belief in the pervasive, mystical, transformative, even life-giving power of the Word. As they articulate:

It is a cardinal mistake of our society to operate on the basis that language functions of whites are everywhere reproducible in black societies in terms of influences and ends. With an African heritage steeped in oral traditions and the acceptance of transforming vocal communication, the Afro-American developed, consciously or subconsciously, a consummate skill in using language to produce his own alternate communication patterns to those employed by whites in the American situation. Communication between different ethnic and linguistic groups was difficult, but the almost universal African regard for the power of the spoken word contributed to the development of alternate communication patterns in the work songs, Black English, sermons, and Spirituals, with their dual meanings, one for the body and one for the soul. It is precisely the power of the word in today's black society that authentically speaks of an African past. Thus, to omit

black rhetoric as manifest in speeches and songs from any investigation of black history is to ignore the essential ingredient in the making of black drama. (1972, p. 2)

The concern with African influences would become a more prominent component of Smith's evolving rhetorical theory. Among the twenty-nine essays in *Language, Communication, and Rhetoric in Black America*, which were on by that time predictable topics or subjects, Smith includes six of his own, including "Markings of an African Concept of Rhetoric." As the title suggests, he begins to rely more heavily on Afrocentric concepts of rhetoric, posing Nommo, for example, as opposite Western persuasive technique:

The public discourse convinces not through attention to logical substance but through the power to fascinate. Yet this does not preclude the materials of composition or the arrangement and structure of those materials; it simply expresses a belief that when images are arranged according to their power and chosen because of their power, the speaker's ability to convince is greater than if he attempted to employ syllogisms. The syllogism is a Western concept; *Nommo* is an African concept. . . . Perhaps that is drawing the choices too clearly, inasmuch as few neo-Aristotelians would argue for a dichotomy of emotion and logic. However, it is necessary to state the polar positions to illustrate the emphasis of the traditional African speaker. (1972, pp. 371-372)

Of course, the African concept of rhetoric is to be used to explicate oratory in the United States as well. In fact, Smith's essay addresses in a sense the peculiar qualities of African American oratory noted by the likes of Moseberry. Elaboration of Smith's ideas can be found in subsequent works, most notably the numerous passages on rhetoric in *The Afrocentric Idea* (Asante, 1998).

Golden and Rieke's anthology is fairly duplicative, including texts by speakers such as Walker, Remond, Douglass, Garvey, King, and Malcolm X. The distinguishing and lasting quality of the collection is the lengthy introduction, which is an insightful discussion of various political goals and rhetorical issues, and which culminates in figure 1. The figure is self-explanatory except for the arrow pointing from separation to assimilation. However, as Golden and Rieke explain, they are suggesting that "some of the separatist rhetoric includes the possibility that once black

men have gotten together and established some political, economic and cultural identity and power, they might be able to join other ethnic groups forming a kind of assimilated United States society” (1971, p. 44).

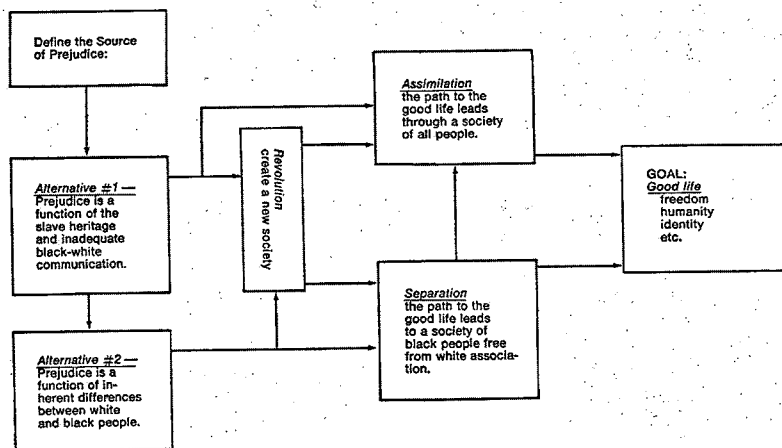


Fig. 1. Rhetorical Strategies of Black Americans (Golden & Rieke, 1971, p. 40) Reprinted by permission of R. D. Rieke.

An additional issue addressed by Golden and Rieke is the very worth of large-scale rhetorical intervention. Are the problems faced by the nation with respect to racialized inequality open to amelioration through what we generally regard as persuasive means? Or, given some of the deep-rootedness of racism, are coercive means, such as the physical force that ended enslavement or influenced legislation in the 1960s, more appropriate? These questions point to a possible “crisis of faith,” particularly for Black rhetors and scholars, and are queries that must be confronted seriously.

Geneva Smitherman’s widely acclaimed book, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (1977/1986) also was conceived in the late 1960s. Although primarily considered a linguist, Smitherman is perhaps most responsible for popularizing the “Black Modes of Discourse,” vernacular conceptions that are invaluable with respect to rhetorical analysis. The modes are (1) call-response, a series of spontaneous interactions between speaker and listener; (2) signification, the art of humorous put downs, usually through verbal indirection; (3) tonal semantics, the conveying of meanings in Black discourse through specifically ethnic kinds of voice rhythms and vocal inflections; and (4)

narrative sequencing, the habitual use of stories to explain and/or persuade. Smitherman (1995) alternately conceptualizes an African American Verbal Tradition (AAVT) that encompasses (1) signification, (2) personalization, (3) tonal semantics, and (4) sermon tone. The latter framework enables her to make sense of Black discourse that is not generally regarded as AAVE. She theorizes, for example, that the use of AAVT made Clarence Thomas a more sympathetic figure than Anita Hill in the African American community. While the syntax they both used during the confirmation hearings was unquestionably standard, Thomas made the matter personal and emotional, signifying along the way. Hill, on the other hand, seemed without passion or anger, emotions she had a right to feel and if displayed would have cast her inside AAVT and probably garnered her more support, particularly among African American women. Smitherman, therefore, seemingly in response to Golden and Rieke, points clearly to the value of rhetorical study as a mode of activist intervention. Because Hill did not resolve her rhetorical dilemma in the most socially productive way, she missed, according to Smitherman, an important moment to deliver more incisive and powerful commentary on sexual harassment, which is certainly a Black as well as larger issue. Smitherman concludes that Black women seeking to develop effective voices as part of the freedom struggle need a “head and heart rhetoric” to provide leadership for African Americans and the nation (2000, p. 265).

Significant post-1970s treatments of African American rhetoric include David Howard-Pitney’s *The Afro-American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America* (1990); Keith Miller’s *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Its Sources* (1992); Shirley Wilson Logan’s *With Pen and Voice: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth-Century African-American Women* (1995) and “We Are Coming”: *The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women* (1999); Bradford Stull’s *Amid the Fall, Dreaming of Eden: Du Bois, King, Malcolm X, and Emancipatory Composition* (1999); and Jacqueline Jones Royster’s *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women* (2000).

Howard-Pitney identifies the African American jeremiad to be an appropriation of the American jeremiad, which itself consists of statements of or references to the popular doctrine of America’s divine promise, chastisement because of present moral decline, and prophecy that the nation will soon overcome its faults and emerge transcendent. The African American version posits Blacks as a chosen people within the



parameters of the nation's archetypal civil myth. Howard-Pitney describes and discusses thoroughly the successes and failures of six leaders—Douglass, Washington, Wells, Du Bois, Bethune, and King—who utilized the form extensively. King and Du Bois, along with Malcolm X, are the subjects of Stull's study; Stull suggests that their composing processes, broadly and deeply construed, could serve as a model for liberatory composition classrooms. And King is obviously the sole subject of Miller's book, which locates King firmly within the tradition of Black religious oratory while exploring his borrowings from the writings of Whites.

Logan's first book, an important anthology that represents the frequently neglected tradition of Black woman rhetors, mainly features speeches by seven women—Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Anna Julia Haywood Cooper, Ida B. Wells, Fannie Barrier Williams, and Victoria Earle Matthews. Her second is an in-depth study in which most of these women are seen in the context of a particular trope—Maria Stewart in connection with the idea of "Ethiopia Rising," for example, or Ida B. Wells in relation to the "Presence of Lynching." Directly connected to Logan's project is Royster's book, which focuses on the essays of elite nineteenth-century African American women such as Stewart, Cooper, and Wells. Royster also posits an Afrafeminist ideology and argues its relevance for rhetorical studies.

Despite the recent impressive work in the field, which includes, by the way, Philip Foner and Robert James Branham's compilation of older speeches, *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787–1900* (1998), many of the earlier volumes have gone out of print. In 1995, citing the lack of a sufficiently comprehensive text as well as a decline in African American rhetoric course offerings, Lyndrey Niles edited *African American Rhetoric: A Reader*. Approximately half the volume consists of reprinted material (mentioned above) by Asante, Golden, and Rieke. The most interesting additions for these purposes are Melbourne Cummings and Jack L. Daniel's "A Comprehensive Assessment of Scholarly Writings in Black Rhetoric" and Ronald Jackson's "Toward an Afrocentric Methodology for the Critical Assessment of Rhetoric." These scholars, affirming work by the likes of Asante and Smitherman, consider traditional academic models and limited notions such as "persuasion" to be too static to account for the richness, dynamism, and cultural content relative to speaker-audience interactions in African-derived contexts. As Cummings and Daniel assert, "Black rhetoric, with its concentration on Nommo, rhythmical patterns, audience assertiveness, and so on, cannot be dealt with by simply applying the conventional Euro-

American tools of rhetorical criticism" (p. 100). In line with this thinking, Jackson proffers an Afrocentric model in which Nommo is graphically posited as the center around which eight elements—rhythm, soundin', stylin', improvisation, storytelling, lyrical code, image making, and call and response—revolve (see fig. 2; R. Jackson, 1995, p. 154). As Jackson elaborates:

Rhythm is similar to polyrhythm in that it suggests that the energy of the rhetor must be one with the energy of the audience. . . . The rhythm must coincide with the mystical and magical power of the word, so that the speaker, the word, and audience are all on one accord. . . . Soundin' is the idea of wolfin' or signifyin' within the African American tradition. . . . Stylin' is the notion that a speaker has combined rhythm, excitement, and enthusiasm which propel a message and the audience. . . . Improvisation is a stylistic device which is a verbal interplay, and strategic catharsis often resulting from the hostility and frustration of a white-dominated society. It is spontaneity. . . . Storytelling . . . is often used by a rhetor to arouse epic memory. . . . Lyrical Code is the preservation of the word through a highly codified system of lexicality. It is the very dynamic lyrical quality which provides youth to the community usage of standard and Black English. It is often used by speakers to appear communalistic, commonplace, and not so convoluted in diction. . . . Image making is the element which considers legends, myths, and heroes in a given culture. . . . Call and response is the final element which offers a culmination of all these elements into an interactive discourse atypical of European communities. It is the idea that one should affirm by clapping, saying "amen," or responding in some way. (p. 154)

At this point, I hope to have amply demonstrated the richness of African American rhetoric as a field of inquiry while indicating, if only implicitly, what future work needs to be done. Numerous studies are required that will allow us to understand the import of current and emerging Black discourses. This is not to project an insular sense but to suggest that an understanding of continued Black articulations for a better society form a central question to be confronted by all if we are to bring a better society into existence. Nor do I mean to imply, by emphasizing contemporary subject matter, that we halt historical investigations. In

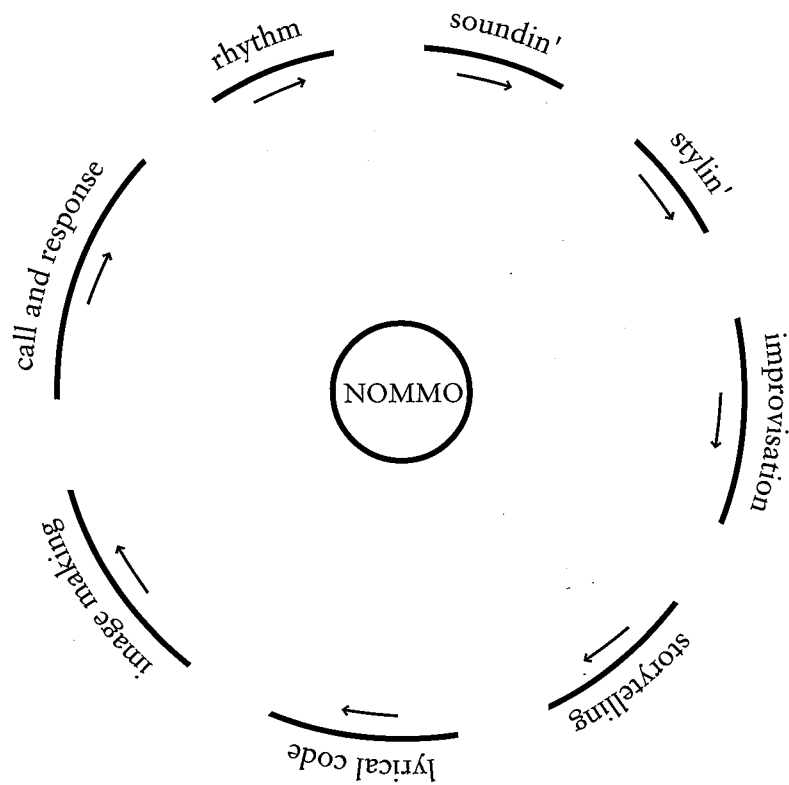


Fig. 2. Representation of Nommo

fact, it is crucial that we uncover and remain aware of some of the questions our forerunners posed because some of them remain unanswered. Will optimists, which all rhetoricians are at heart, remain prone, as both Woodson and Boulware suggest, to losing whatever hold they have on the public because of the inability to deliver tangible results? Will Black leadership that emerges from the working classes become more important, as Pipes envisions it might, than that which stems from the academy? There is yet much to witness.

#### Note

1. Although Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, I have used the dates of his elected term as the period of the New Frontier.

## Part One

### Historicizing and Analyzing African American Rhetoric(s)