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MASTER

8: Anna Julia Cooper
Radical Relationality and the Ethics of Interdependence

Carol Wayne White

The philosophic mind sees that its own "rights" are the rights of humanity.
Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*

In the last several decades, scholarship on Anna Julia Cooper has increased significantly, drawing attention to her wide range of ideas on race, intersectional feminism, and international politics, and to her lifelong work as an educator, political activist, and community leader.[1] In a 2016 study, for example, Vincent Lloyd includes Cooper's work in his revival of a black natural law tradition that he believes offers the best way of approaching politics in the contemporary world.[2] In Lloyd's reading, Cooper's performance of black natural law involves the critique of ideology, including white supremacy and patriarchy, and participation in social movements for justice, especially those focusing on education and commu-

1 Karen Baker-Fletcher, *A Singing Something: Womanist Reflections on Anna Julia Cooper* (New York: Crossroad, 1994); Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan, eds., *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper, including "A Voice from the South" and Other Important Essays, Papers, and Letters* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); Karen Johnson, *Uplifting the Women and the Race: The Lives, Educational Philosophies and Social Activism of Anna Julia Cooper and Nannie Helen Burroughs*, Studies in African American History and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2000); M. S. Giles, "Special Focus, Dr. Anna Julia Cooper, 1858–1964: Teacher, Scholar, and Timeless Womanist," *Journal of Negro Education* 75, no. 4 (2004): 621–34; Jane Gordon, "Failures of Language and Laughter: Anna Julia Cooper and Contemporary Problems of Humanistic Pedagogy," *Philosophical Studies in Education* 38 (2007): 163–78; Vivian M. May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Stephanie Y. Evans, "African American Women Scholars and International Research: Dr. Anna Julia Cooper's Legacy of Study Abroad, *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* 18 (2007): 77–100; Vivian M. May, "'It Is Never a Question of the Slaves': Anna Julia Cooper's Challenge to History's Silences in Her 1925 Sorbonne Thesis," *Callaloo* 31, no. 3 (2008): 903–18; Beverly Guy-Sheftall, "Black Feminist Studies: The Case of Anna Julia Cooper," *African American Review* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 11–15; Kathryn T. Gines and Ronald R. Sundstrom, eds., *Philosophia Africana: Analysis of Philosophy and Issues in African and the Black Diaspora*, special issue, *Anna Julia Cooper*, 12, no. 1 (March 2009); Shirley Moody Turner, ed., *African American Review*, special section on Anna Julia Cooper, 43, no. 1 (Spring 2009); Carol Wayne White, "Relational Humanity and the Interplay of One and All," in *Black Lives and Sacred Humanity: Toward an African American Religious Naturalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016): 47–74.

2 Vincent Lloyd, *Black Natural Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), ix.

CHI Rogers-Turner 0264 text.indd 192 6/19/20 4:36 PM

MASTER

nity building.[3] With a different focus and level of analysis, Vivian May's 2007 study of Cooper as a visionary black feminist also emphasized Cooper's social justice work as a distinctive type of feminist political praxis.[4] In this chapter I share these robust readings of Cooper as an astute thinker and activist intent on provoking American society into a radical transformation of its cultural values and institutional practices. With Lloyd, I believe a key aspect of understanding Cooper's genius as a political activist is found in her nascent views of human nature; however, I do not share the explicit theological and metaphysical interpretations of Cooper's work that Lloyd favors in *BNL*.[5] Rather, following May's lead, I ground Cooper's vision of liberation in the complexity of diverse perspectives (social, ethical, political, feminist, philosophic, etc.) found in Cooper's writings, without privileging a theological (or Christian) framework.[6] In doing so I focus on Cooper's richly textured, nuanced language, which I believe provides layers of possible interpretation to her engaged political activism and humanistic orientations.

In her range of activities as orator, scholar, community activist, and educator, Cooper demonstrates a basic orientation toward life that paradigmatically highlights the central features of political thought featured in this volume. A close reading of her corpus shows Cooper consistently identifying principles that advanced nuanced approaches to justice, freedom, and equality. Addressing problematic gendered, racialized, and class power dynamics in various institutions, Cooper sought a readjustment of relationships among all Americans that would ensure the dignity and worth of each individual. In short, I propose that Cooper's mature intellectual vision demonstrates a particular vision of a transformed America, as well as viable ways of achieving its transformation. Advancing this view, I build on a core theme across Cooper's work—what I call her politics of radical relationality—in which the fate of each individual (or the one) is inextricably connected to all (or the many). Central to this vision is Cooper's conception of humanity, often described in naturalistic evolutionary terms, which she used to challenge racial, gender, and class injustices of her day. She also appealed to a communal ontology in her view of humanity in order to assert the inherent worth

3 Lloyd, *Black Natural Law*, 33.

4 May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist*.

5 In justifying Cooper's inclusion in the black natural law tradition, Lloyd contends that her view of human nature is grounded in a theological perspective that he describes as follows: "Crucially, the black natural law tradition is committed to the view that no worldly description of the human suffices. Just as God exceeds all worldly description, the image of God in humanity exceeds all worldly descriptions" (Lloyd, *Black Natural Law*, xi). I do not share this view of Cooper, seeing her work as much more nuanced and humanistically oriented. For further reading, see my chapter on Cooper titled "Relational Humanity and the Interplay of One and All," in *Black Lives and Sacred Humanity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 47–74.

6 See May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist*, 43, where May describes Cooper's passion for the political, ethical, and philosophic value of speaking from multiple locations, as well as a sense of Cooper's reflexive and situated phenomenological work as a thinker.

CHI Rogers-Turner 0264 text.indd 193 6/19/20 4:36 PM

MASTER

and value of African Americans and other marginalized groups in North America at a time when their humanity was questioned or ignored.

After providing a brief introduction to Cooper and her unique voice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I discuss the extent to which she urged her contemporaries to begin envisioning a new model of relational humanity on which particular political and ethical values could be advanced. Following this, I examine aspects of Cooper's religious-social ethics and her educational philosophy that emanated from her philosophical anthropology—both viable avenues for Cooper in restructuring America. In the final section I connect Cooper's politics of relationality to her vision of America as a relational whole where the destinies of one and all are inextricably tied, and I briefly discuss Cooper's sense of national transformation and promise. I also mention Cooper's self-reflections on her efforts. While focusing primarily on the set of essays included in *A Voice from the South* (1892), I also include other writings by Cooper that are not as well known.

1. A Voice among Many: Conjoining the One and the All

Anna Julia Cooper was born in Raleigh, North Carolina, on August 10, 1858, to an enslaved mother (Hannah Stanley [Haywood], 1817–99) and began her formal education at nine years of age at Saint Augustine Normal School in Raleigh.[7] She later matriculated at Oberlin College, earning a BA in mathematics in 1884 and an MA for college teaching in 1887. Throughout her life, Cooper was involved in various educational pursuits and vocations aimed at transforming the lives of the underserved and marginalized.[8] As a teacher and principal at the famous "M-Street" High School—formally the Washington High School for Negroes, later renamed Dunbar High School—where she worked until 1930, Cooper introduced an innovative liberal arts curriculum that helped many of the students gain entrance into the best colleges in the nation. Upon retirement from Dunbar, from 1930 to 1941 Cooper was involved with Frelighuysen University in Washington, DC—a local university designed to assist working and adult African Americans—both teaching there and serving as its president. She also earned her PhD (1925) from the Sorbonne in Paris, completing a dissertation titled "L'attitude de la France à l'égard de l'esclavage pendant la Révolution." In this work Cooper addressed France's attitudes toward slavery, examining how they contradicted French ideas of liberty and freedom and also influenced the French and Haitian Revolutions. Cooper was

7 Recent biographical sources indicate that this may be the likely date of Cooper's birth, although it has also been recorded as 1859 and 1860.

8 Cooper's many educational and service activities are too numerous to name here; however, the wide range of activities include her work at a war camp sometime after World War I in Indianapolis, her role in facilitating the opening of the first YWCA chapter for black women in Washington, DC, and her supervision of the Colored Settlement House in Washington. She also had a leadership role in the Washington Colored Woman's League, which eventually became a part of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs.

CHI Rogers-Turner 0264 text.indd 194 6/19/20 4:36 PM

MASTER

also a prolific writer, authoring *A Voice from the South* (1892), a collection of essays and speeches featuring her intersectional feminist analysis of American culture, as well as other critical commentaries addressing a wide range of social, political, and theoretical concerns that preoccupied her throughout life.[9]

In her diverse roles as author, teacher, and community leader, Cooper insisted that all people, not just the favored heirs of past unjust systems, should enjoy the benefits of full citizenship. In "Colored Women as Wage Earners," originally published in *Southern Workman* in 1899, Cooper applies this general principle to issues of labor and economics when advocating that unpaid domestic labor be seen as productive wage labor. Introducing a general economic theory that posited labor, along with capital and land, as a key factor contributing to wealth, Cooper asserted that the worker is worthy of her hire: whatever a person contributes to the wealth should be acknowledged and rewarded. At the same time Cooper seems to be rejecting a crass view of labor where the wage earner is reduced to an object or commodity that can be used and exchanged. A crucial aspect of Cooper's argument is the recognition that all workers or laborers, especially black women, were full humans endowed with the qualities of volition, subjectivity, and the valuation of life. As she writes: "Every wage-earner, man or woman, owes it to the dignity of the labor he contributes, as well as to his own self-respect, to require the rights due to the quality of service he renders, and to the element of value he contributes to the world's wealth."[10]

With the knowledge that many black families were headed by women, Cooper also challenged misogynist and racist notions that black women's paid labor was surplus labor. Describing the "double disadvantage" faced by black women, Cooper believed that proper training and educational opportunities would increase their intellectual and moral qualities, declaring, "The colored woman as wage-earner must bring to her labor all the capacities, native or acquired, which are of value in the industrial equation. She must really be worth her wage and then claim it."[11] With these crucial observations and insights, Cooper brings critical awareness to the potentially devastating consequences for black women and black families when wage disparities based on gender and racial inequalities persist, as current surveys in the US continue to show.[12]

9 Other lesser-known writings include Cooper's memoir about earning her doctorate from the Sorbonne, *The Third Step*, and a memoir about the Grimké family, *The Early Years in Washington: Reminiscences of Life with the Grimkés*.

10 Cooper, "Colored Women as Wage Earners," *Southern Workman* 28 (August 1899): 295–98, http://www.huarchivesnet.howard.edu/9908huarnet/cooper3.htm, accessed November 2017.

11 Cooper, "Colored Women as Wage Earners."

12 Recent studies show that black women in the United States who work full time year round are typically paid just 63 cents for every dollar paid to non-Hispanic white men. They also show that the persistent gender-based wage gap continues to harm women, their families, and the economy—and it is particularly damaging for black women. For further reading, see "Black Women and the Wage Gap" provided by the National Partnership for Women & Families: http://

MASTER

Cooper's ongoing concern for society's most vulnerable (or voiceless) also inspired her work with the Alley Sanitation Committee, an organization addressing the lack of housing for poor African Americans in Washington, DC, during the Jim Crow era.[13] She was also one of the few African American female representatives to address the first Pan-African Congress in London (1900), which was "an international gathering concerned with the key issues and problems facing 'African humanity'" and conceived to demonstrate "that those of African descent could speak for themselves against all the injustices they faced."[14] Cooper complemented her community activism with crucial theorizations about the necessity of voicing one's desire for freedom. She believed the historical situations and concrete experiences of oppressed peoples should be critically apprehended by the oppressed themselves—by those whose lives are directly harmed by unjust practices.

In the introduction to *A Voice from the South*, Cooper confronts the misleading assumption that the "black problem," and its possible solution, could be fully analyzed or comprehended without the recognition of black women's voices and perspectives. Introducing the theme of "silenced" black women by noting the lack of respect and worth given them within American history, she declares: "The 'other side' has not been represented by one who 'lives there.' And not many can more sensibly realize and more accurately tell the weight and the fret of the 'long dull pain' than the open-eyed but hitherto voiceless Black Woman of America."[15] In this case and elsewhere, Cooper demonstrates that "oppressed peoples are agents both of knowledge and history, even if their agency, resistance, and alternative ways of knowing have been suppressed or denied by the powerful."[16] This is a crucial idea that anticipates later decolonial discourses and cultural analyses in the twentieth century, as evident in this insight from Colin McFaren and Peter Lankshear: "In order to reclaim their right to live *humanly*, marginalized groups must not only theorize and analyze but also confront, in praxis, those institutions, processes, and ideologies that prevent them from, as Paulo Freire puts it, 'naming their world.'"[17]

Cooper's evocation of the necessity of hearing the black woman's voice when challenging oppressions was more than an ingenious strategy; it was also an

www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/fair-pay/african-american-women-wage-gap.pdf, accessed January 2018.

13 Louise Daniel Hutchinson, *Anna J. Cooper: A Voice from the South* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 93. See also James Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion and Folklife in the City, 1850–1970* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

14 Immanuel Ness and Zak Cope, eds. *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 908.

15 Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (New York: Oxford University Press,1988), ii. Hereafter cited as Cooper, *VFS*.

16 May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist*, 3.

17 Peter McFaren and Colin Lankshear, *Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis, and the Postmodern* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 146.

CHI Rogers-Turner 0264 text.indd 196 6/19/20 4:36 PM

MASTER

important epistemic assertion, conjoining Cooper's voice with other silenced or muted ones and affirming their shared humanity. Voicing the concerns of other black women was in effect an important act of solidarity, aligning Cooper's fate with a generation of women whose humanity had been exploited and then silenced by a legacy of white supremacy. This shared sense of lived (embodied) experience often invigorates Cooper's philosophic writings, activism, and pious discourse. For example, when addressing the 1893 World's Congress of Representative Women in Chicago—a forum attended by women around the globe—Cooper gave voice to the resiliency of black women in the US since slavery, declaring that "the colored women's oppression in this country" and "her yet unwritten history is full with heroic struggle, struggle against fearful and overwhelming odds."[18] Strategically conjoining the personal and the collective, Cooper also acknowledges speaking for women of the South (the poorest and least visible) because "it is there that the millions of blacks in this country have watered the soil with blood and tears."[19]

These examples support my contention that Cooper's theories were not just abstract ideas; they emerged out of her embodied experience as a black woman, scholar, and activist whose own full humanity was questioned. May suggests that Cooper negotiated at least two worlds at once in her published texts and life: "an ideal world in which her personhood would not be questioned and, simultaneously, lived reality in which she had to contest daily the weight of being perceived and treated as 'other.'"[20] Thus Cooper's precarious (and unique) voice as a black public intellectual sheds light on the misogynist and racial injustices that structured American life during her time.[21] Shirley Moody-Turner has recently illuminated Cooper's experience with the print industry of her day, which was the major medium by which authors could disseminate their work. Moody-Turner discusses the various gendered and class dynamics that adversely inflected Cooper's attempts to secure adequate publication outlets for her work as a black woman author.[22] In this context, the multivalent richness of Cooper's public intellectual

18 Anna Julia Cooper, "The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation," in *The World's Congress of Representative Women: A Historical Resume*, ed. May Wright Sewell (Chicago; Rand, McNally, 1894), 711. The World's Congress of Representative Women opened on May 15, 1893, drawing 500 delegates from 27 countries and 126 organizations.

19 Cooper, "Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women," 712.

20 May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist*, 79–82.

21 Katherine Shilton, "Letter from Anna Julia Cooper to Alfred Churchill," in "'This Scholarly and Colored Alumna': Anna Julia Cooper's Troubled Relationship with Oberlin College," accessed March 2020, http://www2.oberlin.edu/external/EOG/History322/AnnaJuliaCooper/AnnaJuliaCooper.htm; May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist*, 34, 80–82; Mary Helen Washington, introduction to Cooper, *VFS*, xxxix.

22 Shirley Moody-Turner, "'Dear Doctor Du Bois': Anna Julia Cooper, W. E. B. Du Bois, and the Gender Politics of Black Publishing," *MELUS: Multi-ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 40, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 47–48.

MASTER

"voice" in conjoining the one and the many is significant, as this insight from Moody-Turner suggests: "Cooper's expansive concept of black publishing was part and parcel of an activist platform that could build and support black arts and education, dispute and debate racist propaganda, introduce important positive images by African Americans, expand the knowledge base of African American readers by introducing important international and domestic scholarship to its readership, and serve as a space for democratic dialogue and critical debate."[23]

The problematic racial, gender, and class distinctions Cooper witnessed and experienced were distortions of the relational whole she imagined to be true for humans. In the next section I offer a brief discussion of Cooper's conception of humanity, which provides the theoretical underpinnings of her egalitarian principles. This formulation of an expansive humanity will also invigorate Cooper's vision of America as the stage on which the "principles of true democracy are founded in universal reciprocity" and advanced as the nation matures.[24]

2. Cooper's Vision of Humanity and Her Politics of Relationality

Cooper never fully developed a systematic philosophical anthropology in any single work, but she does offer within select essays consistent characterizations of humans as evolving, perfecting, and maturing processes. In "The Gain from a Belief," Cooper uses processional imagery for human life to challenge the skepticism and positivism of various European philosophers who saw humanity as nothing more than a conglomeration of cells best explained by scientific empiricism. Cooper rejects this reductive materialism in favor of a loftier view of humanity, or a "sublime conception of life as the seed-time of character for the growing of a congenial inner-self to be forever a constant presence."[25] In "What Are We Worth?" Cooper describes black Americans as dynamic, malleable entities capable of transformative growth, contingent on society's provision of the proper conditions and forms of cultivation for its maturation: "It is labor, development, training, careful patient, diligent toil that must span the gulf between this vegetating life germ (now worth nothing but toil and care and trouble, and living purely at the expense of another)—and that future consummation in which 'the elements are so mixed that Nature can stand up and say to all the world, '*This is a man*.'"[26]

Employing naturalistic metaphors alongside religious ones, Cooper characterized humans as evolving beings with the inner determination to fulfill themselves. In doing so, she contributed to a discourse of human perfectibility that was also found in the influential writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and other nineteenth-century visionaries. In Emerson's transcendentalist writings, human perfection-

23 Moody-Turner, "Dear Doctor Du Bois," 48.
24 Cooper, *VFS*, 168.
25 Cooper, *VFS*, 295.
26 Cooper, *VFS*, 244.

CHI Rogers-Turner 0264 text.indd 198 6/19/20 4:36 PM

MASTER

ism is sometimes expressed as the latent capacities within each individual and their potential directedness.[27] His theme of infinite perfectibility was integrally connected to a general philosophic orientation that saw no discontinuity between perceived distinct worlds—for Emerson, the divine and the human were one, as expressed eloquently in his essay "The Over-Soul."[28] Equally important, Emerson believed that a commitment to the truth of the divine within naturally leads one to exercise that commitment in relation to issues of social justice.

Cooper's brand of perfectionism (or her sense of an inner directionality operating within humans and all natural processes) conjoined individual, national, and universal aspirations within the context of multiple oppressions in the United States. The measure of human progress for Cooper was how well "each and every" American could live in the absence of unjust racial, gender, class prejudices, and other expressions of xenophobia and cultural imperialism.[29] This perspective emerges from her black feminist slant (or intersectional approach) to the theme of one and all, and as I have observed elsewhere, this whiff of American Romanticism in Cooper distinguishes her voice from those of Emerson and other white visionaries.[30]

In my reading, Cooper's black feminist and Romanticist expression of human potential also does not fall neatly within the human perfectibility and moral reform framework that Erica Bell explores in *To Live an Antislavery Life*. In this study, Bell explores the writings of select freed northern black leaders who, in the aftermath of slavery, advanced a politics of respectability that thematized inner moral (or divine) truth and outward action. Bell features black antebellum figures like Maria Stewart, David Walker, and others who ingeniously intertwined a rhetoric of self-improvement with a larger politics of racial uplift and freedom struggle. As she writes: "Every example of black self-actualization, virtue, morality, respectability, and success, they thought, would be a boon to the antislavery cause."[31]

27 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 229.

28 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Over-Soul," in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 386. See also *Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher, Robert E. Spiller, and Wallace E. Williams (Cambridge, MA: Belknap / Harvard University, 1964), 2:1836–38; Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Young Emerson Speaks: Unpublished Discourses on Many Subjects*, ed. Arthur Cushman McGiffert (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938; repr. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1965), 200.

29 Cooper, *VFS*, 118;124–25.

30 Carol Wayne White, *Black Lives and Sacred Humanity: Toward an African American Religious Naturalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016): 60.

31 Erica Bell, *To Live an Antislavery Life* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 35. Bell aims to address some key assumptions of the available scholarly literature on the personal politics of respectability associated with the antebellum black middle class. A chief concern for Bell are certain dichotomies (respectability versus activism and elevation versus black nationalism) that scholars maintain in having uncritical views of the American Moral Reform Society (AMRS), which many black middle-class leaders participated in at the time. Bell clarifies her position, contending that this politics of respectability is "best understood as a value at the heart of the

MASTER

Cooper's expressions of human perfectionism, inclusive in her style of writing, sense of national aspirations, and overall Romanticist outlook, have make her susceptible to the charges of class elitism and conservative politics that Bell addresses in her study.[32] Yet a close reading of Cooper's essays suggest otherwise, as she often and consistently exposed the dangers of "respectability politics" and elitist values. Consider, for example, that in "The Gain from Belief" she admonishes her successful black (male) peers not to "spend time discussing the "'Negro Problem' amid the clouds of your fine havanna, ensconced in your friend's well-cushioned arm-chair and with your patent leather boot-tips elevated to the opposite mantel."[33] She then encourages them to do something about the problem. What I am suggesting in this brief assessment is that Cooper's multifaceted approach to human perfectionism is hard to pin down. In short, Cooper's approach to the general theme of human progress in the nineteenth century does not belong properly to the white paradigmatic expressions associated with Emerson or to a variation of this theme that was exemplified by the middle-class blacks that Bell explores in her study.[34]

What is clear is that with processual imagery, Cooper consistently depicts a dynamic quality to human life that helps to dismantle problematic constructions of the human aligned with racist and sexist ideologies. She suggests that various forms of inequality are ill-informed social constructions which are not inherent to the natural strivings and agential activities within all humans. For example, Cooper confronted a shared notion among many white southern women that efforts to secure the rights of blacks in society ran against the *natural* order of things. In response, Cooper argued that the desire for self-fulfillment expressed by US blacks and other marginalized groups (as well as their efforts to humanize their material existence) were cultural manifestations of a higher truth that must not be stifled.[35] With a strong feminist voice, Cooper encouraged black women and men to seek self-fulfillment and actualize their humanity, as advocated by the women's movement, which she described as "a great and international movement characteristic of this age and country, a movement based on the inherent right of every soul to its highest development."[36] Such ontological aspirations, Cooper

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culture of the emerging black middle class: essential to the self-conception and personal identity of its members, their idealization of family life, their belief in the importance of gender-specific notions of virtue and independence, and ultimately their determination to live and die in a way that was utterly antithetical to the life deemed appropriate for them by slavery's supporters" (8).

32 May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist*, 57–71.

33 Cooper, *VFS*, 299–100.

34 For other perspectives that suggest Cooper possesses a unique voice, see Lewis Gordon's discussion of Cooper's exploration of existential ontological inquiries in *Existentia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000). Gordon also discusses the significance of Cooper's nineteenth-century feminist reflections in *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*, Cambridge Introductions to Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

35 Cooper, *VFS*, 113.

36 Cooper, *VFS*,108.

CHI Rogers-Turner 0264 text.indd 200 6/19/20 4:36 PM

MASTER

argues, are common to all: "the one ideal of perfect manhood and womanhood, the one universal longing for development and growth, the one desire for being, and being better, the one yearning, aspiring, outreaching, in all heartthrobs of humanity in whatever race or clime."[37]

Although she readily critiqued the racist sentiments of southern white women and subtle hypocrisy of white feminists, Cooper still envisioned the women's movement as a transformative process in America that could help regenerate its life, politics, and culture. The promise the movement held for Cooper was its role in creating a network of social interactions that inspired and enabled each person to attain fullness of being and to flourish as part of the whole:

> For women's cause is the cause of the weak; and when all the weak shall have received their due consideration, then woman will have her "rights," and the Indian will have his rights, and the Negro will have his rights, and all the strong will have learned at last to deal justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly, and our fair land will have been taught the secret of universal courtesy which is after all nothing but the art, the science, and the religion of regarding one's neighbor as one's self.[38]

Cooper's conception of human life as the emergence from a greater matrix of natural forces, and with the potential to self-actualize, compelled her to identify the problematic distortions of racial differentiations based on standards of superiority and inferiority. In "What Are We Worth?" she identifies the insidious forms of "negrophobia" that kept white Americans entrapped in self-delusions of superiority.[39] In the beginning of this essay she sums up this antiblack sentiment in a remark ascribed anecdotally to Henry Ward Beecher: "Were Africa and the Africans to sink tomorrow, how much poorer would the world be? A little less gold and ivory, a little less coffee, a considerable ripple, perhaps, where the Atlantic and Indian oceans would come together—that is all; not a poem, not an invention, not a piece of art would be missed from the world."[40] With this observation, Cooper targeted deficient conceptions of black humanity as debased, thereby confronting the enduring legacy of white supremacy in an Euro-American lineage of thought that has helped shape an exclusionary category of the human. The theme of a degraded black humanity that Cooper addressed has resonated deeply with a host of black American political theorists, writers, philosophers, and artists—both before and after Cooper—who have resisted its claims as well the white supremacy ideology in which it is rooted. Her critical discourse about black lives in America is a crucial part of an African American intellectual trajectory that includes Frederick Douglass, who made the following observation in the nineteenth century when addressing the National Colored Convention of 1853: "Our white fellow-country

37 Cooper, *VFS*, 113.
38 Cooper, *VFS*, 117.
39 Cooper, *VFS*, 285.
40 Cooper, *VFS*, 228.

CHI Rogers-Turner 0264 text.indd 201 6/19/20 4:36 PM

MASTER

men do not know us. They are strangers to our character, ignorant of our capacity, oblivious of our history and progress, and are misinformed as to the principles and ideas that control and guide us as a people. The great mass of American citizens estimate us as an characterless and purposeless people."[41] Douglass's observations about the ideology of white supremacy—what he elsewhere labels the "diseased imagination"[42]—also anticipate James Baldwin's astute observation, written fifty-some years after Cooper:

> But this cowardice, this necessity of justifying a totally false identity and of justifying what must be called a genocidal history, has placed everyone now living into the hands of the most ignorant and powerful people the world has ever seen. And how did they get that way? By deciding that they were white. By opting for safety instead of life. By persuading themselves that a black child's life meant nothing compared with a white child's life. . . . By informing their children that black women, black men, and black children had no human integrity that those who call themselves white were bound to respect. And in this debasement and definition of black people, debased and defined themselves.[43]

This trajectory of critical racial discourse initiated by Cooper, Douglass, and Baldwin also anticipates later philosophical critiques of modernist processes of racialization that have repeatedly characterized people of African descent as deficient when measured against the construction of the normative Western human of Enlightenment thought.[44] It is in this wider context that I believe Cooper's conceptualization of an expansive, emancipated humanity achieves its political force. With Douglass and Baldwin, Cooper not only resists the dominant notion of a deficient black humanity but also draws attention to the failures of whites who are simply unable to comprehend the true character and value of black folk. In one instance, she mocks the actions of white reformers who purport to help while speaking of "Negro depravity" in southern states, as well as the "stupendous and atrocious mistake of reasoning about these people as if they were just ordinary humans beings."[45] In "The Negro as Represented in American Literature," Cooper also targets the works of white writers and intellectuals who purport to address the "Negro question" with inauthentic descriptions and problematic images of blacks.

41 Frederick Douglass, *Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Yuval Taylor, Library of Black America Series (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2000), 269.

42 Frederick Douglass, "The Color Line" (1881), in *The Portable Frederick Douglass*, ed. J. Stauffer (New York: Penguin Classics, 2016), 501.

43 James Baldwin, "On Being White and Other Lies," in *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, ed. and trans. Randall Kenan (New York: Vintage, 2010), 168.

44 Emanuel Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996); Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press,1997); J. Stefancic and R. Delgado, eds., *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).

45 Cooper, *VFS*, 107.

CHI Rogers-Turner 0264 text.indd 202 6/19/20 4:36 PM

MASTER

For Cooper, these writers failed to see their own biases and implicit sense of superiority when depicting blacks in a wide range of stereotypes ranging from the submissive Uncle Tom to the savage, vindictive predator. Rejecting these caricatures and misrepresentations as manifestations of a fearful white consciousness, Cooper astutely reveals the power dynamics that are operative when one race attempts to describe the truths and lived experiences of another. She concludes that "an authentic portrait, at once aesthetic and true to life, presenting the Black man as a free American citizen, not just the humble slave of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—but the *man*, divinely struggling and aspiring yet tragically warped and distorted by the adverse winds of circumstance, has not yet been painted. . . . That canvas awaits the brush of the colored man himself."[46]

During her time, and in keeping with her evolutionary imagery, Cooper believed an evolved humanity necessitated the elimination of these distorted views of black humanity, anticipating a future epoch when "as sure as time *is—these mists will clear away*. And the world—our world, will surely and unerringly see us as we are. Our only care need be the intrinsic worth of our contributions. . . . and if we contribute a positive value in those things the world prizes, no amount of negrophobia can ultimately prevent its recognition. And our great 'problem' after all is to be solved not by brooding over it, and orating about it, but by *living into it*."[47] For Cooper, negrophobia or racial prejudice within the American context was mere "sentiment governed by the association of ideas" and was essentially "impervious to reason."[48] She thus encouraged blacks to focus more on "the intrinsic worth of our contributions" as humans and to not become too preoccupied with such "short sighted idiosyncracies," which are ever shifting and unreliable in estimating one's full value as a human being participating in the formation of a just world for all.[49]

Practicing transformation was not just the responsibility of blacks and other marginalized groups, as Cooper believed the nation and its leaders had a pivotal role to play in this process. Opposing the sterile, formulaic views of justice expressed by some white reformers, Cooper believed that transformation of society is primarily enacted through active participation in community organizing, grassroots activism, and myriad educational institutions, all of which aim at the systemic, conscious cultivation of free humans who can then participate fully in the formation of justice.[50] In making this observation, I return briefly to the perfectionism theme in Cooper's philosophical anthropology, as I think her human

46 Anna Julia Cooper, "The Negro in American Literature," in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, ed. Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 158. Hereafter cited as Cooper, *Voice of AJC*.

47 Cooper, *VFS*, 284-5.

48 Cooper, *VFS*, 231, 232.

49 Cooper, *VFS*, 284.

50 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 297.

CHI Rogers-Turner 0264 text.indd 203 6/19/20 4:36 PM

MASTER

progress discourse harbors a pragmatic orientation, or, better yet, a praxis that sought to conjoin thought and action in the midst of radical antiblack realities and the fact of interlocking multiple oppressions in America. While she envisioned a universal human nature that was structured to move in a positive direction, Cooper also relentlessly advocated for radical changes in society. With the latter, she also emphasized the role of choice, access to education, and development of a will within individuals that would allow them to become fully human, their best selves. Note that in "What Are We Worth?" Cooper evokes the lofty ideals of American democracy and its aims in ensuring universal education and freedom for all in order to ask a rhetorical question: What kind of human, in actuality, does the nation produce with its actions, policies, and laws? Cooper eloquently responds that she is not so much impressed with the ideations put forth by the nation's institutions as keen to see the results of their actions: "I shall not try to test your logic but weigh your results—and that test is the *measure of the stature of the fullness of a man*."[51]

In certain essays Cooper encourages her readers to reenvision the human as an important finite realm (or perhaps as constituting a unique value-laden matrix) of potentiality within the unfolding of infinite cosmic possibilities.[52] This sets the stage for her development of a religious social ethic that centers on a critical awareness of racial oppression, as well as other forms. Cooper evokes a moral imagination linked to the historical figure of Jesus, whom she describes as follows: "Jesus believed in the infinite possibilities of an individual soul. His faith was . . . an optimistic vision of the human aptitude for endless expansion and perfectibility. This truth to him placed a sublime valuation on each individual sentiency. . . . He could not lay hold of this truth and allow his own benevolence to be narrowed and distorted by the trickeries of circumstance or the colorings of prejudice."[53] With this portrayal of Jesus, Cooper formulates a religious ethics intent on honoring the value of all humans and challenging ill-conceived racial distinctions. This image of Jesus's capacious humanistic ethics provides an antidote to the hypocrisy Cooper often identified with the dominant white Christian practices of her day. In "The Ethics of the Negro Question" (1902), Cooper asserts that the Negro "stands in the United States of America today as the passive and silent rebuke to the Nation's Christianity, the great gulf between its professions and its practices, furnishing the chief ethical element in its politics," pointing a finger at so-called ideals of civilization.[54] She makes another reference to this lack of Christian integrity in "The Negro in American Literature" (1892), asserting that the notion of caste based on color is "a scathing rebuke to weak-eyed Christians who cannot read the golden rule across the color line."[55] Rather than focus on narrow mor-

51 Cooper, *VFS*, 283.
52 Cooper, *VFS*, 244, 258, 297.
53 Cooper, *VFS*, 298.
54 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 206.
55 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 145.

MASTER

alistic precepts or abstract standards of virtue, Cooper asserts that "life must be something more than dilettante speculation. And religion (ought to be if it isn't) a great deal more than mere gratification of the instinct for worship linked with the straight-teaching of irreproachable credos. Religion must be *life made true*, and life is action, growth, development—begun now and ending never."[56]

Cooper participated in many social justice programs aimed at helping the marginalized secure the means to live humanly and with dignity. In her small pamphlet *The Social Settlement: What It Is and What It Does* (1913), Cooper reviews the history of the social settlement movement, arguing that its mission is driven by the conviction that all humans are "created with the divine right to a chance, and sets about hammering down some of those hideous handicaps which hamper whole sections of a community through the inequalities of environment, or the greed of the great."[57] This principle applied equally to the effects of structural inequality on young blacks. She asserts: "It is to the interest of every man, woman, and child in Washington that each child here, the least important in our reckoning to the most important, shall have the chance to develop into serviceable citizenship."[58]

In her 2007 study, May suggests that Cooper aimed to disrupt her contemporaries' confidence in naive or myopic notions of democracy, redefining them by exposing the role of exploitation and violence endemic to specific histories and hypotheses about democracies, both abroad and at home.[59] I agree with this assessment. In "Equality of Races and the Democratic Movement" (1925), Cooper ingeniously juxtaposes the principles of those proud "Christian" nations that "adore the principles of Democracy, of Equality, of fraternity, who, among their congeners practice the noblest philanthropies, statesmen, philosophers, literati, preachers, teachers of the finest, most exalted ideas" with their practices as soon as race enters the scenario.[60] The contrast is startling, she muses. In the same essay Cooper tackles the theory proposed by the French thinker Célestin Bouglé about the origin and growth of democracy. She is indignant when reading his assertion in *Les idées égalitaires* that equality manifests itself only in Western cultures, or more specifically in Anglo-Saxon cultures.[61] For Cooper, not only does his theory reinscribe the false notion of racial superiority, but it remains an empty abstraction. With her unique religious-ethical sensibilities, Cooper writes: "A better hypothesis it seems to me, would be the postulate that progress in the democratic sense is an inborn human endowment—a shadow mark of the Creator's image, or if you will an urge-cell, the universal and unmistakable hall-mark," which she later speaks of as a divine spark within every human.[62]

56 Cooper, *VFS*, 299.
57 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 217.
58 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 222.
59 May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist*, 99.
60 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 296.
61 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 291.
62 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 293.

CHI Rogers-Turner 0264 text.indd 205 6/19/20 4:36 PM

MASTER

Evoking this divine spark was yet another creative way for Cooper to reiterate her theme of a shared humanity, expressed variously as the interplay of one and all. For Cooper, in the final analysis, the concept of equality is not about special treatment for some; nor is it a set of lofty abstract standards that certain peoples or cultures claim as their invention. Equality is an enactment of a basic truth or principle regarding humanity's essential nature, and its manifestation should be evident in each and every human. As she writes, "The concept of Equality as it is the genuine product of the idea of the inherent value in the individual derived from the essential worth of Humanity must be before all else unquestionably of universal application. It operates not between such and such places,—such or such shape of the cranium, such and such theories of civilization."[63] For Cooper, equality is an ideal or objective value that is achieved under certain circumstances; it becomes manifest when those "with all the power and all the controls" stop to consider that the other (or the powerless) is "as good as I. Both human, both mortal, both entitled to a place in the sun."[64] When that important condition is met, Cooper asserts, then all earnest citizens embracing the vision of a shared yet variegated humanity can contribute their best efforts toward the common good. In the final analysis, then, equality for Cooper is something that societies achieve only when each individual is treated as a full, valuable human with her own uniqueness, so that all may offer their best gifts toward the shared goal of maintaining "harmony in variety."[65]

In a different essay, Cooper targets Western visionaries who imposed a distorted historical consciousness upon the current Western age as the supreme achievement of past eras, portraying Western (white) peoples as superior races with dominant cultures surpassing other ones. She cites Percival Lowell's remarks in *Soul of the Far East* (1888): "As for Far Orientals, they are not of those who will survive. . . . If these people continue in their old course, their early career is closed. Just as surely as morning passes into afternoon, so surely are these races of the Far East, if unchanged, destined to disappear before the advancing nations of the West."[66] In this quotation Cooper detected the same triumphalist and xenophobic spirit that was at work in America's justification of slavery and its treatment of African Americans. She thus responded in a spirited manner: "A spectacle to make the gods laugh, truly, to see the scion of an upstart race by one sweep of his generalizing pen consigning to annihilation one-third of the inhabitants of the globe—a people whose civilization was hoary headed before the partner elements that begot his race had advanced beyond nebulosity."[67]

Closer to home, within American culture, Cooper exhorts other black lead-

63 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 297.
64 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 297.
65 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 298.
66 Cooper, *VFS*, 52.
67 Cooper, *VFS*, 52.

CHI Rogers-Turner 0264 text.indd 206 6/19/20 4:36 PM

MASTER

ers not to erect new norms and classifications that denigrate certain "blacks" as less important than others. In an address to the affluent black male clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Washington, DC, in 1886, she denounces the isolationist ambitions of some black leaders who "exhaust their genius splitting hairs on aristocratic distinctions and thanking God they are not as others."[68] Cooper's point is clear: people of color already marginalized by the edifice of white supremacy should be aware of a politics of respectability in which the poor, underclass, and uneducated were deemed less invaluable. With her capacious view of humanity, Cooper urged each member to see the purported "other" as oneself. Pragmatically, this meant that in order for all community dwellers to flourish, the needs of everyone must be acknowledged and met. Consequently, Cooper exhorts the audience to help those who are most vulnerable to the vicissitudes of slavery and its aftermath—that is, the least part of the whole: poor southern black women. She believed that those who have material prosperity must continue a process of giving back—helping the least because they are an essential part of the whole.

For Cooper, another important mechanism for securing an emancipatory humanity is access to quality education for all. As Lloyd notes in his work, in response to a written question about her views of education, Cooper replied: "I have always stood for that Education that aims at the making of Men rather than the constructing of machines. If the Negro is a man then what is good for Man, in all its age-old and infinite varieties, is good for him. Why should he be cabined and cribbed with just this or that for his mental pabulum?"[69] Cooper exposed racist ideologies as cultural forms of violence that denied black growth, creativity, and potential productivity. In short, they were antithetical to black life's inherent desire to thrive:

In "The Status of Woman in America," Cooper emphasizes the necessity of developing black creativity and securing emancipation from stifling and stagnant forces that thwart self-actualization. In so doing Cooper speaks of the latent potential within black America, which she describes as "young and full of elasticity and hopefulness of youth. All its achievements are before it."[70] With this vision Cooper also associates "genius" with blackness, evoking a type of natural capacity that can be developed and advanced with proper nurturing. She cites the words of an anonymous European writer: "Except the Sclavonic, the Negro is the only original and distinctive genius which has yet to come to growth—and the feeling is to cherish and develop it."[71] Here Cooper indicates to her peers that the cultivation of black life and its vital forces cohered both with the natural order of things and with national and universal transformation. Moreover, Cooper's use of *genius* reflects her desire to celebrate the richness of black culture's vitality, creativity, and

68 Cooper, *VFS*, 33.
69 Lloyd, *Black Natural Law*, 164n15.
70 Cooper, *VFS*, 144.
71 Cooper, *VFS,* 144.

CHI Rogers-Turner 0264 text.indd 207 6/19/20 4:36 PM

MASTER

power at an important juncture in its history; indeed "the memory of past oppression and the fact of present attempted repression only serve to gather momentum for its irrepressible powers."[72] Cooper advocates a vital construction of African Americans' full, complex humanity that has been consistently embattled by the impoverished notion that black bodies are useful only as enslaved forms of menial labor in a culture dominated by the ideology of white supremacy.

In "On Education" (1930), a less-known essay, Cooper describes the role education plays in achieving cultural excellence as well as self-determination in black Americans, as it does in all humans: "The only sane education, therefore is that which conserves the very lowest stratum, the best and most economical is that which gives to each individual, according to his capacity, that training of 'head, hand and heart,' or, more literally, of mind, body and spirit which converts him into a beneficent force in the service of the world. This is the business of schools and this the true cause of the deep and vital interest of all the people in Educational Programs."[73] It is noteworthy that Cooper references the contributions of Aristotle and other theorists for their development of the liberal arts, which she argues have been universally accepted by teachers as a reasonable and proper basis for the education of humanity.[74] In keeping with her sense of equality for all, not just the elite few, Cooper also advocates for the education of domestic workers, which she argues will accelerate their professionalism and offer them opportunities to dignify their lives, as do other professions.[75] With such educational advocacy, Cooper was intent on creating a nation that enabled and inspired all of its members to become creative free agents with the power to influence the world in some way or to some degree.

3. Cooper's Vision for America

Cooper expresses her hope for an emancipated humanity in her conception of America as an unfolding cultural sphere where "regenerating" and "vitalizing" forces were at work—a "relational whole" advancing in growth and perfection for all its constituents.[76] She indicates this vision succinctly in "Has America a Race Problem; If So, How Can It Best Be Solved?," describing the potential for America to be the arena where the voice (or interest) of each and all would be heard and acknowledged.[77] In this dream, America is the scene where struggles "of political tyranny, of religious bigotry, of caste illiberality and class exclusiveness" are nec-

72 Cooper, *VFS,* 145.

73 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 250. The date for this piece is not exactly known. Lemert suggests it is a talk that Cooper probably delivered during her tenure as president of Frelinghuysen University, sometime during the mid-1930s.

74 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 252.

75 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 255.

76 Cooper, *VFS*, 11, 18, 21, 26, 29.

77 Cooper, *VFS*, 166.

MASTER

essary as the country transforms itself into a true democracy.[78] Additionally, for Cooper, America would enter the world stage as a nation where efforts to eradicate the monstrosity of "race prejudice" are visible, where people learn that "a race, as a family, may be true to itself without seeking to exterminate others," and where the "principles of true democracy are founded in universal reciprocity."[79]

At the same time, Cooper wisely notes that such ideals could materialize only once the unjust interlocking forms of oppression structuring American life were adequately addressed. In other words, into this idealized vision of America Cooper interjects a sobering realism. The nation that she and many others experienced on a daily was one dominated by violent ideologies: "America for Americans! This is the white man's country! The Chinese must go, shrieks the exclusionist. Exclude the Italians! Colonize the blacks in Mexico or deport them to Africa. Lynch, suppress, drive out, kill out! America for Americans!"[80] These sentiments ran counter to Cooper's comprehension of humanity's radical relationality. Her politics of one and all conveyed, in a profound sense, that belonging together in right relationship is a fundamental characteristic of human life—in short, it tells us something important about who we are and how we ought to live our lives. Cooper's politics of radical relationality was grounded in a general conception of humanity where each human constitutes part of an interacting, evolving, and genetically related community of beings bound together inseparably in space and time. Accordingly, with this communal ontology, Cooper's sense of right relationships encompassed genuine encounters between and among individuals, as well between diverse groups, in which each person's full humanity was consciously acknowledged and honored.[81]

In *Process and Faith*, social ethicist Douglas Sturm articulates an important insight that seems to be operative in Cooper's politics of relationality: "That we belong to one another is a way of affirming, in the language of philosophy, the principle of internal relations. According to that principle, what we are is made up of a host of entangling and ever-changing relationships, all of which leave their traces on our life from its beginning to its end. At the same time, we are, within the context of those relationships, creative agents, making a difference, great or small, in the lives of others in the immediate present and in the long-range future."[82] Cooper was convinced that those who genuinely understand that we belong to one another tend to act in distinctive ways, such as helping the most vulnerable and promoting justice for all, not just a few.[83]

78 Cooper, *VFS*, 168.
79 Cooper, *VFS*, 168.
80 Cooper, *VFS*, 163.
81 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 108, 204, 339.
82 Douglas Sturm, *Belonging Together: Faith and Politics in a Relational World* (Claremont, CA: P&F Press, 2003), 5.
83 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 205.

CHI Rogers-Turner 0264 text.indd 209 6/19/20 4:36 PM

MASTER

She resisted a politics of self-interest built primarily on a doctrine of individual rights in favor of a politics of participatory citizenship, where individual rights are empowered or enabled to experience fulfillment within an encompassing community of mutually interdependent citizens. As she noted at one point when making crucial connections between various forms of prejudice, "The philosophic mind sees that its own 'rights' are the rights of humanity."[84] For Cooper, a robust America thrived on this principle, not on the manufacturing of inequalities and social hierarchies. Specifically, if any part was held back, then the whole was diminished. With this general outlook, Cooper insisted that unless, and until, black women and men (and other marginalized groups) could prosper and participate fully in the rich unfolding of America, it would not actualize itself.

Achieving this goal, Cooper suggests, involves an interplay of forces and conflict in which diversity and inclusion become standard.[85] With this perspective, Cooper describes a type of participatory citizenship where each distinguishable part has a crucial role to play in furthering the interest of the whole. As she suggests, "Exclusiveness and selfishness in a family, in a community, or in a nation is suicidal to progress. Caste and prejudice mean immobility."[86] Cooper then suggests that in advancing and securing democratic ideals, one law holds fast: "In sociology as in the world of matter, *that equilibrium, not repression among conflicting forces is the condition of natural harmony, of permanent progress, and of universal freedom*."[87] With this appeal to natural processes, Cooper suggests the nation's growth will involve inevitable conflict as it evolves toward sustaining a rich, civilized culture of celebrating differences. Cooper views conflict as stimulating, progressive, and healthy when it is produced through "the co-existence of radically opposing or racially different elements" and where the general ethos is "the determination to live and let live."[88]

In "My Racial Philosophy," Cooper speaks much more realistically of the struggles and vulnerabilities that beset black female cultural workers seeking radical transformation of America, declaring, "The whips and stings of prejudice, whether of color or sex, find me neither too calloused to suffer, nor too ignorant to know what is due me.[89]" She also offers an astute understanding of the intricacies of cultural and physical violence in America, noting that she would be mistaken to "imagine that oppression goes only with color": "When I encounter brutality I need not always charge it to my race."[90] In calling attention to the everyday and institutionalized forms of violence in America, Cooper helps shed light

84 Cooper, *VFS*, 118.
85 Cooper, *VFS*, 159-60.
86 Cooper, *VFS*, 160.
87 Cooper, *VFS*, 160.
88 Cooper, *VFS*, 151, 149.
89 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 236.
90 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 236.

MASTER

on the entrenched white supremacist ideology and its various permutations (sexism, class bias, xenophobia, etc.) that permeated the country. White supremacy's dominance and the struggles against it stand in stark contrast to older, healthier forms of conflict Cooper observes in the natural world.[91]

Finally, Cooper notes that struggle is an integral part of the life of the activist who refuses to be seduced by lofty abstractions or paralyzed by resentment. She writes: "To me, life has meant a big opportunity and I am thankful that my work has always been the sort that beckoned me on, leaving me no room for blasé philosophizing and rebellion's resentment and with just enough opposition to give zest to the struggle."[92] As she observed, the cultural violence maintained by prejudices is "chargeable to the imperfections in the civilization . . . for which as a teacher and a trained thinker I take my share in responsibility."[93] With this awareness she advances her politics of one and all toward the emancipation of humanity, encouraging others to do so as well.

91 Cooper, *VFS*, 150.
92 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 237.
93 Cooper, *Voice of AJC*, 236–37.

CHI Rogers-Turner 0264 text.indd 211 6/19/20 4:36 PM