Making Hope and History 'Rhyme': Michele Moody-Adams's Mak-ing Space for Justice

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REVIEWS

Making Space for Justice begins with Frederick Douglass's famous Fourth of July oration. When Douglass addressed an Independence Day celebration in Rochester, NY, on July 5, 1852, he took consolation from the fact that the United States was still young enough to change course, abolish slavery, and give meaning to the promise of the Declaration of Independence. "Great streams," he observed, "are not easily turned from channels, worn deep in the course of ages."1 Michele Moody-Adams's remarkable book takes Douglass's words as an epigraph and an inspiration for a very different moment. Nearly 250 years after the Declaration and roughly 160 years after the abolition of slavery, Moody-Adams asks how social movements can transform patterns of racial, sexual, and economic domination that have cut deep grooves in contemporary life. She details the ways in which progressive movements have, in fact, shifted "great streams" of injustice, and demonstrates why philosophers and politi- cal theorists must reckon with the "engaged moral inquiry" these movements produce (79).

The argument unfolds across three sections in which Moody-Adams examines: 1) the moral and political work of social movements; 2) the impor- tance of remaking the public imagination through language and art; and 3) the necessity of sustaining hope in bleak times. Drawing her examples from movements that include nineteenth-century abolitionism, twentieth-century feminist and civil rights struggles, and the Black Lives Matter movement,2 Moody-Adams explores how organizers and leaders identify injustice, artic- ulate compelling alternatives, and attempt to realize them. She models an exceptionally capacious theoretical imagination, moving seamlessly across different historical periods and genres and developing insights from thinkers ranging from Alasdair MacIntyre to Antonio Gramsci to Judith Butler.

Contending that "there are reasons to doubt whether any conventional moral philosophy contains the resources to frame and help resolve the most urgent problems of compassionate concern" (94, emphasis in the orig- inal), Moody-Adams shifts attention from philosophers' search for "para- digm-shattering" ideas and focus on individuals to the specific claims and practices emerging from collective struggles against injustice. These struggles, Moody-

Adams shows, highlight three insights: 1) we all share a responsibility to learn how to see the evidence of undeserved suffering around us; 2) "social injustice is a failure of humane regard for persons"; and 3) facts alone are insuf- ficient to enable us to recognize such injustice (86). Social movements thus play a pivotal role in the moral and political education essential to democratic life insofar as they are able to move people.

Moody-Adams pursues these insights through a rich discussion of imag- ination's heterogeneous roles in democratic life. Following John Dewey and

W. E. B. Du Bois, she emphasizes the importance of art in reorienting percep- tion and dislodging deeply held assumptions about the justice of historical and contemporary political and economic structures. In addition to "aesthetic imagination of creative artists," she charts the role of "epistemic imagination" in bringing new concepts, like sexual harassment, to life as policy and law; the way that a masterpiece like Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" can foster "sympa- thetic imagination"; and the political openings created by the "narrative imag- ination" of writers (131). If readers are hesitant to embrace Du Bois's procla- mation that "all art is propaganda," as Moody-Adams does (153), she exposes the anti-democratic work of public art, like Confederate or colonialist statuary, and narratives that silence or distort progressive activists' visions. Indeed, the simple declaration that "Black Lives Matter" exemplifies how powerfully an imaginative use of language can activate new political movements and why that power is feared by the guardians of an unjust status quo.

Even successful social movements produce disappointment, impasse, or repressive reaction, of course. Moody-Adams takes up this challenge by advancing the democratic necessity of hope as, in Baruch Spinoza's words, "an inconstant joy arising from the image of something in the future or in the past about whose outcome we are in doubt" (234). The language of "inconstant joy" speaks to the experience of participating in and learning from struggles for a freer world; and it crystallizes Moody-Adams's point about critique's entanglement with affective, aesthetic, and embodied experience. Political hope, Moody-Adams demonstrates, is neither "optimism," as Vaclav Havel observes (236), nor wishing (238). Rather, it is a way of making sense of the world that both counters the fear attending any effort to change one's society, and enables the cultivation of "civic grace," a willingness to engage opponents as well as allies without resentment.

One of the many achievements of Making Space for Justice is its robust defense of "universal citizenship." Challenging Iris Marion Young's criticisms of this ideal, Moody-Adams contends that it has been a central commitment of "nearly all of the most influential social movements" (23). That this is not a narrow conception, one that prioritizes national membership, is borne out by Moody-Adams's beautiful rendering of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s commitment to "conscientious citizenship" as "a way of living that seeks to give substance to the idea that justice is indivisible."3 Yet there is a tension, both in the book's argument and among progressive social movements, between democratic visions focused on redeeming the nation and calling for critical patriotism, on the one

hand, and those insisting that "universal citizenship" is, first and foremost, a matter of transnational solidarity with the oppressed, on the other. We see this in recent debates about reparations and in the gap between Richard Rorty's reading of James Baldwin in Achieving Our Country (discussed on 72ff), and Baldwin's own appraisal of the US, especially later in his career. Another chapter on the space of justice—perhaps taking up questions of migration and immigration—would be a welcome extension of the book, as it would enable readers to wrestle with difficult questions about whether and how American citizenship can be reconceived in universal terms.

Making Space for Justice offers an acute diagnosis of our time, issuing a vital challenge to philosophers and political theorists to acknowledge what progressive social critics have long understood: that social movements defy both the reductivism of political scientists who focus primarily on interests, and the narrowness of philosophers whose conception of justice relies on abstract formulations of public reason. Moving seamlessly from history to art to theory, Michele Moody-Adams reminds readers that we are the inheritors of struggles we cannot afford to overlook or take for granted. Only by approaching social movements as critical sites of inquiry, she shows, can we envision a future in which "hope and history rhyme" (253, 265).4

NOTES

1. https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/douglass_july_4_speech.pdf
2. See also Deva Woodly's study of the "radical Black feminist pragmatism" of the Movement for Black Lives as a contribution to democratic thought. Deva R. Woodly, Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).
3. Michele Moody-Adams, "The Path of Conscientious Citizenship," in To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr., ed. Tommie Shelby and Brandon M. Terry (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2018), 270.
4. The language comes from the chorus in Seamus Heaney's The Cure at Troy, a tribute to Nelson Mandela after his release from imprisonment on Robben Island.

Review of V.W. Lloyd, Black Dignity: The Struggle Against Domina- tion

Michele Moody-Adams, Columbia University

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Vincent W. Lloyd's Black Dignity: The Struggle Against Domination (2022)

explores the role that the concept of dignity has played in the centuries-long struggles of African-descended people against systems of racial domination. The book builds upon a set of concerns about the "language of dignity" that Lloyd began exploring in 2018, when he published an article entitled simply "Black Dignity" in the journal Crosscurrents. Lloyd's 2022 book seeks to extend the project begun in that article in order to offer a comprehensive—and he believes inspiring—picture of the state of Black political thought and action in the twenty-first century.