Womanist and Black Feminist Responses to Tyler Perry's Productions

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on popular cultural representation and religious life. These were helpful in developing the ideas in the chapter that I wrote for this anthology on class and social mobility in Tyler Perry's *Madea's Family Reunion*.

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Introduction

The Editors (Manigault-Bryant, Lomax, and Duncan)

Picture yourself sitting in a theater, waiting in anticipation for the lights to dim, the curtains to part, the actors to appear, and a story line to unfold. Imagine the excitement of witnessing new expressions of black cultural life and production, and more significantly, the anticipation of the unfolding narrative being presented as *your* story. Visualize sitting in that same theater now bursting with uncontrollable laughter. Now, envision your amusement disoriented by discontent, for your complex individuality has not only been typecast in front of a backdrop of familiar, fictitious, frozen themes, but it has also been eclipsed by a massive cultural invention. What you just witnessed is not an accurate depiction of you, or anyone you have ever met. Yet, there is something strangely familiar and compelling about it. And this is just the opening scene. Oddly you desire more, so you begin plotting when you might be entertained once more—even if it means disentangling your identity from the creative energies of the master showman . . . again.

At its simplest, this anthology is an interdisciplinary, multivocal, womanist/black feminist response to the burning conundrum at the center of Tyler Perry productions: Is Perry's work life-giving or death-dealing to black women and girls? Over the last decade, Perry's star has risen with unprecedented speed and with profits previously unheard of for any black filmmaker. The success of his productions—*Diary of a Mad Black Woman; Madea's Family Reunion; Daddy's Little Girls; Why Did I Get Married*; *Meet the Browns*; *The Family That Preys*; *Madea Goes to Jail; I Can Do Bad All by Myself*; *Why Did I Get Married Too*; *For Colored Girls; House of Payne; Madea's Big Happy Family*; *For Better or Worse; Good Deeds; Madea's Witness Protection*; and *Temptation: Confessions of a Marriage Counselor*—positions Perry as a significant site of cultural expression worthy of critical reflection and inquiry. He is among the highest paid in Hollywood. From May 2010 to May 2011 Perry earned

$130 million, and surpassed filmmakers Jerry Bruckheimer and Steven Spielberg, who maintained second and third place, respectively. His secret weapon? Representations of North American black women's interior lives and the historic black church.

Going to a Perry production can be like going to church. His works often include a remixed pop cultural version of the preacher, the music, and some sort of frenzy.[1] In the June 2013 edition of *Essence Magazine*, Oprah Winfrey referred to Perry's productions as the "new revival...a community gathering...for inspiration, for spiritual healing, for coming together in a way that unifies people the way revivals used to." Black churchwomen flock to Perry's productions in droves because their interests, including the religious, are piqued in a way that is unparalleled. Perry's explicitly Christian films about black women and their relationships with love interests, families, and faith communities situate him as the ultimate ministerial figure. He is not only a multimedia mastermind, he is a family therapist, love doctor, and America's pop cultural preacher all in one. The silver screen, small screen, and stage are his pulpit. We, the audience, are the congregation.

Perry's productions have a "feel good" appeal. They provide comfort and hope to millions of viewers who eagerly invest billions of dollars in his products across the globe. His genius for drawing viewers in with perfect tragicomic timing, familiar cultural catchphrases, seductive epics of love and triumph, covetable moments of individual and communal moral victory, and nostalgic representations of black church rhythms and expressions, will likely guarantee him a prominent position in the canon of American popular culture for years to come. To be sure, there is something special about Perry. Yet, while Perry's productions are certain to keep his audiences coming back for more, they leave others scratching their heads.

Perry, arguably the premier black American producer, director, and playwright of the twenty-first century, wields a considerable amount of power and influence over black cultural production and representation. And, despite having predominantly black casts and story lines, Perry's star power and media success have not been restricted to solely black audiences. His films are neither a repeat of 1970s Blaxploitation films, which were arguably ushered in by Melvin Van Peeble's 1971 film, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*,[2] nor are they of the same ilk as Oscar Micheaux's (1884–1951) early twentieth-century race films.[3] Perry's elaborate story lines display a curious crossover appeal. His films and television shows including *The Family that Preys*, *Madea's Witness Protection*, *Temptation: Confessions of a Marriage Counselor*, and "The Haves and the Have Nots," include white actors and actresses and explicitly serve this function.

Perry's recent collaboration with Winfrey and her Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN) highlights not only a match made in capitalistic heaven, but an unequivocal quest for Winfrey's white and upper middle-class audience. Winfrey, on the other hand, gains access to Perry's lucrative black female audience, thus retrieving her long-awaited "ghetto pass" from hip-hop artist 50 Cent and her symbolic breast from the mercurial white female audience she has nurtured over the years. However, as bell hooks once argued, racial stereotypes, especially those seductively marketed as authentic expressions of blackness, also have crossover appeal and appeal to the widest possible audience is what seems to make Perry tick. A Louisiana native, born in 1969, Perry's artistic gumbo blends black church imagery and colorful story lines with an emphasis on black women, their perceived problems, and redemptive needs as its roux. These elements offer up a delectable palette of raced, gendered, and religious presentations that celebrate black life in many instances, while problematizing black experience in others.

His *re*-presentations of black women and black womanhood could be conceived of as curious at best, and sexist, patriarchal, misogynistic, homophobic, and racist at worst. The latter is sure to raise the age-old question: How can one who is racialized be racist? We are well aware that many readers will disagree with our assertions regarding Perry's *re*-presentations of black womanhood.[4] We are not suggesting nor do we believe that Perry consciously promotes racial or other stereotypes in his depictions of black womanhood in his media corpus. Such a knee-jerk reaction to Perry's works would miss the far more complex array of images, social and cultural scripts, and understandings that are demanded of audiences in their interactions with the works.

We are proposing, instead, that a critical engagement with Perry's representational practices with regard to black womanhood reveals a vulnerability to, whether intentional or not, long-standing racist, sexist, and other harmful ideas. Specifically, Perry's productions reveal a dependency on pervasive and injurious black female caricatures that are disconnected from black women and girls' complex individual, social, cultural, economic, political, and historical realities. These realities reveal how black women and girls are impacted by structural and individual acts of violence, which include racism, sexism, classism, and more. Erasure of these realities *re*-presents black women and girls in nonhumanizing ways. Notwithstanding our appreciation for Perry's overall cultural contributions, part of our apprehension around his productions has to do with the very real ways that *re*-presentations of race and gender symbolically and materially affect black women globally. To put it another way, racial stereotypes lead to more than allusive ideas of racial hierarchy. History reveals that racial stereotypes can lead to real material fury (e.g.,

lynching or rape), and when undergirded by religion can lead to death (e.g., America's war on terrorism). North American black women have experienced both over time.

Perry's productions are ubiquitous. And while some might suggest that his works are solely for entertainment, we propose that they manufacture a voyeuristic visual culture that harmfully blurs the lines between reality, fantasy, and repulsion. This can potentially lead to increased levels of violence against black women and girls—whether psychological, physical, sexual, or emotional. Moreover, the constant caricaturing of black female identities in his productions enables an unnerving casualness with which violence is enacted and stories of violence are presented and circulated.[5] This can lead to a sense of powerlessness on an ontological level. An example of this process is the film *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*. Though the authors in this volume analyze a range of Perry's productions, particular attention is given to *Diary*. Not only is it Perry's first film, it provides the template for his theological and gendered reading of black women's experiences, and a prototype for black womanhood in his later works.

The mass-production and strategic marketing of the film as authentic blackness or what bell hooks calls "fictive ethnography," and the desire to see black women on film telling *their* stories, produces a context for consciously and unconsciously reading, misreading, and thus mistreating black women and girls in real life. *Diary's* story line constructs both Helen and black women and girls as deserving of various types of violence as opposed to victims of violence worthy of respect, civility, protection, and due process. The underpinning of religious messages in this film and Perry's other productions require that black women get over their past by forgiving and forgetting, and that they pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and move ahead, while simultaneously negating abuser or structural accountability. These messages place black women and girls in a heightened state and threat of violence.

Of course, humans are not always to themselves who they are to the world, and individuals and collectives create and utilize critical consciousnesses that appropriate and resist cultural messages. Nevertheless, pervasive sociocultural perceptions of group identities create a context that enables normalized maltreatment. The eerie similarities between the opening scene of *Diary* where Helen is violently dragged out of her house by her cheating husband and pervasive YouTube videos of black women and girls getting beat down in front of an unsympathetic audience are telling. The callousness with which these videos are both encapsulated and disseminated highlights a culture of indifference toward violence against black women and girls. Simultaneously, this captured imagery draws attention to the ways in which movies make culture and vice versa,

and how cultural producers, whether via cinema, theater, television, the Internet, or written texts, have the power to construct meanings that are either oppressive or liberative—and sometimes both.

It is about time for other narratives to be told (not "the" story, but other stories). We have watched Perry and others tell black women's stories. And, we have listened to the criticisms of black male cultural workers and public intellectuals. We appreciate some of these efforts. However, it is our turn as black women and allying scholars to offer our unique and individual analyses on the ways that *we* experience Perry's productions and *re*-presentations. Our aim is not to take anything away from those in Perry's thriving audience or to suggest homogeneity among supporters or critics.

With regard to Perry's supporters, we are well aware of not only individual differences and criticisms among moviegoers, but also the ongoing chasm between academics and the arts.[6] Our intention is to add other kinds of voices and concerns to the multiple, ongoing public and private choruses. This includes, but is not limited to, digital and academic discourses on Perry specifically and black popular culture and its cross-mediations of race, gender, class, sexuality, and religion more broadly. These new voices also situate black popular culture as a significant site of black religious expression; further the discussion on the significance of religion and spirituality for black women; re-present black women who love Perry's productions as complex intersubjectivities with critical consciousnesses; and lay bare the numerous ways that stereotypes reproduced and exchanged between the black church and black popular culture have real and harmful effects for black women.

Our goal is to produce a critical interdisciplinary text that is formative to numerous budding public and academic discourses, courses, panels, and articles on Perry's productions. Our intention is neither to uncritically memorialize nor feverishly demonize Perry, his works, or his audience. To be sure, our interest in this work emerges from our very own pew in Perry's global congregation. Yet, contrary to popular belief, even pew members express righteous discontentment from time to time. Our hope is to bring the parts of Perry's works that reflect troubling aspects of sexism, paternalism, misogyny, homophobia, and what could be perceived as racism, to the forefront, even as we laud his cultural value and incontestable successes. Though our criticisms may challenge or even upset some of our readers, it is the responsibility of the cultural worker to offer critical perspectives on cultural production, including Perry's work.

When conceptualizing this anthology we thought, "Who would be better suited to provide a critique of the signs, symbols, significations, and representations in Perry's productions than womanist and black feminist scholars and allies?" Perry's productions disclose an intricate

relationship between black female *re*-presentations, the black church, and complicated ideas of love and justice. The latter of which is typically sublimated into moralist sermonettes on piety, politics of respectability and second-class citizenship, as opposed to anything resembling true equality, individual thriving, and human agency. Each render black women and girls as complex subjects having some control over their personal identity formation and life choices, even if somewhat mediated by context.

Yet however harmful Perry's *re*-presentations of black womanhood may be, his depictions often reflect inconsistencies and contradictions within the black church. This observation begs the questions: Is Perry a master showman or a glorified stagehand within a broader symbolic black church production? And, is Madea—Perry's gun-toting grandmother who is as quick to serve up proverbial wisdom as she is to instruct female partners how to seek vengeance on the men who mistreat them—a mediated conglomerate of historical black female tropes, or an insightful religious critic with an axe to grind with the historical black church? Who can better critically engage these kinds of complexities than womanist, black feminist and allying scholars?[7]

There is a long history between womanist scholars in religion and black feminists. In her text *Feminism Is for Everybody*, bell hooks explains that feminism is a theoretical lens and a collective political movement aimed at ending sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. That is, feminism is a simultaneous and ongoing intellectual and social activist project geared toward socioeconomic-political change. Black feminist critical discourse and activism is rooted in the suffrage and resistance works of those like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and countless others (also known as the "first wave" of black feminism), as well as 1960s and 70s black power, civil rights, and women's rights social movements.

Second-wave black feminists like the Combahee River Collective (1974), Hortense Spillers, Patricia Hill-Collins, Angela Davis, and others took Truth's lead in shaking up and expanding women's fight against sexist oppression to include intersectional politics such as race, sex, class, gender, and sexuality, which position diasporic women differently and thus enables different kinds of experiences. In addition, these scholar activists and other cultural workers like Michele Wallace, bell hooks, and Jacqueline Bobo explored how racist, sexist and classist historical, cultural and systemic representations such as mammy and jezebel continued to deeply affect black women's lives.

Womanist thought in religion emerged as a prophetic voice in the late 1980s, alongside black liberation theology and white feminist theology, both of which mirrored the sexism and racism of earlier

abolitionist, suffrage, black power, civil rights, and women's rights movements. Womanist scholars in religion such as Katie G. Cannon, Jacquelyn Grant, and Delores Williams critiqued both the black liberationist and white feminist theological project for its essentialist claims on black and women's experiences. The unique positionality of womanist criticism in religion lies in the synchronous urgency placed on intersectional politics, which center black women's experiences, and its significant position as a critical discourse between black spirituality, namely the black church, academia, and world.

Womanist thought in religion has errantly been confused with womanism inaugurated by black diasporic women resistant of the terminology "feminist" in the late 1970s and early 80s, as identified in the works of Alice Walker (*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*),[8] Patricia Hill Collins, ("The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought"),[9] Clenora Hudson-Weems (*Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*),[10] and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi ("Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English").[11] Though Walker is credited with coining the term, and womanism is sometimes used interchangeably with black feminism, womanism as a diverse yet distinctive critical gaze from womanist thought in religion has evolved into a range of theories and movements. Womanism, African womanism, Africana womanism, womanist thought in religion, and black feminism share several similarities but are ultimately dynamic and distinct. Given our interest in black religion and black popular culture in general, and black female and black church re-presentations in Tyler Perry productions more specifically, this volume places specific emphasis on the analyses of black feminists and womanist scholars in religion (hereafter, "womanists").

Womanists, black feminists, and allying scholars share a range of concerns regarding the liberation of black women, girls, and communities: the dynamism and potential dangers of black religiosity for black peoples; the constant appeal to sexist, racist, classist, and imperialist structures that limit freedom, justice, and democracy; the ongoing threat of structural and individual violence; the recurrent deployment of mythology in cultural production as a means to identity construction and meaning making when it comes to black and brown people; the frequent and impending assaults on black female aesthetics as somehow unappealing and subpar; and the unceasing perils of white supremacist praxis and ideals with regards to gender, race, and class in general.

While there are numerous similarities between womanists and black feminists, their foci and methodological approaches differ. Womanist theologians, ethicists, and biblical scholars are particularly insightful

with regard to Perry's catering to black churchwomen. They are by far the most prominently placed in discussions on black women and the Christian tradition. Their analyses on Perry's theology, deployment of the black church and appeal to black Christian women are essential to critically examining and interpreting his cultural force. Conversely, black feminists and allying cultural critics offer vital interpretive gazes necessary for evaluating, taking apart, and rethinking Perry's representational strategies—the discursive and nondiscursive—and for grasping, deconstructing, and re-appropriating his production of racial, gendered and class meanings.

Despite distinctions, there are more gray areas between womanists and black feminists than black and white. To this end, we see the contributors in this volume as participating in a commensurate and complementary call and response, not a debate. Womanists and black feminists find power in collective movement, thinking, writing, and doing. Perry's cultural force requires a collective, nuanced, and multipositioned black feminist/womanist response, one that is grounded in the historical tradition of black women resisting and "clapping back" at individual, systemic, institutional, and structural forces that continue to impede black women's humanity, and to include the moments and relations we ourselves are complicit.

As editors, we are intentionally interested in bringing a variety of theoretical, methodological, and aesthetic perspectives to bear on Perry's work. Because his productions cross themes of interest to multiple and diverse fields of study, this text draws from an amalgamation of black scholars whose expertise includes literary criticism, film studies, anthropology, cultural studies, theological studies, ethics, performance studies, and religion. In addition, it intentionally incorporates the contributions of scholars who represent multiple generations of scholarship as well as wide-ranging perspectives of womanist and black feminist thought. In so doing, the text is as diverse in its content regarding Perry's body of work as it is in drawing from scholars who represent varied professional and methodological perspectives.

We see this critical and multilayered engagement with Tyler Perry's productions and black women's lives as a fruitful and necessary exchange and a critical intervention. Our hope is that this text gets as much mileage in coffee houses, classrooms, social media spaces, conference halls, and living rooms as Tyler Perry's productions. Still, the significance of this volume lies in not only its various womanist and feminist gazes, but also its emphasis on the "religious." Even as new scholarship engages Perry's productions,[12] no work, to our knowledge, has comprehensively attended to the religiosity of his films, plays, and television shows. An integration of religious, pop cultural, gendered, and racial criticism is

required for reading Perry's productions and understanding his appeal more efficiently. Given the broad scope of this task and Perry's body of work, we asked authors to think carefully and critically about his productions across various media, to include Perry's plays, films, and music (since Perry has, on occasion, composed music for his films). Authors were especially asked to integrate their analysis with a consideration of religion and spirituality in Perry's works.

The result is a selection of chapters that examines the specifically "Christian" character of Perry's films. This includes the use of biblical scripture as an integral part of dialogue and narrative development in films such as *Madea's Family Reunion*. It also involves an examination of Perry's incorporation of black church scenes, which provide a moral catharsis for antagonists and protagonists to resolve their issues through repeated themes of forgiveness, redemption and surrender. Authors also specifically examined how Perry's work addresses issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and representation in black American familial and social contexts. What follows is a collection of womanist, black feminist, and allying chapters, covering topics such as spirituality, protest, love, community, justice, performance, violence, sexuality, and homoeroticism, that aim to unravel the mythologies present in Perry's work, reveal his politics of *re*-presentation, and perhaps most importantly, speak our own truths.

Manuscript Organization

We have decided, as editors, to organize this examination of Tyler Perry's productions by dividing the anthology into five parts each of which has two to four supporting chapters. This organization facilitates a serious exploration. In *Part I*, we provide a complete list of Tyler Perry's plays, films, and television series, and brief plot summaries of the respective films engaged in the volume. Perry's productions average three to four *new* films, television series, and plays annually, which precludes our ability to respond to them all. The cross-section engaged in this book however, represents approximately 85 percent of his productions, specifically those produced between 2000 and 2012. Although this is not an exhaustive reading of Perry's work, it is a comprehensive critical reading of the shared themes and tropes overwhelmingly representative of his repertoire.

The subsequent sections explicitly respond to two framing questions: (1) What is religious about Perry's works? and (2) How do Perry's representations of black religion and popular culture reflect a dependency upon historical notions of black womanhood? In *Part II: Theology,*

Spirituality, and Black Popular Religious Imaginations, we provide three chapters that deconstruct what is specifically "religious" or "theological" about Perry's movies and plays and examine his deployment of Christianity as a moralizing and regulating tool for black female identities. In chapter 1, Nyasha Junior uses select scriptures throughout the New Testament to demonstrate how Perry's films reflect and reinforce "Bible-based" notions of the African American Christian family, and in chapter 2, Cheryl Kirk-Duggan uses *Madea's Family Reunion* and *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* to construct a womanist theological anthropology that examines how black women use protest, love, and "relationality" to ensure wholeness. Lisa Allen discloses the critical role that gospel music plays within all of Perry's productions and analyzes what the music's message conveys to its viewers in chapter 3, and in chapter 4, Andrea C. White presents Perry's systematic theology and expounds upon the broad theological implications of his work.

In *Part III: Theorizing Intersecting Identities and (Re) Envisioning Black Womanhood*, the contributors examine Perry's conceptions of gender, race, and class, identify the historical tropes of black womanhood Perry employs, and interpret how these themes impact viewer interpretations. They further inquire how these images can be positively re-appropriated by black women, if at all. In chapter 5, Yolande Tomlinson uses *Daddy's Little Girls* and *Meet the Browns* to analyze Perry's overarching vision of community, racial justice, and gender relations. Carol B. Duncan explores representations of class and social mobility and their relationship to marriage as ritual practice and social and economic arrangement in Tyler Perry's *Madea's Family Reunion* in chapter 6. In chapter 7, Tamura A. Lomax examines the "Black Bitch" trope, and utilizes a cross-section of Perry's films to reveal how as Perry's story lines resonate deeply with black Christian women and their experiences, they also present a potentially harmful range of cultural codes. In the final contribution to the section, Whitney Peoples engages the question of how Perry's productions appropriate conceptions of African American womanhood in chapter 8, where she considers Perry's treatment of African American women both as subject and audience.

Part IV: The Politics of Performance is the portion of the text devoted to analysis of Perry's performance techniques, most notably drag, but also to the ways Perry incorporates themes such as homoeroticism, gangsterism, and hypersexualism to communicate specific ideas about black masculinity, femininity, and sexuality. In chapter 9, LeRhonda S. Manigault-Bryant engages two popular responses to Perry's use of drag performance as presented in animated series to demonstrate how Perry challenges our conceptions of "masculine" and "feminine" while at the same time proffering troubling implications for how the black female

body is interpreted by viewers. In chapter 10, Joy James reads Perry's character Madea through the lens of the Greek tragedy *Medea* to reposition misogynist presentations of black women, and in so doing offers a "cautionary tale" about Perry's formulations of violence, criminality, and maternal love.

In the final section of the book, *Part V: Black Women as Religio-Cultural Capital*, the contributors engage the ways that Perry's use of black female representations have led to lucrative financial success. In chapter 11, Terrion Williamson addresses how Perry's productions have lured female viewers in with a familiar story of the "good Christian girl" while at the same time espousing a conservative theology of sexuality and racial uplift—a feature that has resulted in Perry's creation of a genre she calls "churchploitation" films. In chapter 12, Robert Patterson employs womanist theological paradigms, considers the limitations of Perry's representations of black religion and gender, and situates that conversation within a broader discourse of the commercialization of black religious culture—considering at whose expense this trend is occurring—black women's—and why we should be concerned about the ethics of this matter. In chapter 13, Brittney Cooper concludes *Part V* with a critical engagement of Perry's films from the perspective as a spectator, black feminist academician, and a theologically liberal Christian from an evangelical background. To Cooper, Perry's use of Christianity to emotionally manipulate and financially exploit black women cannot be abstracted from the ways that black women's interpretive communities make productive and useful meanings of Perry's cultural productions.

For far too long, black women and girls' identities have been captured in cultural scripts with predetermined outcomes. These scripts, whether discursive, oral, or visual, notoriously screen in reductive and totalizing historical significations on race and gender while screening out our individual and collective nuances. This sort of "splitting," the process of foregrounding, exaggerating, and essentializing "difference" over and against individual and collective differences, is a very harmful framing device. By distinguishing what is supposedly "normal" from what is supposedly "abnormal" and thus what is "acceptable" from what is "unacceptable," "splitting" places black women and girls within a murky set of cultural representations, theories, and meanings that have over time produced a sea of reductive "facts" and artifacts, which include but are not limited to those reproduced and circulated in Perry's productions. This text aims to dismantle this kind of cultural asphyxiation.

Womanist and black feminist thought offers us the necessary concepts, language, and strategies for grasping Perry's dynamic appeal as well as for disrupting the ground upon which his ideas of black woman and girlhood are reproduced and circulated. An overarching anxiety that

sparked the initial idea to create this volume was characterized by a concern with how Madea, one of the most pervasive and popular characters in contemporary popular American film, came to be a black woman played by a Bible- and gun-toting black man in drag. The nuances here are many. Drag is a very powerful performative tool that dates back centuries. Michele Wallace suggests that drag performances enable outlandish self-effacing ridicule on one hand and a sense of freedom on the other. Madea embodies both. She also provides an alternative narrative for black women to move from survivalist modes to triumph, and a critical eye toward the black church. Madea reflects a complexity in which many black women can relate—a complexity often subdued by the politics of respectability in black churches. However, Madea's representation is simultaneously full of stereotypes often undergirded by the black church.

That Madea is performed in drag raises numerous questions about the place of black womens' anger, outlandishness, honesty, criticism, authority, and complexities in the American imagination. Is Madea so beloved because she is really a man? What if she was a self-identified woman? We believe this volume will start new conversations and dialogues among readers, including students and members of film going publics, inside and outside of academic and seminarian contexts. Given Perry's productivity and growing prominence, his work will be in the canon of American popular culture for years to come. It is our hope that whether one is interested in film studies, religion, womanist/black feminist thought, or just generally curious about how scholars might respond to Tyler Perry, that anyone who picks up this anthology will experience and interpret Perry's productions as a comprehensive and complex body of work.

Notes

1. W. E. B. Du Bois noted that "three things characterize this religion of the slave—the Preacher, the Music and the Frenzy" in *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co.; [Cambridge]: University Press John Wilson and Son, Cambridge, 1903).
2. Directed by Melvin Van Peebles (Los Angeles, CA: Yeah Films, 1971).
3. "Race films" were a genre of popular film in the United States made during the first half of the twentieth century that featured all black casts and story lines. These films were produced for a black audience.
4. It is because of the push and pull, the love-hate relationship that many viewers have with Perry's productions that we have notably dedicated this book to the "fans and the stans." The concept fan is indicative of someone who respects, appreciates, and is in favorable support—a fanatic even—of someone or something, yet that support is not given blindly nor without constructive critique. Though similar, the term stan, made famous by the rapper Eminem, is indicative of an overzealous celebrity fan for whom there is no room for critique. Stans, or "haters" will often thwart the efforts of fans who are willing to engage a celebrity in a more comprehensive manner.
5. Saidiya Hartman explores this idea with regard to North American enslaved black women in her text *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
6. This is not the only chasm at work. We edited this volume fully aware of the sometimes silent and often not so silent schism between religious and cultural studies. The ongoing question, "What is scholarship?" is not lost on us. For decades there has been a hierarchy of disciplines. The study of religion has often been placed on the underside of the discourse, quite often misrepresented as less rigorous. We hope that this volume helps to counter this myth among many others.
7. Allying scholars may or may not personally identify as womanist or black feminist. The import of their work lies not in naming but in politics.
8. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1983.
9. *Signs* Vol. 14, No. 4 (Summer 1989): 745–773.
10. Michigan: Bedford, 1993.
11. *Signs* Vol. 11, No. 1 (Autumn 1985): 63–80.
12. See *Interpreting Tyler Perry: Perspectives on Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality*, edited by Jamel Santa Cruze Bell and Ronald Jackson, II (New York: Routledge, 2013).