



Stepping Back, Looking Outward: Situating Transgender Activism and Transgender Studies — Kris Hayashi, Matt Richardson, and Susan Stryker Frame the Movement

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The objective of *Sexuality Research & Social Policy's* two special issues titled *The State We're In: Locations of Coercion and Resistance in Trans Policy* is to highlight research that is of immediate, practical value to transgender rights advocates and policy reformers. Dean Spade and I, the guest editors of these special issues, believe that the articles we have included accomplish that goal very well. As a whole, these pieces examine a wide range of laws, rules, and practices that constitute the state's efforts to maintain and reinforce gender norms, as well as the effects of those efforts and the particular strategies advocates have deployed for resisting them. For the most part, these articles are very much located in the urgency of the present moment, when the consequences for many of those whose gender identity or gender expression do not fit with the conventions of the gender binary can be severe.

With this roundtable, however, we step back and consider the broader outlines of the activism—usually branded in LGBT communities and, increasingly, in the popular press as the transgender rights movement—that has challenged not only the state's enforcement of the gender binary but also its power to do so. My coeditor and I were interested in eliciting a dialogue that contemplated this movement relationally: How does this movement articulate with other movements for social justice, such as antiracist work? Can it be framed in relation to analogous struggles for gender self-determination in locations outside the United States without merely exporting the Western notion of *transgender*? Have the notions that gender is also racialized, that racial categories are also enforced through gender norms, influenced the policy

goals of the movement and, if so, how? How might the relationship between the movement's past, its present, and its future be understood?

Finally, we wanted to take this opportunity to reflect on the relation between the newly emerging academic field of transgender studies and its central object of study—the challenges by gender-nonconforming people to traditional gender normativities. We thought it especially appropriate to consider this question here because the publication of the research presented in these two special issues of *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* marks a significant moment in the development of transgender studies. The last decade has witnessed the materialization of this interdisciplinary field with conferences, special issues of journals, and the publication of *The Transgender Studies Reader* (Stryker & Whittle, 2006) and *Transgender Rights* (Currah, Juang, & Minter, 2006). Despite these inroads, the place of transgender studies, especially work outside of the humanities that does not construct trans subjects as pathological, remains tenuous in academia.

Indeed, one very significant facet of empirically grounded transgender studies, as is evident from the biographical statements of the authors of articles in these two special issues, is the site of its production. None of the articles in these two issues were produced by academics in tenure track positions at colleges or universities. Instead, some of the research we have featured has been produced by activists and advocates in the trenches who find time to write after they have put in their 40-plus hours of work every week. Other articles are by researchers temporarily based in grant-funded think tanks, by

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postdoctoral fellows, and by graduate students who have chosen dissertation research of real import to the communities they are studying but whose work is only marginally supported by the research institutions where they are working. The situation is especially vexing for transgender-identified researchers. As Susan Stryker (2007) explained in a recent essay, under what she called the *epistemological regime* that dominates the academy, the bodily situatedness of knowing is divorced from the status of formally legitimated objective knowledge; experiential knowledge of the effects of one's own antinormative bodily difference on the production and reception of what one knows consequently becomes delegitimated as merely subjective. (p. 154)

As a result, certain kinds of transgender expertise—including some that might be especially vital for students to see reflected in the faculty—have a hard time gaining a foothold in academic knowledge production.

Nonetheless, the field is destined to grow. We hope that growth will be in locations that provide more permanent institutional support; even without that support, however, transgender studies practitioners will continue to carve out spaces for themselves to research and write about transgender communities. The configuration of the relationship between transgender studies and transgender activism, then, is of central concern. How immediately responsive should this academic area of inquiry be to the needs of those located in the midst of activists' struggles? Who should frame the research questions? What can be learned from the relationship between other areas—such as ethnic studies and disability studies—that have sprung largely from social movements?

We chose three provocative activist-thinkers who have histories as activists and as knowledge producers to share their views on these questions. Let me introduce them.

For 7 years, Kris Hayashi was part of Youth United for Community Action (YUCA), an organization in California led by young people of color organizing for justice. As YUCA's executive director, Kris managed two offices and a budget of over half a million dollars. Kris has been active in various social justice organizing campaigns for more than 10 years and has served as executive director for the Audre Lorde Project (ALP) for 4 years. Kris is one of a small number of trans and gender-nonconforming people of color who are executive directors of organizations serving lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals. ALP provides a center for community organizing for lesbian, gay, bisexual, two spirit, and transgender people of color in the New York City area. Through

mobilization, education, and capacity-building, ALP works for community wellness, as well as progressive social and economic justice. Committed to struggle across differences, ALP seeks to responsibly reflect, represent, and serve our various communities.

Matt Richardson is an assistant professor in the Department of English, University of Texas at Austin, and also is affiliated with the Center for African and African American Studies and the Center for Gender and Women's Studies. Matt's research interests include African American and Black British cultural studies, queer theory, feminist studies, and film studies. Matt graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with a PhD in African diaspora studies and a designated emphasis in gender and women's studies. Some of Matt's most recent publications include "No More Secrets, No More Lies: Compulsory Heterosexuality and African American History" (2003), as well as two coauthored articles in the anthology *That's Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation* (Sycamore, 2004): "Calling All Restroom Revolutionaries!," about organizing for trans and genderqueer restrooms on college campuses, and "Is Gay Marriage Racist?," which discusses Blackness and gay marriage.

Susan Stryker is Ruth Wynn Woodward Professor of Women's Studies for 2007–2008 at Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia. She has written widely on transgender and sexuality topics for scholarly and popular audiences. She recently coedited *The Transgender Studies Reader* (Stryker & Whittle, 2006) and codirected the Emmy Award–winning film *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria* (Silverman & Stryker, 2005). Past work includes serving as guest editor for the transgender studies special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (1998) and authoring the Lambda Literary Award nominees *Gay by the Bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Stryker & Van Buskirk, 1996) and *Queer Pulp: Perverted Passions From the Golden Age of the Paperback* (Stryker, 2001). She earned her PhD in U.S. history from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1992; later held a postdoctoral research fellowship in sexuality studies at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California; and, from 1999 through 2003, worked as executive director of the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco. She was the 2006–2007 Martin Duberman Fellow at the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, Graduate Program, of the City University of New York. She is working simultaneously on a new film about transsexual celebrity Christine Jorgensen and a book about San Francisco's transgender history.

This roundtable conversation with Kris Hayashi, Matt Richardson, and Susan Stryker took place in structured e-mail exchanges between January and March 2007. Responses are presented in the order they were written. Kris Hayashi was unable to respond to the third question.

What does the emerging trans rights movement—if it is a movement—look like and how does it fit into a broader struggle for social justice domestically and globally? What key coalitional opportunities are yet to be exploited by trans activists and our allies?

Susan Stryker: As a historian, I tend to look to the past as a way of situating myself in the present. Glancing into the rearview mirror to survey the twentieth century, it certainly appears that we have a trans movement today—however polyvocal, multidirectional, and contradictory it might appear when we are involved with it on a day-to-day basis.

Figuring out when a movement for trans rights begins is a tricky proposition, a question perhaps of interest primarily to historians. People who do not fit currently conventional and dominant patterns of relating a gendered sense of self to a sexed embodiment are pervasive throughout history and across cultures; the visibility of such people to us, however, as well as our desire to connect with them as ancestors and kindred spirits, is better evidence of what Eurocentric modernity perceives as noteworthy than of essential, transhistorical, transcultural, transgender identities. Not all of those who have been in social locations we're tempted to call transgendered have had oppositional relationships to their conventional culture. Still, researchers have turned up many historical examples of such gender-variant people pushing back, sometimes with inspiring levels of success, both individually and collectively, against the cultural gender norms that marginalize them from fully and freely participating in the benefits and responsibilities of social life. But to what extent can this episodic resistance be construed as a movement? When, and under what circumstances, can we start talking about *trans* people?

Personal identities rooted in notions of trans-ness, crossing, inversion, and reversal start turning up in subcultural and medicolegal discourses around the middle of the nineteenth century, often in relation to overlapping categories of homosexuality and intersexuality. It's not clear exactly when large numbers of people began to organize their experiences of self and the world through these trans categories, when they began to think of themselves as specific and peculiar kinds of persons who had an interest in coming together as a community, or when they started to think of their identity-based social groups as a

basis for political action. Answering these questions requires further research into the shift from acts to identities, but it's pretty clear that the enabling conditions for a political movement advocating for the civil rights of a significantly disenfranchised minority of trans people were beginning to coalesce by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A few examples will have to stand in for this long historical development. One of the case studies in *Die Transvestiten: Eine Untersuchung über den erotischen Verkleidungstrieb* (The Transvestites: An Investigation of the Erotic Drive to Cross Dress), German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld's pioneering 1910 medical work on transgender people, was a male-to-female individual who sometimes lived as a man, sometimes as a woman, but preferred the name Johanna or Jennie. S/he was active in socialist labor politics and had become aware of Hirschfeld's political activism on behalf of homosexual and transgender individuals in Germany. She contacted Hirschfeld in the hope that he, through such publications as his *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* (Yearbook for Sexual Intermediaries; 1914), could help feminine men and masculine women find one another—hopefully to pair up romantically in gender-inverted couples. Decades later, in 1952 and 1953, when Christine Jorgensen made headlines around the world with her genital transformation surgery in Denmark and became the first international transsexual celebrity, she received thousands of personal letters from people who saw something of themselves in her. Many of these correspondents encouraged Jorgensen to use her sudden fame to speak out publicly on behalf of trans people—especially those who desired medical procedures to change the appearance of the sex-signifying features of their bodies. Simultaneously, a group of male-to-female cross-dressers in Southern California published *Transvestia: The Journal of the Society for Equality in Dress*. This short-lived mimeographed publication, whose two issues were distributed to a clandestine list of deeply closeted subscribers, represents the first tentative expression of a transgender political movement in the United States.

By the 1960s, the fledgling transgender movement was beginning to diversify. The early *Transvestia* correspondence network became reinvigorated in the early 1960s and soon connected several secret sororities of male cross-dressers scattered across the country. By the middle of the decade, socially marginalized transgender women in San Francisco, who routinely experienced discrimination and harassment from the police when they gathered at a favorite late-night hangout in the Tenderloin neighborhood where many of them worked as prostitutes, were

sufficiently politicized to band together and fight back against their oppression. This uprising, the Compton's Cafeteria Riot of August 1966, was part of a wave of increasingly militant resistance on the part of transgender street people that included street-fighting outside Cooper's Donut Stand in Los Angeles in 1959 and the Dewey's Lunch Counter sit-ins and picketing in Philadelphia in 1965.

The Compton's Riot stands out from these other instances because the resistance there was sparked by the formation of a political group, Vanguard, composed of queer street kids, hustlers, and queens, and also because it resulted in the formation of the first transsexual advocacy and support groups—Conversion Our Goal (COG), California Advancement for Transsexuals (CATS), the National Sexual-Gender Identification Council, the National Transsexual Counseling Unit, and the Transsexual Counseling Service—all formed before 1973. These San Francisco groups, which worked to change policies, practices, and public opinion, as well as provide peer support, were soon joined by similar groups in New York and Los Angeles, such as the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), and the Transsexual Activist Organization (TAO). By the middle of the 1970s, as female-to-male (FTM) individuals became more involved in social-change activism, a new cohort of organizations and publications had emerged that included the FTM-oriented Labyrinth Foundation in New York, *Metamorphosis* in Toronto, and the Renaissance group in Southern California. By the end of the 1970s, in spite of increasing estrangement between transgender groups and gay, lesbian, and feminist movements, the groundwork had been established for a transgender movement. Due to the devastating impact of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, however, and because of transphobia within progressive political moments, it would be another decade before the foundation laid in the 1960s and 1970s would sustain a larger movement.

Since the early 1990s, the trans movement has undergone a growth spurt of historic proportions. A more single-issue political focus on transgender-specific needs, such as changing gender designation on personal identification documents or gaining access to medical and psychological services related to changing sex, has blossomed into a multifaceted movement, one that increasingly addresses structural social inequalities and finds powerful and creative ways of linking transgender issues with those of other groups. A favorite example of how transgender issues can be articulated differently in the present than they typically have been in the past has to do with identification documents—without appropriate identification, people who live in a gender other than the one they were

assigned to at birth become undocumented workers who experience greater difficulties crossing borders, are subject to higher levels of surveillance, and are more at risk for state-initiated personal violence. People in the United States who cross gender borders, regardless of where they were born and how they make their living, have a common stake with other sorts of migrants who work without documentation. They have a common stake with those who are profiled, whose movements are restricted, and who become targets of border control for reasons other than gender. It is the same power of state that has deployed itself against us all, a power that attempts to limit our access to the means of life, that gives us a motive for resistance.

Contemporary transgender activism also presents new opportunities at a global level for resisting homonormative, neoliberal strategies that collaborate with global capital. Transgender activism in decades past, particularly when it has been self-consciously queer-identified, has typically sought to ally with gay and lesbian political causes—understandably so, given the long history of inter-related sociocultural formation and the greater resources and political clout of the gay and lesbian organizations. But as gay liberation drifts (seemingly inexorably) toward a consumerist quietism that accepts a gay place at the table of capitalist abundance without asking why so many of the hungry people in the streets are there because they are classed as deviant, the transgender movement should carefully reassess how closely it wants to be associated with such a homosexual agenda. The exclusion in late 2007 of transgender people from the proposed federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act (2007), which was revised to cover sexual orientation only rather than also including gender identity or expression, serves to highlight this potential rift. Gay and lesbian politics are not necessarily synonymous with progressive politics. What are the underlying norms, manners, modes of comportment, and dispositions that allow certain kinds of ostensibly queer expression to appear respectable and acceptable while other forms remain abject? Such phrases as *socioeconomic class*, *physical ability and appearance*, *skin color*, and *transgender status*, among others, spring to mind.

Transgender activism can function as a vital critique of this new homonormativity. It brings into visibility at least one incipient norm present in U.S. gay and lesbian political movements since the 1950s—that is, the extent to which these gay and lesbian social formations have predicated their minority sexual-orientation identities on the gender-normative notions of *man* and *woman* that homosexual subcultures tend to share with the heteronormative societies of Eurocentric modernity.

When this gender-normative, assimilationist brand of homosexuality circulates internationally with the privileges of its first-world point of origin, it all too readily becomes the primary template through which human rights are secured, or resources for living are accessed, by people rooted in nonheteronormative formations of sex-gender-sexuality that have developed from non-Eurocentric traditions in diverse locations around the world—*gay*, in other words, has the power to colonize. *Transgender* poses a similar risk, but to the extent that transgender activism can distinguish itself from homonormative neoliberalism, it can help create a different set of openings for resisting the homogenizing forces of global capital than those that have circulated through the categories lesbian, gay, or homosexual.

Kris Hayashi: I appreciate Susan starting us off with the history of our communities' activism and organizing; I also believe it's important to recognize, remember, and honor that our communities as trans and gender-nonconforming (TGNC) people have organized and fought back against injustice throughout history—individually and collectively, as part of trans movements and as part of many other movements both within and outside of the United States. I also appreciate the recognition of the ways in which Euro-centrism shapes who and what we claim as part of this history. Often, within TGNC communities of color, it has been important to seek out and claim the histories and cultures within our countries of origin, often precolonization, of people with multiple and complicated understandings of gender.

The trans movement in the United States today is, as are most movements, diverse, multifaceted, and continually changing and shifting. If we are looking at an overall picture of those working individually and collectively to meet the needs of TGNC communities and fight for justice for TGNC communities, this picture is broad. It encompasses a wide range of structures and organization including, but not limited to groups and projects that are part of larger organizations such as TransJustice, a TGNC organizing project for people of color; LGBT organizations with strong TGNC leadership reflected in the work of the organization, such as the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, FIERCE!, and Q-TEAM (the latter two are both organizing projects for lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirit, transgender, and queer youth of color); various grass-roots groups such as Transsistahs and Transbrothas, a group of African American transgender people in Kentucky who organize a national conference; communities within the House Ball scene; local nonprofits, such as the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, the Transgender, Gender

Variant, and Intersex Justice Project; and a few national nonprofits, such as the National Center for Transgender Equality. Additionally, this picture includes the countless numbers of individual TGNC people who fight injustice and discrimination through daily interaction with institutions and communities and the various web-based forums and electronic mailing lists. These organizations, groups, and individuals engage in multiple strategies including direct services, community building, advocacy, education, academics, leadership development, cultural work, legal services, and organizing.

Yet, the need of TGNC communities is much greater than the resources that exist. Funding for TGNC work is limited because few funders include TGNC communities within their funding. LGBT organizations in general have not prioritized the needs of TGNC communities and, within other social justice organizations, the needs of TGNC communities are often invisible.

Moreover, it is still the case that our communities are pathologized and viewed as in need of services, not as leaders and organizers. Thus, there is a clear lack of programs focused on organizing and leadership development. Furthermore, there are only a handful of efforts that prioritize the leadership of TGNC people with the least access to resources, such as communities of color, low-income communities, immigrants, youth, elders, rural communities, differently abled individuals, and so forth.

The answer to the question of how the trans movement fits into a broader struggle for social justice domestically and globally is affected by the ways in which racism, patriarchy, economic injustice, ageism, ableism, and geography have shaped our priorities. TGNC communities include communities of color, immigrants, youth, elders, rural communities, and differently abled communities. Thus, how a trans movement fits into a broader struggle is clear. For example, as TGNC communities of color, we view our struggles as one and the same as broader struggles for social justice domestically and directly connected—if not the same as—struggles for social justice globally. Members of TransJustice, a community organizing group led and run by TGNC people of color that is part of ALP, stated in its *Points of Unity*, a document written for the 2006 Trans Day of Action in New York City:

As Trans and Gender Non-Conforming (TGNC) people of color, we see that our struggle today is directly linked to many struggles here in the US and around the world. We view The 2nd Annual Trans Day of Action for Social and Economic Justice on June 23, 2006, as a day to stand in solidarity with all peoples and movements fighting against

oppression and inequality. We view this action as following the legacy of our Trans People of Color warriors, such as Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, and others who with extreme determination fought not only for the rights of all trans and gender non-conforming people, but also were on the frontlines for the liberation of all oppressed peoples. (TransJustice, 2006)

For example, as stated by TransJustice in its 2005 *Points of Unity* document, TGNC communities of color face injustices similar to those that oppressed communities face:

The specific issues that TGNC people of color face mirror those faced by broader communities of color in NYC: police brutality and harassment; racist and xenophobic immigration policies; lack of access to living wage employment, adequate affordable housing, quality education, and basic healthcare; and; the impacts of US imperialism and the so-called US “war on terrorism” being waged against people at home and abroad. These issues are compounded for TGNC people of color by the fact that homophobia and transphobia is so pervasive in society. As a result, our community is disproportionately represented in homeless shelters, in foster care agencies, in jails and prisons. (TransJustice, 2005)

The Transgender, Gender Variant and Intersex Justice Project (TGIJP) is a legal services and community-organizing project that is primarily led and run by TGNC people of color and that prioritizes the leadership of TGI prisoners and former prisoners. According to its mission statement, TGIJP seeks to

challenge and end the human rights abuses committed against transgender, gender variant/genderqueer and intersex (TGI) people in California prisons and beyond. Recognizing that poverty borne from profound and pervasive discrimination and marginalization of TGI people is a major underlying cause of why TGI people end up in prison, TGIJP addresses human rights abuses against TGI prisoners through strategies that effect systemic change....Because of the profound and complex impact the prison industrial complex has had on the disabled, poor communities, communities of color and TGI communities, TGIJP operates at the intersections of race, gender, sex, class, sexual orientation, intersexuality, and ability, among others. (TGIJP, 2007)

During a period of time when U.S. imperialism and corporate power continue to destroy communities and lives on a global scale, as TGNC people within the United

States, we have a responsibility to act in solidarity with global struggles and act in solidarity or as a part of broader domestic struggles for social and economic injustice.

Matt Richardson: My perspective comes from a similar place as Susan’s in that I, too, am looking at history. However, my historical lens is focused on a different set of circumstances. I am also in agreement with Kris that race is fundamental to understanding the current situation and envisioning future political work. I think they both did an excellent job of giving a picture of early and contemporary trans movement-building and organizational development. Therefore, I will contribute to this dialogue by foregrounding the part of the question about struggles for social justice in a U.S. racial context, which I hope will inform discussion of coalitional opportunities. I am very interested in how the Black body in particular comes into Western thought and material reality as the marker for sexual aberrance and deviance. By *sexual* I mean both the physical body and the act of sex. Often, where biology and behavior meet is in the (social) scientific study of Black people. It is through the study of the Black as a scientific object that Black genders have been constructed as *pathological*, to use a term from Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1967); the effects of this construction cascade globally because they have helped set the standards for what is considered normal in Eurocentric modernity, as Susan describes. For this reason, it is crucial to think about the ways in which trans discourses are implicated in struggles surrounding dehumanization (even when they are invested in gender normativity).

Let me clarify what I mean by considering how comparative anatomy set the stage for the racial construction of biological sex. Slavery positioned people of African heritage as quasihuman in the great chain of being. There were many attempts to prove racial hierarchy through systematic investigation, many arguments resting on observations of the physical difference in biological sex that could then be used to explain imagined abnormal sexual degenerate behavior—all of which, of course, was fodder for anti-Black violence. For eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientists such as Johann Blumenbach and Georges Cuvier or philosophers and politicians such as Thomas Jefferson, this less-than-human designation left open questions surrounding the difference in Black sex organs (e.g., the famed extended labia minora, called the *Hottentot apron*, of South African women), igniting Western imaginations of bestiality and excessive lascivious desires. (See, for example, Thomas Jefferson’s ruminations on African women copulating with orangutans in his 1787 volume *Notes on the State of*

Virginia). To this end, the gendered expressions of those whom Havelock Ellis (1897/2007) called the “lower human races” (p. 17) became a fascination for a variety of scholars of anthropology, sociology, sexology, psychology, and anatomy. The desire to quantify the difference in Black female sex organs came from the assertion that the genitals of Black female objects of study was, as an article from the 1867 inaugural volume of the *Journal of Anatomy and Physiology* put it, “well marked to distinguish these parts at once from any of the ordinary varieties of the human species” (Flowers & Murie, p. 208). Claims of physiological excesses rendered Black people ideal for excessive labor and torture, well beyond what would be considered acceptable for any so-called civilized man or true woman. These early attempts to congeal racist taxonomies of difference through anatomical investigation and ethnographic observation produced the Black body as always already variant and Black people as the essence of gender aberrance, thereby defining the norm by making the Black its opposite.

This context is particularly useful in considering what is at stake in claiming early African Americans who openly transgressed gender norms into transgender history and what is at stake for contemporary Black people to claim trans identity. Figures such as Cathy Williams, a late-nineteenth century, notoriously defiant mail carrier of the Old West who served as a male Buffalo Soldier from 1868 to 1870 (also named William Cathy or Stage Coach Mary), have become isolated examples of strong women in African American historical discourse even when they could be placed in relation to other examples of nineteenth-century gender variance. One reason for this approach is that, as a result of the issues stated previously, to call attention to Black transgression of gender norms can be construed by mainstream Black communities as dangerously close to being complicit with racist discourses. This situation creates a dilemma for differently gendered Black people in the past and in the present. What does it mean to embrace a term such as *transsexual* or *transgender* that is not culturally recognized in one’s own community? How does it mark one as *not* Black?

Any trans rights movement that successfully emerges from Black people or incorporates Black people as partners in struggles against violence and exploitation needs to look at how the historical conditions of slavery and colonialism set the stage for the ways in which gender is assigned and lived. What would be useful is recognizing that in the contemporary United States, for example, the Black population comprises a multitude of populations across the African diaspora. The immigration of Black people from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa, among other places, produces a complex and multifaceted

set of communities. It would then make sense to take into consideration how people of different genders are designated before they are transported or come to the United States and what happens to genders once they arrive. Important questions to ask are: What was the impact of slavery and colonialism on gender categories before arrival and after? How does this impact differ according to skin color, class, and age and ability? Jacqui Alexander (1997, 2002) and Gloria Wekker (2006) have contributed a great deal to this discussion in relation to sexuality in their work on the Caribbean and Suriname. I think this is a rich subject that has not even begun to be researched.

How has the framing of trans rights changed in the last 10–20 years with its increasing visibility and legislative gains? What should be the central political and policy objectives of this movement? How can we build a successfully antiracist movement for trans justice?

Kris Hayashi: At ALP, we believe in multi-issue organizing and caution against single-issue movements. We believe that single issue movements often leave behind the very communities, which are most vulnerable. As stated in the Beyond Marriage Statement, a critique of the current gay marriage movement initiated by Queers for Economic Justice:

Meanwhile, the LGBT movement has recently focused on marriage equality as a stand-alone issue. While this strategy may secure rights and benefits for some LGBT families, it has left us isolated and vulnerable to a virulent backlash....The struggle for marriage rights should be part of a larger effort to strengthen the stability and security of diverse households and families...The current debate over marriage, same-sex and otherwise, ignores the needs and desires of so many in a nation where household diversity is the demographic norm. We seek to reframe this debate (BeyondMarriage.org, 2006).

Thus, it’s important that however trans movements develop and progress, we must do so in ways that continue to fight against all forms of oppression and for justice for all oppressed communities.

At ALP, we also believe that in order to build a successful movement for justice for all oppressed communities, it is critical to place at the forefront the needs, perspectives, and leadership of those within our communities who are most vulnerable, are most lacking in access to resources, and face the greatest barriers to survival. We believe that these communities should determine the key issues and problems our movement seeks to address. Due to the systemic oppression on which U.S. society and,

thus, our movements within the United States are based, often the exact opposite occurs. If we take a look at organizations and movements led by TGNC people facing some of the greatest barriers to survival, the issues that those communities have prioritized do not often receive the greatest visibility and resources—and thus are often not within our movements' or other movements' thinking in regard to trans issues. These issues range from justice for TGNC prisoners, to police brutality and violence, to gentrification, to the U.S.-led war on terrorism both within the United States and abroad, to immigrant rights, to welfare, to unemployment, to education access. For example, in addition to the Transgender, Gender Variant, Intersex Justice Project, other organizations have also placed the needs of the most disempowered at the forefront. In New York City, TGNC youth of color and low-income youth in the West Village neighborhood face ongoing violence and harassment at the hands of the police, as well as from residents who are primarily White and middle-class to upper class. As a result, FIERCE!, an organization led and run primarily by TGNC low-income and homeless youth of color, prioritizes issues of police brutality and violence, as well as gentrification. TransJustice, a project of ALP that is led and run by TGNC people of color, has prioritized issues of unemployment and education access due to high rates of unemployment (60%–70%) facing TGNC people of color. Also in New York, a coalition of organizations and groups including TransJustice, Welfare Warriors, and the LGBT Community Center's Gender Identity Project have prioritized efforts to end the regular harassment and discrimination faced by TGNC people seeking to gain access to public assistance. Finally, many TGNC groups led primarily by people of color and low-income communities have also prioritized ending the U.S. war on terrorism, both in the United States and abroad. As trans movements progress it's important that we look critically at which issues are prioritized and adequately resourced, which issues are not, and how those choices have been shaped by systems of oppression.

With regard specifically to building a successful antiracist movement for trans justice, I think it's important to reflect on the current state of trans activism and organizing in relation to a few key questions. Are our organizations and groups structured in ways that support the leadership and involvement of people of color? Is the leadership of our organizations and movements majority White? Are the people who decide what issues the trans movement should focus on majority White? Are the people and organizations who receive the greatest amount of resources majority White? Are the people, organizations,

and individuals who receive the greatest amount of visibility within the general public and the movement majority White?

Building a successful antiracism movement requires White allies to challenge the ways in which racism is perpetuated within trans movements—both when it occurs on a day-to-day basis and when it occurs in the building of groups and institutions. White allies also need to understand the importance of spaces for people of color and support leadership and organizing by and for trans and gender-nonconforming people of color. Specifically, it's important for White allies to look toward White antiracist leaders and organizers within trans communities for models of antiracist work.

As Matt stated, I think it's important to recognize the ways in which colonialism and imperialism have shaped how U.S. society views gender, knowing that many communities of color had multiple genders before colonization occurred. As a result, it's not enough to seek to build an antiracist movement—we should also seek to build a movement that is anticlassism, antipatriarchy, antiageism, antiableism, and antihomophobic: a movement that seeks to reflect the diversity of multiple gender identities and sexualities and to work in solidarity with those who struggle within and outside of the United States against U.S. imperialism and globalization.

Matt Richardson: I agree wholeheartedly with Kris's statements that a multi-issue point of view is absolutely crucial to antiracist trans organizing. Current queer focus on marriage is problematic on many levels, but especially because, as Kris stated, it secures rights and benefits for some and leaves others incredibly vulnerable. In an article I coauthored with Marlon Bailey and Priya Kandaswamy (2004), titled "Is Gay Marriage Racist?," my colleagues and I also discussed the limitation of gay marriage as an effective civil rights strategy that meets the needs of all queers because it presumes that all queers have an equal opportunity to take advantage of rights.

Building an antiracist trans movement in the United States requires recognition that not all trans people are the same, especially in relation to state power. This misrecognition of all gender-nonconforming people as being the same before the law fuels an emphasis on legal means to help alleviate the problem of trans discrimination. Changes in law do not necessarily produce the same benefit for everyone. To focus on legislative gains is to rely on a dictum of equal protection, a focus that overlooks the experience of those of us who are not recognized by the state as full citizens no matter what our passports say and whether or not we were born in the United States.

Again, history is particularly useful here in that it sheds some light on why it is crucial to pay attention to the relative status of trans people. One of the fundamental Supreme Court cases that helped define the parameters of citizenship was *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857): While still a slave, Scott and his attorneys argued that he became free when his owner moved from a slave state to a free territory. The case challenged the very definition of U.S. citizenship for the descendants of Africans. The court ruled against Scott, with Chief Justice Roger B. Taney writing that:

The question before us is, whether the class of persons described in the plea in abatement compose a portion of this people, and are constituent members of this sovereignty? We think they are not, and that they are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word ‘citizens’ in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States. On the contrary, they were at that time considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race, and, whether emancipated or not, yet remained subject to their authority, and had no rights or privileges but such as those who held the power and the Government might choose to grant them. (*Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 1857)

Even though the Scott decision was supposedly overturned with the ratification of the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution in 1868 and 1870 respectively, protection under the cover of citizenship was not granted. In anticipation of the constitutional eradication of formal slavery, by 1865, Southern states had initiated a series of laws called Black Codes that regulated and subjugated newly freed people, subjecting them to state-sanctioned and -enforced incarceration and violence for such offenses as congregating in public and talking back to Whites. Of course, the constitutional amendments’ legal promises of the right to life and liberty and the right to vote were superseded by the rapacious force of anti-Black sentiment. Not only did Black people have to fight for more than another 100 years for unencumbered voting rights, which have yet to arrive, but also the postbellum South was in a murderous frenzy, leaving a legacy of unimpeded lynching.

The lived experience of contemporary Black trans people in the United States demonstrates the incongruity between the promise of state protection and the practice of regulation, surveillance, and brutality. In 1999, during the Creating Change Conference in Oakland, California, a group of African American trans women were attacked

in downtown Oakland. When the police arrived on the scene, they attacked the assault victims as well. One officer was quoted as saying, “I am tired of having to do all this paperwork. You guys have been told not be on the corner of 14th and Broadway. I am tired of your shit” (GenderPAC, 1999). A demonstration by the conference attendees happened that night at the Oakland police headquarters. I was at the demonstration, as were other members of this roundtable. The original attack and the subsequent verbal police assault are part of a larger continuation of a refusal to protect and serve that has implications specifically about police brutality toward trans people and about a history of state-mandated racist violence. What did not happen that night in most of the speeches I heard was a connecting the incident to the everyday racial violence that happens to many members of the same community.

In 2004, only a few years after the incident during Creating Change, at the exact same corner of 14th and Broadway, I witnessed the police in full riot gear descend on a peaceful gathering of predominantly Black music festival attendees. I happened to live a few blocks away from this contentious corner. One day, on my way home, the commuter train was suddenly halted. As passengers, we were told that a riot was in progress above ground and that, for our protection, all train service to this area had been promptly cut off. Those of us who lived there were allowed to exit, but no other trains were allowed to stop at the two stations in that area. Bus service, too, had been rerouted. When I ascended to the street, I found a calm crowd of mostly Black young people stranded without access to public transportation and a line of police with bullhorns telling people to leave the area immediately. Having not been at the music festival, yet just another Black face in the crowd, I found myself running from police batons and covering my face from the canisters of tear gas that were released into the streets. The police later issued a statement saying that the crowd was out of control and that appropriate measures were taken.

Any antiracist movement—trans or otherwise—must contend with the everyday life of people who are vulnerable to racism in all of its forms. After the 1999 attack on the transgender women, it was recommended that the police undergo sensitivity training on trans issues. This is a fine proposal, but it does not touch the much more structural conditions that prompted the assault or the police response. Echoing Kris’s questions about trans organizational leadership, the more that trans organizations are led by people who are affected by racism and class oppression, the more multilayered strategies will be

enacted, including working together with other organizations that are already tackling connected issues.

Susan Stryker: I have seen a great deal of change in how transgender issues have been framed since I first started getting involved at a personal level in the trans community in the late 1980s; it seems hard to believe that it's been almost 20 years. Back then, it was very difficult for me to find another trans person who thought in political terms. Most everybody I met was focused on survival; trans support groups were pretty gloomy affairs, and there were very few resources of any kind. What activism existed was focused almost exclusively on educating medical and psychotherapeutic service providers in order to create better access for surgery, hormones, and counseling. There was a lot of talk about us as a medically colonized people; a lot of talk about hormones and surgery on demand; a lot of talk about the transsexual witch hunts in gay, lesbian, and progressive movements in the 1970s; and a lot of talk about turning tricks and AIDS risk—but that was it for political discourse, as far as I could see. Except for the folks who were active on AIDS issues, I didn't see a lot of political activism at all.

I was pretty snooty about the prevailing apolitical attitude. I was in grad school at Berkeley through most of the 1980s, and had a head full of Foucault that I was trying desperately to hook up to some kind of lived practice. I had found my way to San Francisco's leather/SM underground, which for me was an amazing laboratory and workshop for figuring out how to put together gender, sex, sexuality, identity, embodiment, and desire in radical new ways, as well as for thinking about why such novelties seemed so threatening to the dominant culture. I found it all electrifyingly political. And I made those communities my primary home, rather than the rather dispiriting trans community.

It took me a few years to realize that, in the late 1980s, it wasn't necessarily true that trans folks were apolitical by choice. The fact of the matter was that there wasn't a lot of opportunity to do much of anything at that point except tell other people that—hey, really, just because I'm transgendered it doesn't mean I'm psychotic, or need to go to a feminist consciousness raising group, or come out as the gay man I really am by liberating myself from the oppressive gender stereotypes that made me want to mutilate my body. Transgender issues were pretty effectively contained by countervailing cultural tendencies; opportunities to do political work were meager; and it took a lot of strength and determination just to make it from day to day as a trans person.

That sense of almost claustrophobic containment is what made the queer movement of the early 1990s so riveting for me. It was where, in my own life, I was finally able to connect book learnin' with street politics. I was deliriously happy to finally find other trans people who thought similarly to the way I did, who wanted to link trans issues to a disruptive cultural politics, who wanted to address big structural problems as well as quotidian ones—such as who at your endocrinologist's office would treat you like a human being and which one would supposedly forget to call in your prescription. We'd form a working group on trans exclusions from medical insurance, write a manifesto on universal health care, do a gay-lib-style zap of the American Psychiatric Association and the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association to protest gender identity disorder, and devise some new rationales for gaining access to trans-specific health care services without resorting to pathologization. Those were heady times when it seemed like we had a whole world to change.

The exhilaration of watching a new transgender dialogue begin to take shape is hard to reduce to words. It was glorious to finally be able to speak with some nontrans people and not have to educate them first about the fact that you were a viable human being. My awareness of the profound difference between not having a speaking position at all and having disagreements among trans people about the best thing to say is what allows me to take a very long view on what the trans movement needs to be doing. I'm still a little amazed that we are doing anything at all and that so much has been done in such a relatively short period of time. The biggest change in framing has been that we have the opportunity to create multiple possible frames.

Given this possibility, I am reluctant to say what I think central policies and programs for the movement should be, mostly because I don't like the idea of a central anything—let's (at least metaphorically) cut off the head of the king and overthrow sovereign power whenever possible. I also want to echo the sentiments already expressed here about the importance, for those of us who have any sort of privilege, of not only actively seeking out people and communities who are marginalized by the very privileges we enjoy but also listening to them and working with them to create a more just situation, one where difference is just difference, not hierarchy. Attention to multiple marginalities, particularly those constructed by race and class, will not result in a single, unified trans movement, but that's something that should be celebrated. No one movement will address everybody's needs.

How well does transgender studies, as it has been framed academically, fit the needs and agendas of trans activists? What kinds of academic work are most needed? Which are the least helpful?

Matt Richardson: The questions concerning leadership that Kris brought up in the previous response are particularly relevant for thinking about what trans activists need from academia and what academia's role is in relation to activism. First of all, the question remains— which activists? Organizations led by and concerning trans people of color are going to have different agendas than predominantly White ones and different people of color will have diverse goals. Both as academics and as activists, we need to pay attention to these dissimilarities to actually respond responsibly to trans people's lives.

I would like to see a turn in the future of trans studies that takes its direction from the most vulnerable trans populations. For example, Kris mentioned the TGIJP, which is based in the San Francisco Bay Area. What might be of most use for the people that TGIJP serves—those who are mass incarcerated, which is also majority people of color—are scholars who are themselves activists. Scholars who value praxis would be involved in the hands-on work of struggle that actually informs their scholarship. Angela Davis is a prime example: Her service to the struggle over 4 decades is well documented as is her related academic writing, including her recent book, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (Davis, 2003). Another case in point is someone such as Ruth Wilson Gilmore who, in addition to directing the Program in American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, is a founding member of the collective Critical Resistance, one of the most important national antiprison organizations in the United States. Gilmore is also active in the Prison Moratorium Project and California Prison Focus and has just published *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Gilmore, 2007). Few of us, myself included, could ever live up to the dizzying career of Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore; however, they provide models to which we can all aspire, at least in the spirit of their commitments to being personally invested in trying to change the material conditions that they write about.

To this end, the interdisciplinary perspective that operates within ethnic studies disciplines is a rich place to develop critical gender studies. The academy is sorely lacking interdisciplinary studies of the racial construction of gender, and that is what may be the most productive future of trans studies. Scholarship that is based in the

materiality of class, race, ability, and age in the past, present, and future—even if it is highly theoretical—may ultimately be of use to on-the-ground activists engaged in struggles for survival.

Susan Stryker: I really resist framing transgender studies as a field structured by the demands, on the one hand, of activist strategies and, on the other hand, of academic concerns. It suggests that academics are not activists, or that activists are not academics, and that the proper role of academic trans studies should be to provide content and tools for nonacademic activists to then use out in the real world. When you ask What kind of academic work is most needed?, the answer needs to be qualified by another question: Needed by whom? Likewise with the question about what is least helpful: least helpful to whom? Knowledges and their utility are quite specific to their situations.

This activist versus academic conflict is a familiar way to frame the internal politics of interdisciplinary fields of study that have their roots in minoritarian critiques of knowledge, power, and social structure, and I don't think it is ever very productive. This same debate says that feminist theory has no value for women's struggles, that critical race theory has nothing to do with Black struggles, and that queer theory has nothing to do with gay rights.

I think we are hearing two different things in this conflict. First, we are hearing the pain and frustration of people who have been excluded from the kinds of benefits accorded to those who have access to higher education and academic employment—people who feel justifiably angered and alienated when they encounter work supposedly done in the name of their cause but that has no obvious bearing on their lives. Second, we hear the defensiveness of people who are uncomfortable with their academic privilege yet who are convinced of the importance of the intellectual and critical work that they do, people who often try to assuage their class guilt by working (in sometimes condescending ways) with nonacademic social justice activists and trying to justify their academic work by arguing for its supposed political relevance.

I think we need to be more nuanced in our thinking about the role of the academy in the production of trans knowledges and about the relationship of this knowledge to transgender social justice movements. The university, after all, is just another place to work, and it has its own peculiar workplace issues. Bringing trans politics into the politics of the academic workplace—for students, staff, and faculty alike—is one important way to channel some of the financial resources and symbolic capital of academe toward the trans struggle for social justice. Part of this work involves legitimating trans concerns in the language

of academe. This is specialized work, requiring expert knowledge and technical, sometimes jargon-riddled language. Institutionalizing transgender studies in the academy is one strategy for using the considerable resources of the academic institution while keeping the issues on the table. It becomes part of educating the rising generation of trans youth who have been fortunate enough to gain college admission and of creating a safe and empowering educational experience for them, part of creating secure working conditions for trans people on staff, and part of transforming disciplinary academic knowledge in ways that will have unforeseen consequences. This sort of transgender intellectual work, which is specific to the academic workplace, should not be seen as intrinsically useless to a broader trans social justice movement even if it is very arcane, because this sort of academic work performs the queer labor of refashioning the relationship of trans issues to social power. If nothing else, it helps make visible the means through which trans concerns have been rendered invisible and marginal. At best, it situates the kind of knowledges that come from trans embodiment and experience at the very heart of the academic enterprise.

I find Foucault's (2003) discussion of *subjugated knowledges* incredibly appropriate for discussing the politics of transgender studies (Stryker, 2006). In referring to subjugated knowledges, Foucault had two distinct things in mind. First, he meant bodies of knowledge contained within social systems and institutions whose very existence is masked by the operation of the systems and institutions themselves. This sort of knowledge can be desubjugated only by those who have the specialized training necessary for its recovery and extrication. It is critical work that makes use of all the tools of scholarship—the work of the legal advocate who can argue that “walking while transgendered” should not make one liable for criminal prosecution on suspicion of prostitution, or the work of the psychoanalytic theorist who can contend in psychiatry's own terms that transsexual fantasy is not a form of psychosis that should be confined within an asylum. The other type of subjugated knowledge is what Foucault called knowledges that have been deemed insufficient by the hierarchies of erudition—folk knowledges, practical knowledges, bodily knowledges, and other forms of knowing that cannot claim the status of a science. It is resistant knowledge structured by the experience of power's operations upon oneself. Foucault (2003) called for an “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (p. 7) that begins with the genealogical coupling of these two complementary ways of knowing—wedding together the meticulous recovery of the struggle with the raw memory of the fight.

What this boils down to for me is a question about how transgender studies in the academy and transgender social activism work together. Even very abstract kinds of academic knowledge can be inspiring for activist practices beyond the ivory tower, in the same way that music can be inspiring even if you can't say in words how music moved you to do something. However, even the most rigorous kinds of intellectual analysis will be nothing but dead formalism without an enlivening engagement with the broader material conditions that the analysis seeks to apprehend. Let's all be more patient with the various kinds of work we each do, more curious, more connected across our differences—and more creative in the ways we draw inspiration from the work others do in locations that are not our own.

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