

That's the American way

Not long ago in a galaxy not far from our own, my path happened to cross with the head representative of the National Realman Association (NRA). He was about 40 years old, and introduced himself as Ivan M. Whyte. During our discussion, he began to attempt to "re-educate" me about gender issues.

"Brother," he said with a broad smile, "we must begin to unify our effort — with the way things are going today, we're losing ground and they're gaining."

"But," I asked, "isn't that what America is about Ivan? Aren't women supposed to be able to pursue the same goals of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?"

"Of course, of course, but you'll find that our forefathers who wrote that didn't mean at our expense. Women today won't be satisfied until we're under their thumbs."

"Oh? How is that so? Isn't the women's movement about the freedom to choose for yourself?"

"Hey," I.M. said, pushing his chair away from the table, "Don't change this into some abortion rally."

"I'm not, but that's one good example of women's choices being made and legislated by men, isn't it?"

"Heck, no. Abortion is ungodly. What kind of choice is that?"

"Are you in favor of abortion and the death penalty, son?"

"That's not fair. You can't put those issues together."

"So you say?" I.M. said with a wary eye. "Anyway, the point is, unless we come together as men, we'll lose everything."

"How?"

"They want our jobs. Not just the business ones, but the political ones too! We let them into the work force, isn't that bad enough?"

"But women today don't receive equal pay for comparable work and make up a small percentage of high-level corporate and political positions," I said.

I.M. shook his head.
"Not for long with wimps like Clinton in power. It was a sad day when he turned in his membership. After all we did for his relationship."

"Well, I don't know about that, but I thought some of his Cabinet selections were good. Who better to decide what women want and need than women?"

"Are you saying men can't do the job?" I.M. asked angrily.

"No. But empowering women to make decisions for themselves strengthens both them and the nation as a whole. How can we, as men, decide what is equitable pay for being a homemaker or when a woman takes maternity leave?"

"That's reverse sexism," I.M. shouted, beginning to turn red. "You're just one of those spineless liberals who's afraid to stand for what's right."

"Wait. I'm not soft on women's issues. I just believe that there is enough for everyone. It's kind of like the African-American struggle. . . ."

"There you go again," I.M. yelled. "You people are always trying to turn things into a racial issue."

"You people?" I asked, rising to my feet. "Well," he began to look flustered. "That's not what I meant."

"Anyway, I can see that you're not what our group is looking for. I think NOW is accepting applications."

"Thanks for the tip," I said. "You should open your eyes. John Locke's social contract

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Novel shows black struggle

The contemporary African-American novel, "Disappearing Acts," written by Terry McMillan, is very true-to-life and can be understood by every black person who reads it. McMillan writes of a love story between a black man, Franklin Swift, and a black woman, Zora Banks. The relationship between Franklin and Zora turns into a love-hate relationship as a result of the type of problems that are prevalent in black male and female relationships.

McMillan handles the interplay between the black male and female in a manner that can be respected and accepted by both the black male and female. The language, style and perspective McMillan uses to develop the love relationship between a black man and woman reveals her distinctiveness as a black woman writer.

In "Disappearing Acts," McMillan's artistry with the language known as black urban speech, serves to convey clarity to the reader. The clarity and force of black-urban speech is highlighted in Franklin's stinging analysis throughout the book.

Unlike many other books, which help to perpetuate the stereotype that black people cannot write or speak in an understandable way, McMillan proves to be above those false norms.

Contrary to popular perceptions dealing with black speech, McMillan's usage of black urban speech in "Disappearing Acts" enhances her uniqueness, because it does not detract from the quality of the novel, and it communicates with the reader with beauty and clarity.

Two facets of McMillan's unique style are shown by her portrayal of Franklin's growth at the end of the novel as a contrast to the person he was at the beginning of the novel and by her use of first-person dialogue throughout the novel.

Our first glimpse of Franklin comes about as he proclaims his disdain for the ways of

black women.
"All I can say is this, I'm tired of women. Black women in particular. . . . Want all your time and energy. Want the world to revolve around them. Once you give 'em some good lovin', they go crazy and start hearing wedding bells. Start thinking about babies. And want you to meet their damn family. . . ."

At the end of the novel, the reader finds that Franklin has undergone a transformation in feelings toward black women. And McMillan easily and effectively portrays Franklin as a black man.

McMillan renders the dialogue in the first person, which draws the reader into the conversation. Through the use of first person, the events taking place in the novel become the contemporary.

McMillan writes "Disappearing Acts" from a pragmatic and plausible perspective. She is able to give the reader a believable male and female perspective. Through the use of first person, McMillan is also able to show that the black male and female relationships face many obstacles such as racism.

McMillan writes both a love story and a social commentary. She zeroes in on issues that are in the forefront of the lives of black males and females in America today. McMillan's novel is a way in which many who cannot relate to the black male or female can have a better understanding of their struggles.

McMillan's ability to bring together the elements of language, style and perspective effectively demonstrates her uniqueness as a black woman writer in the 20th century.

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