

FEATURED PUBLICATION & AUTHOR INTERVIEW

CHARISMA AND THE FICTIONS OF BLACK LEADERSHIP

Erica R. Edwards (2012, University of Minnesota Press)

Erica R. Edwards has written about African American narrative, American popular culture, and the contemporary history of black politics and black social movements in *American Quarterly*, *American Literary History*, *Women & Performance*, *Callaloo*, and elsewhere. Her book, *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* is forthcoming from University of Minnesota Press. Professor Edwards specializes in African American literature, gender and sexuality, and black political culture. She is currently at work on a book on African American literature and the War on Terror. Her work shows how contemporary African American literature challenges us to think in new ways about the relationships between African American narrative, American popular culture, and the contemporary history of black politics and black social movements.



Our guest interviewer, Richard A. Couto (Ph.D., political science, University of Kentucky) is with Union Institute and University and a founding faculty member of the Antioch University Ph.D. Program in Leadership and Change. Prior to that he was a founding faculty member of the Jepson School at the University of Richmond, where he held the George M. and Virginia B. Modlin Chair in Leadership Studies from 1991-2002. During that period, he spent two years as a senior research fellow at the University of Maryland James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership. At the Jepson School, Couto helped develop a curriculum that integrates classroom instruction with community service. Couto's recently served as editor for: *Political and Civic Leadership: A Reference Handbook*.

RICHARD: Erica, first of all, let me just say that it's been a long time since I was so excited about a book and its scholarship. This was just a marvelous book on so many counts.

ERICA: I really appreciate your saying that. Thank you.

RICHARD: I hope you have had wide acclaim for it. It's just a wonderful piece of scholarship. There you are sitting in an English department at the University of California Riverside. Did you ever think that you would be talking to someone about the book as a leadership book?

ERICA: I actually didn't. I welcome this conversation, but it is something of a surprise. I've been trained as a literary scholar since my undergraduate years; I majored in English and Spanish. The questions that I ended up asking in the book placed me in conversation with leadership studies in a way that really was exciting and interesting, but I have not been trained as a leadership studies scholar. So, it's an interesting opportunity for a conversation. I'm excited!

RICHARD: Truly, your lack of background in the leadership literature is a real advantage. You have done so much splendid interdisciplinary work that you've lent to us – who are familiar with that literature – really compelling, important insights into

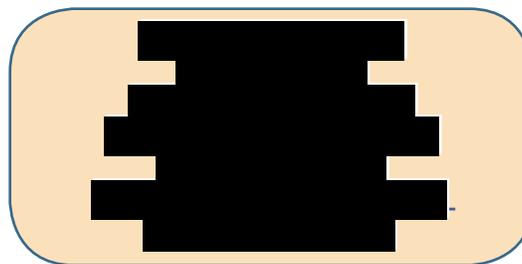
some of the central questions of leadership studies. It's hard to pull off interdisciplinary scholarship, but I can see that while you are talking with me about leadership, you might also be talking to somebody about the insights your work provides to politics, literary criticism, African American studies, feminist studies, and on and on. It really is a very, very rich contribution to several fields.

But enough with the praise, let's get into the content and the substance. You frame your book with two critical incidents, one in the introduction, and one in the epilogue. The first involves Erykah Badu, a musical artist at the 2005 Millions More Movement in Washington, D.C., an event that was meant to commemorate the Million Man March, which Louis Farrakhan organized and he was the main speaker at the Million More Movement.

Then the other event that you highlight in the epilogue is Oprah Winfrey, the ubiquitous host personality, when she appears in Columbia, South Carolina in 2008 at a Barack Obama rally.

Tell us a little bit about each of these incidents and how they frame your book's central arguments.

ERICA: Sure. The central question in the book is about how we imagine Black leadership and how we have come to imagine



Black leadership over the course of the 20th century. In spite of overwhelming historical evidence to the contrary, the book asks, why do we continue to imagine African American history as a product of singular leadership? I was trying to think about the ways that we narrate the history of Black politics and how the master narrative of Black politics as charismatic leadership is restaged, or re-imagined, or redefined by Black literary texts since World War I.

I chose to focus more on contemporary political performances in the introduction and the epilogue – the one with Erykah Badu in 2005 in the immediate wake of Hurricane Katrina and the one with Oprah Winfrey three years later – because I wanted to think about the millennial moment in which we found ourselves in 2008 – really since 2000 – to think about what was happening in this contemporary scene of Black politics. There was a kind of waning of a certain Black leadership model, perhaps characterized by someone like Louis Farrakhan, and the introduction of Obama as a figure who recalls these 20th century themes of Black leadership while, I think, repositioning them in important ways.

In the first scene I write about Erykah Badu’s performance at the Millions More March ten years after the Million Man March, which was the largest Black political mass mobilization in 20th century history. I was thinking about the uses of memory in that public staging of a commemorative event for the Million Man March. In the ten years since, the earlier march had been critiqued by feminist scholars and public thinkers for its exclusion of women and a certain kind of glorification of Black patriarchy. Badu was invited to the second march as someone who would open up the march to cross-racial politics as well as move the march beyond what it had previously been associated with, which was a sort of narrow vision of Black Nationalism.

So, in the introduction to the book, I’m trying to think about what happens when Badu sort of breaks with the script. What she’s supposed to do is sing her song *Time’s a Wastin*, which is a song about young Black men becoming their best selves. But Badu over and over again, as the music starts playing in the background, stops, asks the MC to stop the music, and delivers an extemporaneous speech about Black politics in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. I read this moment as her disrupting a scenario of Black politics that I define as the

charismatic scenario. She’s trying to stop that scene and trying to imagine what could take its place. She’s trying to imagine politics without the presence of a charismatic leader. So, I use that scene as a place to begin a meditation about what it would mean to think Black politics in the absence of an easy glorification of charismatic leadership, or to think Black politics alongside a healthy suspicion of charismatic leadership as the only viable political model.

This is why I begin the book there.

RICHARD: Let me ask you a couple of things about that event. The crowd gets a little impatient when she doesn’t live up to their expectations and, if I remember correctly, they start shouting or chanting Farrakhan’s name, inviting him on. And she responds to them.

ERICA: Well, I don’t think that their impatience is as explicit as that. By the time Badu appears, the crowd has been waiting for hours. It was a day-long rally and I do think people were experiencing exhaustion or maybe boredom. But there’s a kind of palpable awkwardness. Badu’s speech is filled with several awkward silences and pauses. Eventually she does offer the song, but then she stops it short to tell the crowd to stand up and “scream out their own damn names.”

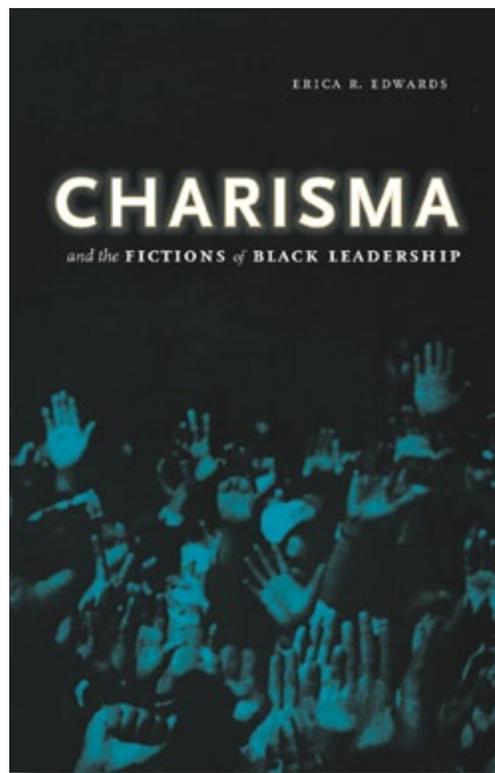
RICHARD: Right.

ERICA: I do think that part of what Badu is offering the crowd in that scene is the opportunity to think about their own role in this sort of drama of political history and in the drama of that particular present.

RICHARD: And that contrasts with the event in the epilogue with Oprah Winfrey.

ERICA: Right, right, right. In many ways that was such an interesting scene. For me, it was instructive precisely because of what was happening around the literary text, which occupies the center of my thinking in the book. So this is when Oprah appears on Obama’s campaign trail for the second time in Columbia, South Carolina, and delivers a rousing speech, quite in contrast to Badu, to something like 29,000 people by news accounts.

Winfrey uses Ernest Gaines’ *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* to anchor her campaign speech for Obama. She recalls a scene in Gaines’ novel where the character is searching for



a messiah figure who will deliver the characters from slavery. The character in the novel goes from young man to young man saying, “Are you the one? Are you the one?” She uses that refrain from the novel to ask the same question of Obama, “Are you the one? Are you the one?” I believe she says something like, “Ladies and Gentlemen, I do believe that he’s the one,” and then she introduces Obama. That use of a messianic message around Black leadership in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* that – quite in contrast to the other novels that I talk about throughout the book – predicts and packages in a way that Winfrey – by now, a trusted reader of American literature through Oprah’s book club – calls upon to authorize her endorsement of Obama.

I use that scene as a way of thinking about what Obama means for contemporary Black politics and the history of Black charismatic leadership, for example, how his campaign mobilized certain kinds of performative expectations for Black leadership that we could see routed through a genealogy that begins with someone like Frederick Douglass and goes through someone like Martin Luther King, Jr. But I was also thinking about the ways in which his particular perfusion of electoral politics with the charismatic performance allows us to see a particular kind of shift in American power that I think is important to talk about. In that whole scene of major historical transformations around how we think about Black leadership, Black masculinity, and Black politics, the literary text had an almost uncanny role in authorizing Winfrey’s endorsement, which was a major win for the Obama campaign.

RICHARD: Right. Although, she uses fiction in that role, your emphasis in the book is the role of fiction as a form of contestation of that charismatic scenario.

ERICA: Exactly.

RICHARD: You did a wonderful job of framing this. Just to be precise, could you summarize, what *are* the fictions of Black leadership?

ERICA: I use fiction in a double sense throughout the book to refer to the ways in which Black charismatic leadership is not exactly a natural occurrence or phenomenon, but rather, is constructed in the U.S. political cultural imaginary throughout the long 20th century and, I argue, from Reconstruction to the present. I use the word fiction deliberately to refer to the structure of Black leadership as it is enacted, performed, imagined, and circulated in cultural texts like the television news or the newspaper.

I’m also, though, really interested in narrative fiction, i.e., the novel, and the ways that novels – particularly throughout the African American literary tradition – have re-imagined

Black politics or have mobilized literary texts to interrogate the centrality of charisma in the Black political imagination. What I argue is that authors such as W.E.B. Du Bois, George Schuyler, Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, and a few others, have often been preoccupied by the problems that arise with the centralization of charisma as the only viable political model for African Americans’ social movements or political organizations. I tried to think about why it is that – really since the 1930s – we have seen African American authors over and over again return to the question of why charismatic leadership has occupied such a central place in Black political imaginary and what would happen if it were not accorded such a central place? For example, 1996’s *The White Boy Shuffle* by Paul Beatty begins with the protagonist declaring himself the last African American leader, saying something to the effect of, he has come to fill the perennial void in Black leadership.

The discourse of the leadership void, the idea that African Americans are always deficient in leadership, particularly since King’s death, had, by the ‘90s, become so widely available that it could be easily parodied by a novel like *The White Boy Shuffle*. And, actually, I would argue that discourse has deeper roots in a longer 20th century history of imagining the need for Black political leadership in the form of a singular charismatic male leader.

RICHARD: Leadership Studies readers will relate to what you just mentioned in terms of the emphasis of the “great man theory” of leadership where we can’t move forward until the great one appears and offers us the leadership that we need. You do a wonderful job of explaining that fiction of the need of a singular charismatic person to promote collective improvement and collective wellbeing. But, you go a step further in your discussion of charisma. You refer, of course, to Weber and the construction of authority, but then you talk about charisma as a discursive and performative régime. I’m hoping you can expand on your point that charisma functions culturally through three primary forms of rhetorical and material violence – social, historical, and epistemological. This takes us way beyond the ordinary concerns of leader-follower relationships and the impact of charismatic leadership on that. Could you tell us what you mean by the social, historical, and epistemological violence that charisma sometimes entails?

ERICA: Sure. Part of my goal in the book is to think seriously about charisma, following Max Weber’s account of authority, but also trying to think beyond the definition of charisma as simply a structure of authority. It seemed important for me as a cultural literary theorist to really think seriously about the role of cultural production and textuality in giving us what we think we know about authority or leadership, or the need for authority and leadership.

And so, I work with a concept in performance studies introduced by Diana Taylor, the concept of “this scenario”, which is – as Taylor describes it – a kind of movable set of prescriptions for social actors in historical scenes or a kind of sketch that determines, in broad outlines, what social actors are supposed to do in any given setup or moment. I try to think about the kind of scene that we know about Black leadership, for example, the leader being called by a force outside of himself, a burning bush experience, or something like Martin Luther King’s kitchen table conversion. Then, eventually, the scene of Black leadership that often revolves around spectacular oratory as a sort of Weberian proof of charisma. I try to think about that scenario as following Taylor’s idea of a movable set of prescriptions for the body, for expressing public feeling or affect, that move through a number of historical moments or political performances like the ones that I discuss in the bookends to my book – Badu and Winfrey – and that also move in and out of various kinds of texts, particularly for me, literary texts.

In doing that, in studying the formation of the charismatic scenario as it weaves in and out of texts over the course of the 20th century, I notice that for African American authors, the preoccupation with the charismatic scenario has been on its problems or violences. I think about those violences in three primary forms, as you pointed out. One is sort of social violence of imagining political mobilization as a top-down structure that depends upon, as you said, the great man or leader as a kind of demigod or a mini god. In that case, I follow previous studies of leadership and authoritarianism in critiquing the charismatic scenario as a failure of democracy or as a disruption of or suspension of democratic principles. Throughout the book, I maintain a political affiliation with a kind of radical, democratic process perhaps best characterized for me by someone like Ella Baker, who is well-known in African American studies for shifting the focus in civil rights media from leader-centered groups to group-centered leaders and for making the statement that strong people don’t need leaders. So, really trying to think about and think in-line with grassroots activists about the problems that leadership presents to radical, democratic collectivity.

The second violence is a kind of historiographical violence, which – in perhaps a similar fashion – narrates history as the product of gifted charismatic men rather than as a dynamic process involving leaders – who we may see as charismatic – but also involving a number of other historical processes, actors, and collectivities that often get occluded in stories of dazzling charismatic leadership. To go back to my previous example, I was trying to think about activists like Ella Baker and other activists in the Mississippi movement, for one example, as often being forgotten in Civil Rights historiography. But I was also trying to think about how it was

that these stories of what the historian John Dittmer called Local People had, by the time I wrote this book, become incredibly well known in historical scholarship thanks to many of the innovations in social history since the 1960s. When I wrote this book we knew quite well – those of us who study the history of Civil Rights or the history of Black power – the histories of everyday people making change. These had become known to us and are becoming more and more known to us as the years go by. I started the dissertation that preceded this book in the early 2000s and I remember finishing the dissertation around the time when the American public was mourning Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King, and thinking about how those historical commemorations were putting in motion and narrating a different history of Civil Rights than the one that was becoming more and more familiar to me in the scholarship of social history.

In public commemorations, in television shows, in biopics, and in other more publicly available and knowable genres, the history of Black politics has been narrated throughout the 20th and early 21st century as a succession of charismatic movements, or charismatic leaders that move from Douglas to Garvey to King, and sometimes King and Malcolm X to Obama, as a neatly sealed history of Black politics that often forgets about the kind of everyday process of making historical change at the local or grassroots levels. So, really trying to think about how authors in my book ask us to remember the forgotten historical actors and to think about the process of history itself as riddled with silences and violences.

RICHARD: That’s another dimension of your study, the depths with which you know the historical and social interpretation of the Civil Rights Movement. Clayborne Carson described the Civil Rights Movement as a thousand struggles for liberation that took place not only interpersonally and interracially, but also intrapersonally and racially. Another characteristic of your book is that it is not only extremely well-researched but elegant in style. You have the wonderful phrase, “gendered infrastructure” which refers to the hidden and lost dimension of the role of a Black woman in the Civil Rights Movement.

That takes us to the third form of violence, which, when I read this I thought, “Whoa, this is going to be interesting.”

ERICA: It has to do with precisely what you just mentioned, this problem of gender. As we have come to be familiar with the fiction of charismatic leadership over the course of the 20th century, what I argue is that we have come to know leadership as a product of gifted, charismatic men, which means that the very way in which we come to know Black politics is structured in epistemological violence around gender. I tried to think about the problem of gender in epistemological terms, that is, as a kind of problem for knowledge production. For example, in a

novel like Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, which retells the story of Exodus from the Bible in the language of the Black vernacular, I think about how the novel tries to approach Black politics through a suspension of what we think we know about Moses, how we have come to know Moses as a mythical character that functions as an analogy for the Black leader, and how the novel tries to imagine Black politics as a violent structure that suppresses women's subjectivity, women's place in politics, and women's very capacity to imagine radical change. Her novel is largely about the character of Moses' sister, Miriam, who gets buried underneath Moses' story. So, I tried to think about how it is that we come to know Black politics as a product of gender hierarchy and also how it is that the sort of novels that I read helps us to unknow Black politics and to re-know it. That is, how they help us to rethink Black politics through a gendered infrastructure of resistance that often, historically, has centered women's political action in the process of historical change. Building on the scholarship of Belinda Robnett – who argued that women often functioned as bridge leaders, essential community builders and, for her, within the civil rights movement – I try to think about the ways that these novels help us know what social historians often already know about Black political and Black social movements, that is that women often have played a far greater role than the popular narratives of charismatic leadership are willing to allow.

RICHARD: Yeah. You have this very elegant summary of the violence of charismatic leadership, which I think summarizes – for those of us in the leadership field – a much broader concern about the great man theory. You describe it as romanticized, paternalistic, and hetero masculine, which invites one to really consider the many, many dimensions of that lingering emphasis within leadership studies.

You mentioned several times your use of literary works of fiction as your data and how these texts express this charismatic contestation over time. You talked about the books that you read and clearly, you enjoyed some more than others. There's this frank admission of 200 monotonous pages....

ERICA: [Chuckles] Yes.

RICHARD: You also use film, specifically the film *Barbershop*, to explain humor as parody as part of this charismatic contestation. Would you talk a little bit about the humor and parody that you find in *Barbershop* and how that relates to the central theme of the book?

ERICA: Sure. So, it's interesting. Many will probably remember that when the film *Barbershop* came out in 2002, it was released to no small controversy when one of the characters in the film made some jokes about Civil Rights

leaders. I think the joke was, if I'm remembering correctly, that Martin Luther King was a ho, referring to his alleged sexual affairs. Or, I think more people took offense to how the film joked about Rosa Parks, that is, Rosa Parks didn't do nothing but sit her Black ass down. And so, what was interesting was that the discourse about the dethroning of Civil Rights icons in the film was played out publicly as a public clash of Black leadership. The NAACP called for a boycott of the film. Jessie Jackson and Al Sharpton had things to say about the film. Interestingly, in the film itself, the same character, when he's warned that Jessie Jackson isn't going to like what he's saying, he says, "Man, fuck Jessie Jackson."

There's a kind of self-conscious joking about Black leadership as a sacred, protected preserve in the film that leaves it open to criticism by public audiences. What I'm really interested in within that chapter is why we saw a number of humorous pokes at Black leadership emerge over the course of the early 21st century and really beginning in the late 20th century. We could go back to something like Chris Rock's standup comedy film that aired on HBO, I think it was in *Bring the Pain*, where he said we had Malcolm and Martin, and ever since then we've had a bunch of substitute teachers.

So, I'm trying to think about the way the discourse of the leadership void that emerged in the years following Civil Rights. This is when public understandings of Black politics reminded us that we didn't have any more strong Black leaders. That was particularly the case after Jessie Jackson's run for the presidency in the '80s. Once that discourse of the leadership void solidified it became available to comic artists, both in print and on stage, and also in film as something to be made fun of. So, the argument in that chapter is what could a comic text like *Barbershop*, what could parody or satire, do to shift, again, what we think we know about Black politics? How are comical texts interested in dethroning or desacralizing icons that, since the 1960s, have become more and more untouchable, particularly as the discourse of the leadership void solidified?

RICHARD: You contrast your methods in this book with the ordinary methods of leadership studies, the social scientific approaches, and you talk about the historical and the sociological, political science, and social psychological. Your book is different in that regard, but different also in that the context is politics rather than corporate or business, which brings very dramatic new insights. You bring a deep, deep theoretical framework to your analysis. You write of your method that it's a Black feminist critique informed by, but not at home, within ethnic studies, literary and cultural studies, sociology, political science, religious studies, Marxist studies, and performance theory. That gives an indication of the different disciplines that you borrow from, but yet, they're not all comfortable with each other's perspective. As a Ph.D.

student writing a dissertation, what kind of fights did you have with your committee?

ERICA: [Laughs] Yes. I had a really supportive and brilliant committee that pushed me to think expansively about political theory and where it could go, but also, trusted me as a literary and cultural theorist. What was interesting to me about this process of shaping my methodology for the book is that I was inspired by political scientists who had tried to grapple with the intersection of Black electoral politics and radical social movements, which is, I think, in many ways the kind of nexus that those of us who work on Black politics always have to negotiate or grapple with – that kind of connection or sometimes disconnection between the radical impulses of social movement and the ways that electrical politics sometimes compromises those aims. Thinking with people like Ron Walters, Robert Smith, Joy James, Michael Dalton, Cathy Cohen, and perhaps most centrally for me, Cedric Robinson, I was really interested in what political science as a discipline has taught us not just about the history of Black politics, but about how it is that we come to know that history.

In some ways, I do try to move beyond political science's disciplinary interest in Black politics, particularly in terms of moving beyond quantitative analysis, but, I'm also interested in placing my interrogation of Black politics in conversation with sociology, which has been – it seems to me – a real home for leadership studies and religious studies. Often, many of the discussions about charismatic Black politics have occurred in religious studies. I'm thinking of something like Eddie Glaude's work, which has been really important to my own. I'm also trying to think expansively about my project as an extension of a Black feminist project that has always been interested in the ways in which the disciplinary structures of Black politics – not just in the academy, but also in the public realm – have often marginalized or silenced Black women activists and thinkers. I've tried to think expansively about a theoretical framework that could be capacious enough to tackle some of the problems that I'm trying to get at in the book around authority, around social organization, around gender expression. To try to get at all of these complex topics while also thinking seriously about textuality meant that there was no single disciplinary methodology that could express the central preoccupation of this project. I don't know if that answers the question.

RICHARD: It does. You're using some disciplines, but also trying to go beyond them. That provides a segue to your use of [Jacques Derrida's] hauntology. When I first read it I was sure you had made that word up. I pulled up my *Webster's Dictionary* and it wasn't there. I had to go to Wikipedia to find it, and then later on in the book, you discuss it. It's indicative of your reading many different sources and your ability to use

concepts with ease. Could you just describe that term and why it's so central to your analyses?

ERICA: What was really interesting to me as I studied Black charismatic leadership as a cultural formation was that it often expressed itself as lack, or as a kind of absence. There's this amazing moment for me when I was reading the documents of the United Negro Improvement Association, or the UNIA, which functioned with or alongside Marcus Garvey's leadership. I got to the period in which Garvey was detained in a penitentiary in Atlanta and I was trying to study how the organization understood Garvey's absence and then how it understood itself in Garvey's absence. There's this great moment in which they are acting out Garvey's absence as the absolute instantiation of the greatness of his leadership. There's a mass event where one speaker stands on the stage and gazes on Garvey's empty robe, which is positioned in a chair, I think, next to him, and he says something along the lines of, "when I gaze upon the robe, it carries my mind back to when I first entered this glorious organization." Then in the parade, which I think was the next day, there's a car carrying a placard of Garvey's face and the empty robe is also traveling in the motorcade. What happens in that moment is that Garvey's absence does what his presence can't even do, which is communicate a grandness that is beyond a material body.

There are a few moments like that where I was forced to think about these absent presences in the history of Black leadership and this took me to the Derridian concept of hauntology. I was trying to think with post-structuralist theory about the way that we come to know things, not only through what is present, but also through what is absent. Thinking about what is not with us allowed me to go on and think about Civil Rights imaginary or Civil Rights memory as similarly structured in hauntology. In the wake of the 1960s, the Black leader could never actually exist in the present, I argue, except as a specter. Black leadership was expressed as the leaders we once had and lost, or the leaders that were yet to come. There was never any sense that leadership could have a place in the present.

In a lot of ways, we saw this iteration of leadership as messianic absence play out in the wake of Obama's election. Up until the election, Obama could be anything that one wanted him to be.

RICHARD: Right.

ERICA: But there's a way in which the very structure of messianic leadership means that the kind of desire or the kind of erotic relationship one has with the leader dissolves once he or she actually exists in the present. Leadership, for me – as I study the history of Black politics as it's imagined – has always been about a deferred erotic longing that never actually

instantiates in the presence of a leader, but only instantiates in the leader's absence, either through his passing on or his yet to come. We could say, then, that Black charismatic leadership is structured by haunting or is structured as hauntology.

RICHARD: You just did a wonderful job of illustrating the gems that people can find in this work. Rigorous scholarship. New insights. It's just wonderful. Previously, when you were talking about some of the disciplines that you borrowed from, you talked about political scientists and you gave us a number of works with which most leadership scholars are not familiar. My one fear for your work is that it won't reach the wide audience that I think it deserves. I want to emphasize that, as much as your work is grounded and exhaustive in the fiction of Black novelists and film, it is generalizable as well. For example, you talk about the African American charismatic scenario as a public archive for widely held beliefs about authority and identity. In this sense, your work becomes one instance of contestation of charismatic leadership drawn from the African American community, but widely applicable. And when you talk about the politics of curiosity replacing the politics of charisma, I think, "Damn, I hope this isn't overlooked as being just for African Americans." It is universal.

ERICA: Yes, I appreciate that concern. I think part of what was difficult for me, what I found challenging as I started doing research about charisma, was that in looking at the work of scholars who wrote about charisma – from Weber on down the line – I couldn't find the kind of specificity that I found necessary to think critically about the African American case. So, it seemed important to me to not think only in specific terms about the kind of socio-historical context in which Black leadership in the United States becomes, in many ways, almost equated with African American identity. It was important to think specifically about how that came to be the case, but it was also important to think about what it means to specify the study of charisma in particular historical cases that reach beyond the ones that we know.

I don't want to deny the generalizability of my argument, but I did want to make a specific intervention in charisma studies that was about particularity and specificity. I would like to hope that the work that I do in the book is available to a larger set of questions about leadership, race, gender, and cultural production, literary text, and political performance. I always hoped that the book would speak to an audience outside of African American studies, but that it would also fill a major gap in African American studies about not only how we think about Black politics, but about how we write about it in our work.

RICHARD: That's an admirable ending to our conversation – the dual purpose that you had for the book. I would have to say that you were tremendously successful in that regard. You pull

it off. Everyone within the field of leadership studies should read this book because of the contributions that it makes to what they know and the way it will stretch their knowledge and make them question what they think they know.

ERICA: I really appreciate that.

RICHARD: Is there anything I omitted? Is there anything you would like to add?

ERICA: I don't think so. I think we pretty much covered it. I really appreciated the conversation. It was great to think more about the kind of connection that my work could have with leadership studies. I appreciate your rigorous attention to the book.

RICHARD: It was a pleasure. I haven't read a book with as much excitement in quite a while. It's really a first rate piece of scholarship. Congratulations.

ERICA: Thank you so, so much.

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