ALSO BY REBECCA TRAISTER

All the Single Ladies:
Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation

Big Girls Don't Cry:
The Election That Changed Everything for American Women

GOOD AND MAD

THE REVOLUTIONARY POWER OF WOMEN'S ANGER

REBECCA TRAISTER

SIMON & SCHUSTER

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY NEW DELHI

CHAPTER TWO

THE CIRCLE OF ENTRAPMENT: THE HEAVY PRICE OF RAGE

Back in 2008, when Hillary Clinton first ran for president, there was plenty of commentary about her voice and her aggressive, ambitious demeanor, which often got confused with each other. Her tone was understood on many levels to sound inherently villainous: whether it was when she laughed—routinely referred to in the press as her "cackle"—or when she spoke loudly, it was heard to match what was largely believed to be her unnerving ambition. Back then, *Washington Post* reporter Joel Achenbach fantasized about the good old days of the brank's bridle, writing that Clinton "needs a radio-controlled shock collar so that aides can zap her when she starts to get screechy."[19]

In 2008, the reaction to Clinton was in part about the sheer novelty of hearing a woman's voice register on a presidential campaign trail, and her volume and pitch stood out especially against that of her opponent Barack Obama, who, for reasons relating to his own historic identity and firstness, could not afford to raise *his* voice in anger, and whose calm tone and oratorical gifts proved a stark contrast to Clinton's. During Obama's administration, Clinton would continue to be caricatured as threatening and angry, with the *Washington Post*'s Dana Milbank and Chris Cillizza joking that if she'd ever attended a beer summit with the president, she'd be served "Mad Bitch" brew.[20]

The 2016 election was a different ball game. From the start, the theme of the presidential race *was* anger: Bernie Sanders was angry. Donald Trump was angry. And they talked about it directly. In 2016, after Republican South Carolina governor Nikki Haley advised voters not to listen to "the angriest voices," including Donald Trump's, on immigration, Trump told CNN, "She's right. I am angry. . . . As far as I'm concerned, anger is okay. Anger and energy is what this country needs."[21] Ten days later, Sanders took a similar approach, responding to Bill Clinton's description of him as angry. "You know what? It's true. I am angry. And the American people are angry." Four days later, Clinton herself got into the act. "A lot of people are not only worried and frustrated," she said. "They're angry. . . . I'm angry too."

But somehow Clinton couldn't persuade people that she was furious in the same way, perhaps in part because she couldn't quite get the tone of her voice right. A *Washington Post* write-up that included coverage of that speech opened with a description of how Clinton's voice "thundered through a bowling alley . . . then turned soft and thoughtful." The rest of the piece included two descriptions of Clinton as "shouting" and ended with a quote from one of Clinton's supporters who opined, "Bernie Sanders has an ability to connect in a charismatic way. It's that magnetism that she's not inherently able to transmit."

How could a candidate whose assertive expressions of anger were understood only as performative, imitative, and inauthentic *also* be heard by so many people, at the very same time, as constantly yelling at them?

After her first debate with Sanders, the *New York Times* evaluated the Vermont senator—whose everyday communication style involves finger-pointing, raised tones, and vigorous head-shaking—as having "kept his cool," while claiming that Clinton "appear[ed] tense and even angry at times"[22] and wondered if her "ferocity" wasn't "risky, given that many voters . . . already have an unfavorable opinion of her." Watergate journalist Bob Woodward opined that Clinton's challenges originated with her "style and delivery . . . she shouts. There is something unrelaxed about the way she's communicating." On his radio show, after playing a clip of Clinton

talking loudly—yes, angrily!—about standing up to the gun lobby, Sean Hannity asked, "What is likable about that? . . . Angry, bitter, screaming?"

And it wasn't just the right-wing or mainstrean press. It was the left as well. "Is she a presidential candidate or is she trying to star in the *Scream* reboot?" asked John Iadarola of the left-wing news network *The Young Turks*, arguing that what "needs to be borne in mind . . . is something can be historically true, a form of discrimination or stereotyping like women are shrill and they're nags and men have said that historically way too much . . . but that doesn't mean it's impossible for a woman . . . to speak loudly when she doesn't need to."[23] In other words, just because it's sexist doesn't mean it's not true.

It was a perfect, and perfectly maddening, circle of entrapment: a candidate who yelled too much, but who didn't express anger enough, and when she tried to express anger better, was presumed to be faking it.

"She was exactly the wrong candidate for this angry, populist moment," wrote liberal journalist Thomas Frank in his election postmortem, noting that Clinton was "an insider when the country was screaming for an outsider." Frank could see the anger of people who were screaming, and understood the moment as a furious one. Yet what Frank saw in *Clinton*, working to her detriment, was a "shrill self-righteousness, shouted from a position of high social status, that turns people away."[24] Given that her opponents were also multiple-home-owning powerful white people, one an almost three-decade veteran of Congress and one a billionaire real estate tycoon, it's hard to imagine that it was the high social status and not something qualitatively different about her shouting that struck Frank as the *really* shrill turn-off.

The irony was that while there was plenty of reasonable debate about Clinton's friendliness with banks and history of centrist compromise, her economic agenda was directly targeted at many of the populations that were angriest, *including* coal miners and those white working-class communities in the throes of the opioid epidemic. Clinton had policies on subsidized childcare and creating more economic stability for caregivers, on addressing racial and economic inequality around reproductive autonomy via abolishment of the Hyde Amendment. But she was widely understood to be bad at talking about these issues in a persuasive way, and part of that badness surely did stem from her own oratorical shortcomings. But those shortcomings might well have been exacerbated by all the ways that Clinton—and lots of public-speaking women who came before her—had been discouraged from talking loudly or too aggressively, leaving her nervous and hesitant about getting too passionate, too enflamed, too screechy or shrill or emotional or any of the other ways America hears women's voices raised in feeling. She had to walk a very thin communicative tightrope, often sounding boring and robotic, wholly unable to viscerally convey her interest in the frustrations of voters.

That the forceful expression of fury might not just be okay from (white) men but might in fact actually work to their benefit, while at the same time working *against* their female peers and competitors, is backed up by some emerging research.

The psychology professor Lisa Feldman Barrett has described in the *New York Times* a study in which her research team showed people photographs of men and women making facial expressions. They found that their subjects were more likely to assume that whatever was causing a woman's emotion was something internal, whereas whatever was provoking a man's response was something external, or as she put it, "She's a bitch, but he's just having a bad day."[25]

It's a problem that John Neffinger, a political advisor who's been coaching candidates for years, and who wrote a series of memos to Clinton during the race, trying to help her balance the ways in which she expressed herself, has been wrestling with. He and fellow researchers have reviewed studies on two general criteria in how the public evaluates candidates: strength and warmth. Going in, he explained, male candidates are presumed to have strength—a category imaginatively tied to skill, authority, capability, and economic power—and female candidates are intrinsically assumed to possess warmth—which in political terms is meant to convey affinity, fun, friendliness, and also the sense that a candidate really cares about the people they want to represent.

"When somebody manages to project a lot of strength and a lot of warmth, we say they're charismatic and magnetic, we want to be *with* that person, we want to *be* that person," said Neffinger. Those who read

talking loudly—yes, angrily!—about standing up to the gun lobby, Sean Hannity asked, "What is likable about that? . . . Angry, bitter, screaming?"

And it wasn't just the right-wing or mainstrean press. It was the left as well. "Is she a presidential candidate or is she trying to star in the *Scream* reboot?" asked John Iadarola of the left-wing news network *The Young Turks*, arguing that what "needs to be borne in mind . . . is something can be historically true, a form of discrimination or stereotyping like women are shrill and they're nags and men have said that historically way too much . . . but that doesn't mean it's impossible for a woman . . . to speak loudly when she doesn't need to."[23] In other words, just because it's sexist doesn't mean it's not true.

It was a perfect, and perfectly maddening, circle of entrapment: a candidate who yelled too much, but who didn't express anger enough, and when she tried to express anger better, was presumed to be faking it.

"She was exactly the wrong candidate for this angry, populist moment," wrote liberal journalist Thomas Frank in his election postmortem, noting that Clinton was "an insider when the country was screaming for an outsider." Frank could see the anger of people who were screaming, and understood the moment as a furious one. Yet what Frank saw in *Clinton*, working to her detriment, was a "shrill self-righteousness, shouted from a position of high social status, that turns people away."[24] Given that her opponents were also multiple-home-owning powerful white people, one an almost three-decade veteran of Congress and one a billionaire real estate tycoon, it's hard to imagine that it was the high social status and not something qualitatively different about her shouting that struck Frank as the *really* shrill turn-off.

The irony was that while there was plenty of reasonable debate about Clinton's friendliness with banks and history of centrist compromise, her economic agenda was directly targeted at many of the populations that were angriest, *including* coal miners and those white working-class communities in the throes of the opioid epidemic. Clinton had policies on subsidized childcare and creating more economic stability for caregivers, on addressing racial and economic inequality around reproductive autonomy via abolishment of the Hyde Amendment. But she was widely understood to be bad at talking about these issues in a persuasive way, and part of that badness surely did stem from her own oratorical shortcomings. But those shortcomings might well have been exacerbated by all the ways that Clinton—and lots of public-speaking women who came before her—had been discouraged from talking loudly or too aggressively, leaving her nervous and hesitant about getting too passionate, too enflamed, too screechy or shrill or emotional or any of the other ways America hears women's voices raised in feeling. She had to walk a very thin communicative tightrope, often sounding boring and robotic, wholly unable to viscerally convey her interest in the frustrations of voters.

That the forceful expression of fury might not just be okay from (white) men but might in fact actually work to their benefit, while at the same time working *against* their female peers and competitors, is backed up by some emerging research.

The psychology professor Lisa Feldman Barrett has described in the *New York Times* a study in which her research team showed people photographs of men and women making facial expressions. They found that their subjects were more likely to assume that whatever was causing a woman's emotion was something internal, whereas whatever was provoking a man's response was something external, or as she put it, "She's a bitch, but he's just having a bad day."[25]

It's a problem that John Neffinger, a political advisor who's been coaching candidates for years, and who wrote a series of memos to Clinton during the race, trying to help her balance the ways in which she expressed herself, has been wrestling with. He and fellow researchers have reviewed studies on two general criteria in how the public evaluates candidates: strength and warmth. Going in, he explained, male candidates are presumed to have strength—a category imaginatively tied to skill, authority, capability, and economic power—and female candidates are intrinsically assumed to possess warmth—which in political terms is meant to convey affinity, fun, friendliness, and also the sense that a candidate really cares about the people they want to represent.

"When somebody manages to project a lot of strength and a lot of warmth, we say they're charismatic and magnetic, we want to be *with* that person, we want to *be* that person," said Neffinger. Those who read

as having more strength than warmth are viewed as "fearsome" and those with more warmth than strength as "adorable." The question of how these qualities are valued in politicians is as old as Machiavelli's argument that it is better to be feared than loved, though best to be both. According to Neffinger, "It's really hard to find candidates who combine the two." Male candidates *can* theoretically squeak by as fearsome, especially in times of national crisis, when authoritarian male figures are generously viewed as protectors: think Rudy Giuliani after 9/11, or famously ill-tempered John McCain, revered as a war hero. They can't be wholly adorable, precisely because that means they've been feminized and are therefore taken less seriously.

For women, both poles are toxic: to be fearsome is to be vilified and unpalatable, unnatural and monstrous. To be adorable is to be unserious and incompetent. The strategic problem for women is that the work to balance both poles is delicate and precarious: As it turns out, for men, a little warmth goes a long way. For women, a little strength goes way too far.

Bernie Sanders, a disheveled grump whose style was to yell righteously but repetitively at his audiences about inequality, was able to exude charm simply by smiling at a small bird that landed on his podium during a speech. But when a woman, said Neffinger, "asserts herself in some fashion having to do with strength, she quickly slides out of the warmth category. She becomes perceived as a threat to the social order. Guys can be a little nice, without throwing out their strength. But women cannot add a little strength without losing warmth."

Those were the dynamics facing Hillary Clinton as she competed against two men who were trading on their strength—their anger—as a major selling point to the American public. To compete with them in this vein would be to invite further, compounding anxiety about the ways in which she was already upsetting the order of things simply by running against these men for the highest office in the land. And no one on her team was naive about what kind of impact these conditions had on her range of expression.

As her lead speechwriter Dan Schwerin told me in 2017, "There's a reason why male candidates can shout and are called passionate, and if a woman candidate raises her voice to whip up a crowd, she's screeching and yelling." Because his boss understood this, Schwerin said, "she's controlled, she doesn't rant and rave, she's careful. And then that's read as inauthentic; it means that she doesn't understand how upset people are, or the pain people are in, because she's not angry the way those guys are angry. So she must be okay with the status quo because she's not angry."

Clinton herself addressed her frustration with this seemingly unsolvable equation in her campaign memoir *What Happened*, barely able to contain her simmering disdain for the impossibility of the dynamics facing her as a candidate. "I've tried to adjust," she wrote. "After hearing repeatedly that some people didn't like my voice, I enlisted the help of a linguistic expert," who told her to focus on deep breathing and positivity. Clinton is drily smoldering as she explains how she was pushed to such *un*natural lengths to maintain the illusion of a naturally cheery femininity: "That way, when the crowd got energized and started shouting—as crowds at rallies tend to do—I could resist doing the normal thing, which is to shout back." Clinton told the linguistic expert that she'd try her best to comply. "But out of curiosity, can you give me an example of a woman in public life who has pulled this off successfully—who has met the energy of a crowd while keeping her voice soft and low?"

The linguistic expert could not.

MICHELLE OBAMA, THE "ANGRY BLACK WOMAN"

If Hillary Clinton had a hard time figuring out how to express complex emotions, including frustration, without being understood as threatening, her path was a walk in the park compared to that of Michelle Obama.

Michelle Robinson had grown up on Chicago's South Side, the daughter of a stay-at-home mother and a city employee. She graduated from Princeton and Harvard Law School, and met her future husband Barack Obama when she was assigned to professionally mentor him at the white-shoe Chicago law firm Sidley Austin. During the years in which the couple lived in Chicago, when Barack worked as a community organizer and law professor, and Michelle left the fancy firm to work for the city, and then

for the University of Chicago, she was considered the star of the couple: the gregarious, charismatic, funny, dynamic one. Having grown up around Chicago's corrupt political machine, she was distrustful of politics and didn't want anything to do with them. But her husband did.

Then Barack Obama became the brightest star to streak across the American political landscape in a generation, and his wife fell under national scrutiny. Her impassioned speeches, her emotive candor, her clear and informed view of American history, including her grim take on politics and her sharp sense of humor, all began, perplexingly, to work against her.

As her husband became a sensation in the Senate, she was caught by a reporter rolling her eyes and commenting, "Maybe one day he will do something to warrant all this attention"; by the time he hit the presidential campaign trail two years later, she was still affectionately complaining about his failures to make the bed or put his socks in the laundry basket; she called him "snore-y and stinky" when he woke up in the morning, and described him, memorably, as "a gifted man, but in the end, he's just a man." This quickly earned her the attention of the *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd, who worried that people heard Michelle as "emasculating" for "casting her husband . . . as an undisciplined child." Again, the critical voice of a woman was cast as maternal reproach.

This was the gentlest treatment Michelle Obama was to receive in the press during that presidential campaign.

After her husband began to win primaries and it seemed possible that he might win the Democratic nomination, Michelle gave a speech in which she said, "People in this country are ready for change and hungry for a different kind of politics. . . . For the first time in my adult life I am proud of my country because it feels like hope is finally making a comeback."

It was a positive, warm, forward-looking statement. But coming from the mouth of Michelle Obama, it was heard in some quarters as a resounding and unpatriotic affront. Conservative columnist Bill Kristol chided her for not having been grateful for America winning the Cold War, while at the *National Review*, Jim Geraghty wrote, "America hasn't been good to her? What, opportunities to go to Princeton, Harvard Law, working for top-shelf law firms and hospitals . . . that's not enough?" as if any sentiment short of fawning appreciation for the country in which she had worked hard and excelled was unthinkable.

The very act of mild critique—of a nation in which her great-great-great-grandmother had been enslaved, in which her husband was the first black man ever to come close to being nominated for the presidency, in which she was being asked to sacrifice her job and independent identity to try to move into the White House, a building constructed by slave labor—was enough to confirm a popular vision of Michelle as a worryingly angry black woman.

She appeared on the cover of the *National Review:* mouth open (of course), her eyes cutting menacingly toward the viewer, under the headline "Mrs. Grievance." The conservative columnist Michelle Malkin began referring to her as "Barack's Bitter Half." The black conservative columnist Mychal Massie wrote that Michelle "portrays herself as just another angry black harridan who spits in the face of the nation that made her rich, famous, and prestigious."

As the novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie would write of Michelle, "Because she said what she thought, and because she smiled only when she felt like smiling, and not constantly and vacuously, America's cheapest caricature was cast on her: the Angry Black Woman. Women, in general, are not permitted anger—but for black American women, there is an added expectation of interminable gratitude, the closer to groveling the better, as though their citizenship is a phenomenon that they cannot take for granted."

Medusa-Michelle memes proliferated on the internet. The already incorrect description of Michelle as angry transformed into her being militant. Juan Williams, then an NPR commentator, called Michelle Obama "Stokely Carmichael in a designer dress," connecting her to the civil rights leader who had in the 1960s transitioned from nonviolent organizing to the more militant approach he described as "black power." In *Slate*, the former left journalist turned neo-con Christopher Hitchens published a breathtakingly dishonest attempt to connect Michelle's undergraduate thesis at Princeton—which had been about the experience of being black at Princeton—to the black power movement, claiming inaccurately that twenty-one-year-old Michelle said she had been "much influenced" by

Carmichael, who in turn Hitchens connected to Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. Fox News went further, asking if the fist bump, or dap, that Michelle had shared with her husband on the night he'd clinched the Democratic nomination was in fact a "terrorist fist jab." A *New Yorker* cover parodied the panic over Michelle's perceived militancy—and memorialized the view of her angry black femininity—with a Barry Blitt cartoon portraying her in a 70s-style Afro, carrying a machine gun. The illustration was called *The Politics of Fear*.

By the time her husband was accepting the nomination in Denver, Michelle's public persona had been remade: she talked about clothes and pantyhose, not about politics or the nation, and not with any critical inflection about her spouse. At the convention, she was framed (accurately!) as a devoted wife and mother, a little girl who'd loved the Brady Bunch, but as nothing else. In her own speech, she carefully expressed her love of country and gratitude for the chances it had afforded her. Michelle had been effectively muzzled, any querulousness tamped down. She'd never actually expressed true anger on the trail, but the very act of having opened her mouth in a free and frank way had so quickly been heard as rancor that her opinions and her open mouth, and anything that could be heard as frustration or complaint, had had to go.

Before she left the White House, in an interview with Oprah Winfrey, Michelle would say of that period, of being cast as "that angry black woman," "Dag, you don't even *know* me, you know? . . . Where'd that come from?"[26] More than a year later, Michelle—speaking at a gathering of black women in Florida—would speak even more frankly to former White House advisor Valerie Jarrett of this process, explaining that early on, "I looked at one of my speeches and I saw that what was animation and passion to me, could easily be turned into sound bites of anger and aggression." At that point, she said, "I was like, *oh, this is a game*. It's a game. And what was I thinking? I thought this was real, but it was a game too. And I wasn't playing the game, I was just being passionate because I thought that's what people wanted . . . But they don't know what they really want. So I had to learn how to deliver"—and here, she pasted a big smile on her face, and offered a shake of her hair—"a *message*."[27]

Writing at the start of her 1940 memoir, the civil rights and suffrage activist Mary Church Terrell described her story as one about "A colored woman living in a white world. It cannot possibly be like a story written by a white woman. A white woman has only one handicap to overcome—that of sex. I have two—both sex and race. I belong to the only group in this country which has two such huge obstacles to surmount. Colored men have only one—that of race." Terrell's is what the Rutgers women and gender studies professor Brittney Cooper has called "one of the earliest articulations of the political stakes of intersectionality," a term that would be coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw nearly five decades later to describe the interlocking sets of biases faced by women of color in America. This was more than simply a doubling of bias; for the racism faced by nonwhite women is amplified and altered by sexism, and the sexism they encounter is perverted and exacerbated by racial bias.

In practice, these dynamics have long meant that black women's expressions of frustration, resistance, or even mild critique have been refracted through an American lens that has enlarged them, rendering them as some defining feature of black femininity. One crucial result of the national mythos around black women's anger, said the writer Joelle Owusu in 2018, is that as a black woman, she is regularly "perceived as the aggressor in every situation . . . Even when you are being polite and respectful during an altercation, someone will always make a remark about a black woman's 'attitude' or 'aggression.' "[28]

The problematizing of anger in black women takes many forms. There's a reflexive defensiveness against it from white women and from men, a resistance to actually reckoning with the roots of black female dissatisfaction—whether that dissatisfaction is expressed gently or furiously or perhaps merely inferred—that gets conveyed via irrational allegations of spoilt ingratitude, negativity, or instability.

"We are told we are irrational, crazy, out-of-touch, entitled, disruptive, and not team players," writes Cooper in her exploration of black feminist anger, *Eloquent Rage*. "Angry Black women are looked upon as entities to be contained, as inconvenient citizens who keep on talking about their rights while refusing to do their duty and smile at everyone."

THE RIGHTEOUS FURY OF MAXINE WATERS

In October of 2017, Maxine Waters, speaking at an event to benefit the Ali Forney Center, which supports LGBTQ homeless youth, made remarks about how moved she'd been, hearing the story of the black, homeless, trans youth advocate after whom the center had been named, noting that "with this kind of inspiration, I will go and take Trump out tonight."

Waters, a leading and vocal proponent of impeachment, was quite clearly not referring to any sort of violent action, but in the following days, conservatives pounced on her sound bite. One right-wing pundit, Lawrence Jones, said on *Fox and Friends* that, "When you incite violence, that should be investigated," expressing his concern that Waters's remark would "[send] people out to assassinate Republicans" and when challenged, reiterated that "She could have said impeachment if she wanted impeachment; she talked about essentially assassinating the president."[29] Omar Navarro, Waters's political opponent in California, tweeted, "I'm calling for the arrest of Maxine Waters."[30]

The deranged attempt to cast Waters's remarks as a murder threat didn't remain on the Fox News fringes of political coverage; it was repeated in the mainstream press, with CNN anchor Chris Cuomo asking Waters on air about her comments in ways that cast her as militaristic from the start. Cuomo observed that the conflict between the president and his critics "has become an ugly war of words" with Waters "a named combatant in this battle." Playing the clip of Waters's speech, Cuomo said, "those words have been interpreted as an attempt on the president's life." Waters called his assessment "absolutely ridiculous," noting that "nobody believes that a seventy-nine-year-old grandmother who is a congresswoman and who has been in Congress and politics for all these years [was] talking about doing any harm."[31]

But of course people *did* believe that, or were willing to, in part because rational political challenge to white male presidential authority, coming from a black woman, was such a disruption of the power structure. Cuomo's interrogation of Waters made clear that her words had violated natural assumptions about which kinds of people were permitted to deploy aggressive language, and toward whom, when he asked her if she believed that she should "have a more high level of decency in how you discuss those that you want to criticize, especially when it's the president of the United States?"

Waters understood the resonance of his analysis perfectly. "I think I have been extremely responsible in laying out the case in which this president should be impeached," she said, but "people are not accustomed to a woman, in particular an African-American woman, taking this kind of leadership. How dare *me* challenge the president of the United States?"[32]

A cult of adoration sprang up around Waters during 2017 and 2018, and millions publicly appreciated her willingness to speak in lengthy and righteously aggressive tirades about Donald Trump, to snap back and stand up for herself. Memes of Waters staring censoriously over her glasses spread across social media. A clip of Waters, insisting during her questioning of Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin that she was "reclaiming [her] time," became a viral GIF and was remixed as a gospel song. The performer of that remix was a surprise guest during Waters's interview on the daytime talk show *The View*, provoking a dizzying moment during which the show's four white and one black cohosts, along with a predominantly white studio audience, danced along to a man singing words Maxine Waters had said during a tense congressional hearing.[33]

It was kind of great, but also kind of weird, the popular celebration of the woman who became known in some quarters as "Auntie Maxine," in reference to a black familial figure who expresses her regard and affection in part by taking no shit and doling out real talk. Waters was celebrated as "righteous, furious, uncowed" in a Buzzfeed piece in which Campaign Zero cofounder and Black Lives Matter activist Brittany Packnett described Waters as "the Auntie Boss: As real as your auntie and as powerful as only a black woman could be." The mass feting of Waters, a black woman who was quoted back in 1989 saying "I have a right to my anger, and I don't want anybody telling me I shouldn't be, that it's not nice to be, and that something's wrong with me because I get angry," was surely a balm in a nation that has rarely acknowledged black female rage as beautiful, patriotic, or inspirational.

Yet Waters wasn't just signaling righteous fury, she was also incurring

the costs of that fury, costs that many of those deploying her side-eye GIFs and memes had never incurred through all the many years in which Waters had stood against the tide and been vilified for it.

It's true that Waters had been the subject of a long-running ethics investigation on charges that she helped a bank in which her husband held stock (she was cleared of wrongdoing and one of her top aides was reprimanded). But before and after that investigation, she was treated as a sideshow, and with often virulent racism by her political detractors. In 2012, after she'd torn into Republican leaders Eric Cantor and John Boehner, calling them "demons," Fox News anchor Eric Bolling advised her, "Congresswoman, you saw what happened to Whitney Houston. . . . Step away from the crack pipe." In 2017, Bill O'Reilly responded to a clip of one of Waters's speeches excoriating Trump by claiming that he hadn't heard a word of it, having been too distracted by her "James Brown wig."[34]

But it's not just her political opponents who have fallen in line with the vilification of black female anger. In the summer of 2018, as fury on the left built, partly in response to the Trump administration's zero tolerance policy regarding refugee seekers at the Mexican border, their separation of at least three thousand young children from their parents, and the expansion of family internment camps meant to house asylum seekers indefinitely, angry protesters began interrupting the meals and movie nights of Trump administration officials; one restaurant owner in Virginia refused to serve Trump press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders. Maxine Waters was one of the only Democratic politicians to meet this rising tide of politically meaningful and valid rage with respect, acknowledgment, and encouragement.

In a speech in California, she urged those who were furious to "show up wherever we have to show up," suggesting that "if you see anybody from that Cabinet in a restaurant, in a department store, at a gasoline station, you get out and you create a crowd and you push back on them and you tell them they're not welcome anymore, anywhere." Waters was not advocating violence; she was calling for assembly and pushback. It was in line with her history as a representative of disempowered populations; she was hearing and channeling the exertions of the furiously oppressed against the oppressors.

But when Waters applied her view of the role of insurrectionist protest in 2018, members of her *own party* stepped in to censure her. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer advised that "no one should call for the harassment of political opponents," chastising Waters's suggestion as "not American." (It was of course deeply American, a tradition stretching back to the Revolution.) Nancy Pelosi also chimed in, claiming, "Trump's daily lack of civility has provoked responses that are predictable but unacceptable." Horrifyingly, neither Democratic leader bothered to defend Waters against the implicit threat sent in a tweet by the president, where he called Waters "an extraordinarily low IQ person" and falsely accused her of advocating "harm to [his] supporters," concluding with the grim warning, "Be careful what you wish for Max!"

To publicly rebuke a black woman's support for political protest but not the powerful white patriarch's thinly veiled call to violence against her was to play on the very same impulses that Trump and the white patriarchal party that supported him played on: racist and sexist anxiety about noncompliant women and nonwhites, and the drive to punish them. That her own colleagues would cast Waters as too much, as too combative and fearsome, while letting the threat made against her by the most powerful of white men go unremarked upon, was a goddamn travesty. Especially given the decades of work Waters had done to recognize and address the potentially consequential fury of underrepresented and disempowered populations on behalf of whom her party is supposed to advocate, and the way in which her exertions are a service to those yearning to have their fury heard and seen and acknowledged as valid.

Alicia Garza recalled to me how Waters had gained early prominence "fighting to make visible" the case of Eula Love, a poor black woman shot and killed by police in her district after a dispute over a gas bill in 1979.[35] Describing the news coverage of the event, Garza said, "Maxine was certainly angry. And she was portrayed as absolutely batshit crazy. She was portrayed as not credible. And she kept going."

These days, Garza said, "everybody is all 'Auntie Maxine, you go girl!' But this has been her *career*. She has always used anger in the service of a higher purpose." Garza pointed out how black women's anger can get fetishized, yet never really taken to heart. "So we can love Maxine reclaiming her time, but do we love what she is saying about the conditions that

black people are living in? We get to ignore that in a way by taking on this trope of the angry black woman as someone who is performing for us, as opposed to taking on the substance of what she's talking about."

It also matters that enthusiasm for Waters has ballooned in a period when her party wields no power: Republicans haven't had as big a majority in the House since the 1920s. Waters may talk directly about the desire to impeach a president—a desire she's channeling for millions of Americans—but she has no power to do so. It's far easier to admire the spitting fury of a woman when she poses absolutely no political threat, a phenomenon that is also observably true about the adoring memes around nonblack women including Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Hillary Clinton When She's Not a Candidate, but that sheds light onto how the sometimes appreciative treatment of certain Angry Black Women in fact reflects their relative powerlessness.

Ginsburg, whose fiery dissents have become the stuff of internet legend, and who has become known on the internet as the Notorious RBG, is in the minority of the Supreme Court. The pleasures of celebrating her toughness stem in part from her actual physical stature: she is a short, thin, octogenarian who has twice had cancer; the whole punch line of admiration for her is in part rooted in the improbability of her threat; she's like a little doll of female anger who we can all cheer for, even as she is outvoted again and again and again. It's extremely difficult to imagine the same kind of tattoo-inspiring admiration for her angry opinions if those opinions were actually reshaping the law.

As for Clinton, she was perhaps never more lauded for her aggressiveness than in the years after having lost the Democratic primary to Barack Obama when she went on to work for him as his secretary of state. In those years, she was the subject of social media love; a Tumblr called "Texts from Hillary" was built around an image of her looking like a badass in sunglasses, sending savage messages to other powerful people. But this was in an era when she was widely celebrated for having been a team player, subsidiary to her former political rival. As soon as she again became a candidate for president, the fact of her individual power and the threat it posed to her male competitors was recalled, and the mass affection for that tough and righteously censorious version of Hillary was extinguished almost instantly.

These provisos on a celebration of female fortitude—that they take place almost exclusively around women who do not pose an imminent threat to power—must be acknowledged when considering the ways in which black women's anger can get fetishized and celebrated. In some ways, the cultural caricature of neck-snapping, side-eye-casting black female censure becomes easily embraceable precisely *because* it is disconnected from real political, economic, or social power, because its relationship to the threat of actual disruption of white male authority can be understood as inherently comical. Black women's relative distance, from both white supremacy and patriarchal advantage, makes it easier, in some ways, to applaud their toughness, precisely because it is so far removed from being a true threat to white male domination.

And when it *does* threaten a white man? John Neffinger pointed to the treatment of Kamala Harris, whose sharp prosecutorial interrogations knocked Attorney General Jeff Sessions off his game in 2017, bringing the punitive force of white patriarchy on her head. "When Kamala took Jeff Sessions apart," he said, "it immediately became a Republican talking point, and they pushed the narrative that she was hysterical. Now, you watch that interaction and my god, she's the furthest thing from hysterical. But they knew that to discredit her, that's where they had to go, that that's how you undermine a cool customer and threateningly competent woman like Kamala Harris. You cast her as an Angry Black Woman."

As with Waters, some on Harris's side quickly took up the video as a meme, cheering her as a you-go-girl rebuke to Sessions's assumptions of white male authority. But the popularity of the Angry Black Women cartoon also leaves these women doing a lot of the work of expressing anger that white women feel, but are discouraged, in different ways, from expressing themselves. This is crucial to an online social media phenomenon that has been dubbed "digital blackface," a practice whereby white and other nonblack users turn to GIFs of black people expressing the emotions they wish to convey.

For example, among the most popular means of conveying women's cutting feminist rage at men in digital shorthand is to post a GIF of the actress Angela Bassett taken from a scene in the 1995 film *Waiting to Exhale*, a scene in which Bassett's character, angry at her husband for leaving her

for a white mistress, puts all his clothes and belongings in a car and sets it on fire. When people on the internet are anxious to express suspicion or the feeling of seeing through some bullshit, it's to the side-eye of black women—from actress Viola Davis to pop star Rihanna to civil rights hero Dorothy Height staring at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., during his 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech—that they often turn to do the work of expressing their anger for them.

"We're your sass, your nonchalance, your fury, your delight, your annoyance . . . " the writer Lauren Michele Jackson told journalist Amanda Hess, who argued that "on the internet, white people outsource their emotional labor to black people."[36] When so much social opprobrium is directed at women for expressing anger toward the white men to whom white women are likely to be more proximate, many white women rely on black women, expected to be angry as a default setting, to perform the emotion in their stead.

These are the dynamics that the black feminist Audre Lorde details in her famous 1981 address to the National Women's Studies Association, "The Uses of Anger," when she describes reading from her work, "A Poem for Women in Rage" and having a white woman approach her to ask, "Are you going to do anything with how we can deal directly with *our* anger? I feel it's so important." Lorde asks her how she uses her rage, and then has to turn away "from the blank look in her eyes." "I do not exist," Lorde writes, "to feel her anger for her."[37]

These relationships have long been in play politically. For generations, black women have been asked to do the work of opposing the rise of the right wing—as the most reliable Democratic voting bloc, as some of the most vocally furious women in Congress, as the backbone of organizing, activism, and political and civic engagement in the nation—even as the Democratic Party has invested little in them as candidates, and too little in policy that would better support and protect them. Meanwhile, during the Trump administration, the political media has regularly passed them over for serious political analysis, while filling newspapers with endless deep ethnographic dives into the lives and motivations of white working-class Trump supporters.

In a crucial 2017 special election for the Alabama senate seat, 98 percent—*98 percent*—of black women voters voted for Democrat Doug Jones over the openly racist accused sexual predator Roy Moore; almost 50 percent more black women than black men voted in that election; and 63 percent of white women voted for Moore. After Alabama, there were all kinds of social media messages and op-eds "thanking" black women for "saving America," a message that implicitly suggested that black women were themselves inherently adjacent to, or marginal within, America, even in the very moment at which their centrality to deciding its representation was purportedly being acknowledged. The credit that black women received in the wake of the Alabama election, wrote political consultant Angela Peoples in the *New York Times*, is "one small step in the right direction. But we don't need thanks—we need you to get out of the way and follow our lead."[38]

MEN AND ANGELS GIVE ME PATIENCE

In the face of all of this multifaceted judgment of their fury, how are women in public and political spheres supposed to strategize around the anger that they sometimes—often—feel?

"Men and angels give me patience," Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote to Susan B. Anthony in 1852, frustrated about the impositions of motherhood and wifely duty on her ability to express her political anger through writing and speaking. "I am at the boiling point! If I do not find some day the use of my tongue on this question I shall die of an intellectual repression, a woman's rights convulsion."[39]

In 2017 came a million schemes for how to get women to express their anger in some appropriate way, something that might release them from it, but that still fell within the purview of acceptability. Magazines recommended exercise classes to women for whom "Scream ALL the expletives" was the first thing written on [their] to-do list today"[40]; Mama Gena, head of "The School of Womanly Arts," urged her devotees to "FEEL loudly . . . RAGE like an angry lioness . . . HOWL like a bitch in heat . . . cry MORE . . . SCREAM your head off."[41]

For A Bad Time, Call, "a podcast dedicated to women's anger," launched,

encouraging nonmale-identifying people to phone into a recorded line and vent their frustrations. The litanies were then stitched together into audible quilts of female ire: "I am just really, really tired of grown-ass men who have their own jobs and their own lives telling me what I should be doing with mine/I'm just so tired of women being made to feel like we're not enough in anything we do/I'm just so pissed off about having to be pissed off. It's almost the new normal to be pissed off literally all the time because bad shit is constantly happening to women." At the end of the podcast, one of the hosts reassures listeners and callers alike: "Your anger is real. Your rage is valid. And we want to hear it."

In the fall of 2016, I appeared on *Real Time with Bill Maher*. It was days after the second presidential debate, to which Donald Trump had invited the women who'd accused his opponent's husband of sexual misconduct, at which he'd loomed over Clinton, practically pawing the ground with undisguised loathing and resentment toward her. Clinton had gripped her microphone with white-knuckled control, had not confronted him nor acknowledged the bizarre malevolence of his approach; she had kept her voice steady and her manner professional. Maher was frustrated by this, suggesting to me during his panel discussion that she should "say it to his face; he's right there, say 'You're full of shit, you asshole!'"

Maher likely hadn't done the math on how risky it would have been for Clinton to have turned on Trump in anger—the ease with which any ire directed toward him would have been reframed as her having played the woman card for strategic effect, how promptly she'd have been understood as having cast herself as a victim of bullying in order to earn cheap sympathy, how she might have come off as castrating, unhinged; the satisfaction that might have been gained by her critics in having seen evidence that her opponent had gotten under her skin.

But the person who *had* done that math—in real time—was Hillary Clinton, who months later would describe that debate to me as one of the most difficult moments of the campaign, shivering with the visceral recollection of how Trump's demeanor had been "so personally invasive . . . following me, eyeing me." She said that she *did* consider, as a presidential debate was going on, whether she should turn on him and shout "Get away from me!" But she had figured that that would be playing into his hands: "He will gain points and I will lose points," she recalled thinking (she had thought right; she was widely acknowledged to have kicked the ever living shit out of Trump in that debate, even without actually kicking him). Acknowledging how tight her grip on her microphone was during the debate, Clinton told me it was an extension of the internal control she was mustering. "Think of all the times where you are either mentally or physically gripping yourself," she said. "[Willing yourself] not to respond, not to lash out, not to display the anger that you feel, because you know it will redound to your detriment. So you swallow it."

You swallow it. It's a choice made by millions of women throughout time: the decision that the best strategic approach is to take the anger you feel and stuff it way down deep. Because to let it out is going to do more damage to you than it's going to damage the person or forces you're angry at. As a woman in public life, "you can't be angry for yourself," said Clinton. "You just can't. You can be indignant, you can be annoyed, you can be frustrated, but you can't be angry."

When Barbara Lee described to me the efforts she has made, in multiple circumstances, to contain and channel her fury in ways that are productive and will not backfire on her, I asked her whether she guessed that men had any idea how much internal strategizing went on inside women's heads. She sighed. "No, they're not aware of anything, if you ask me," she said with a smile. "They can't see women differently from the way they think women are." Which is often contained, their simmering unease covered over by politesse. But, Lee maintained, the fact that men have no idea how mad women are beneath the surface "works to our advantage, because that's how we win."

Perhaps it is how we win the debates, but so far, it is not how we win the elections. And it can be maddening—in both the enraging and the crazy-making sense of the term—to come to grips with the fact that many men have no idea how rocky the terrain of anger is for women.