UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

“Dreams Eclipsed: Culture and Warfare in Black Los Angeles”

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

by

Aundrey Maurice Jones

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2021

The Dissertation of Aundrey Maurice Jones is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2021

DEDICATION

In memory of my father, Vincent Maurice Jones.

May 18, 1952 – April 27, 2004

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بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

Bismillah Ir-Rahman Ir-Rahim. In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Entirely Beneficent.

This dissertation was written entirely at the mercy and will of Allah, may He be praised and exalted. For those who may see goodness in my work, know that I am only the recipient of goodness and that all praise and thanks are due to Allah, the exalted. All mistakes and shortcomings found in this work are my own, for which I take full ownership and responsibility. For that I ask Allah for strength and forgiveness.

Completing a dissertation is no easy task, and I could not have finished this masterpiece of imperfection without the aid of the many friends, colleagues, mentors, advisors, students, community members, and family who have never failed to believe in me even when I chose not to believe in myself. The completion of this work has been supported by UC San Diego's Black Studies Project (BSP) and the Institute for Arts and Humanities (IAH). Both have provided short-term funding for me to make the necessary strides in initiating the early stages of my research. Because most of my research and writing was done while teaching at the various colleges and universities across San Diego county, I owe much to the various students that I have had the pleasure of having in my classroom over the past few years. As a teacher, I know that my students are my teachers just as much as I am theirs. I am indebted to the radical task of knowledge building and exchange, and I cannot be more proud of the brilliant young and momentous minds that I have had the privilege to come across during my time in San Diego. To my students, current and former, whom I have shared great time and space with, know that I stay truly inspired by you all. This dissertation would not have materialized had it not been for you. You know who you are.

Upon my entry into graduate school, I knew it would have been easier to leave than to stay. Despite its struggle, I was able to form a family that would not only last me through my years as a graduate students but would be integral to my outlook on life both inside and outside of the academy. My special thanks go especially to Jorge Mariscal (el profe), Jeff Gagnon, Niall Twohig, Fnann Keflezighi, Mychal Odom, Martin Boston, Robert Xach Williams, Carlton Floyd, Rafiki Jenkins, and Cynthia Vasquez. These folks have had the terrain mapped out much before I even stepped foot on campus. They have kept me sane during my times of insanity, have served as voices of reason, and have looked out for me as one of their own. They all have given me advice on how to navigate this isolating world, how to establish myself as the intellectual I am and hope to be and have encouraged me to do the work that propels me the most. All of these individuals have continuously seen something in me that I honestly still do not see in myself to this day. Between sharing ideas, laughs, annoyances, advice, and everything that makes us human, these folks have constantly reminded me of the importance of my own humanness. These reminders are so subtle, but so substantial.

In addition, I owe so much gratitude to Maisam Alomar, Cristina Visperas, Jason Perez, Kai Small, Sal Zarate, Vineeta Singh, Jorge Ramirez, Cesar “Che” Rodriguez, Ren-Yo Hwang, Marlen Rios, Tyrone Palmer, Steven Osuna, and Yessica Garcia-Hernandez. I have shared conference panels, living spaces, seminar spaces, café tables, and car rides with them. In these various spaces, I have learned so much and have often wondered if I could ever be as smart as them. Now you are all established and respected scholars in their respective fields. These brilliant and compassionate minds have generously offered advice, read my work in its various stages, bombarded my inbox of different fellowships and job opportunities for me to apply to, and have offered their precious time and brain capacities to helping me succeed.

My special and wholehearted thanks also goes to Professor Wendy Matsumura, whose mentorship has been among the most sincere and kind of them all. Your humility and rigor are emblematic of the kind of scholar and human I hope to become at some point in my life. I also want to thank my mentors that have been with me since my undergraduate years at UC Riverside, particularly Professors Dylan Rodriguez, Erica Edwards, Vorris Nunley, Jodi Kim, and Amalia Cabezas. Some of my favorite intellectuals ever. I really do respect and admire you all.

A very special thanks goes to Michelle Welsing, Yusef Omowale, and Damien Sojoyner at the Southern California Library in South Los Angeles. You provide the best space for anyone who researches Black life in Southern California. Thank you for always believing in my project and for providing me the space and resources to work. Thank you, also, for being the space that the community needs. Thank you to my family of activists that continue to inspire me and believe in me, especially Vonya Quarles (All of Us or None – Riverside), Dennis Malone and Curtis Howard (All of Us or None – San Diego), my brothers David Chavez, Casey Goonan, and Khalid Alexander (Pillars of the Community - San Diego). You all are the best.

Thank you to my committee. To my mentors Dayo F. Gore and Danny Widener, thank you for your support from the very beginning and always pushing me to think deeper than I could even fathom. My thanks also go to Sara Kaplan, Shelley Streeby, and Dennis Childs. Your insights over the years have made me a better scholar. I thank you all sincerely.

To my new intellectual family in the (newly-formed!) African-American Studies Department at Lake Forest College. I will see you soon!

To the best and kindest friends I could have ever asked for – James Deavenport and Edmond Hare. From officemates to brothers. You two, more than anyone, have seen and known my growth firsthand. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for bearing with me, keeping our

friendships active, and listening to my thoughts – good and bad. You two are my brothers for real. I am so blessed to have met you in San Diego and look forward to my future kids calling you both "uncle." Your hearts are so luminous in this dark world.

To my loving family. My mother, Consuelita (Connie) and my older brother, Robert (Bo). I love you both so much. Your support is unwavering and radical in its own. When all else fails, you don't. We're all we got, and I love that we're okay with that. I send love to my family here and afar, to my cousins, my Titas and Titos, in the U.S. and the Philippines. Insha'Allah (God willing) we can be together in person soon. To my known and unknown ancestors, I pray that I make you proud and keep your spirits alive.

Lastly, I give thanks and deep admiration to my loving partner, best friend, and fellow nerd, Halima Abdulkarim. You have been the best of it all, and I thank Allah (subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) for bringing us together. Your support through my process has kept me inspired, grounded, and motivated to finish. I am not only inspired to be a better scholar by your love, but to be a better man and servant of Allah. Those, to us, are more important than anything that this dunya has to offer. I love you so much. May Allah (subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) always guide and protect us.

VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"Dreams Eclipsed: Culture and Warfare in Black Los Angeles"

by

Aundrey Maurice Jones

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

University of California San Diego, 2021

Professor Dayo F. Gore, Chair

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"Dreams Eclipsed: Culture and Warfare in Black Los Angeles" investigates the language(s) of social analysis that emerges from Black Los Angeles since the 1940s in order to make sense of warfare at home and abroad. Engaging Black literature, film, and music, this dissertation bridges various fields ranging from Black studies, cultural studies, carceral studies, critical theory, as well as histories of California and the Third World to examine how Black life in Los Angeles has been made more or less possible when interrogated through transnational discourses of war and conquest. I draw on histories of African captivity to generate a theory of the material and ontological constraints that poor and working-class Black people occupy when living under the precarious auspices of domestic militarism. This dissertation examines watershed moments in U.S. American social life such as the Second World War, the Civil Rights and Black

Power Movements, the Watts Rebellion of 1965, and the L.A. Riots of 1992 in order to illuminate the connection between the burgeoning warfare state and the increasing social and cultural permanence of mass incarceration, policing, and surveillance—i.e., the carceral state. Through examining carceral warfare and racial/gendered captivity as ideal structural features of postwar Los Angeles, this project situates Black working-class cultural production as a primary site for theorizing, navigating, and overcoming war at both the domestic and international scale.

Key questions that drive this dissertation include: What can a place like Los Angeles say about the multiple discourses that allow logics of war to intersect with racialized and gendered captivity as logical conditions enabled through carcerality? Through Los Angeles' expansion as a global, multi-ethnic metropolis, how is captivity understood as not only the condition that is produced by the carceral state, but also a condition that has always been transformed and depicted in Black arts and culture throughout the 20th century? At the core, "Dreams Eclipsed" deals with how Black people have not only constructed meanings of life and struggle in the city, but how Black culture in Los Angeles contributes to global narratives of anticolonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-racist struggles across the diaspora.

INTRODUCTION
Battling Perceptions and Realities

> Los Angeles was wonderful. The air was scented with orange blossoms and the beautiful homes law low crouching on the earth as though they loved its scents and flowers. Nowhere in the United States is the Negro so well and beautifully housed, nor the average efficiency and intelligence in the colored population so high. Here is an aggressive, hopeful group – with some wealth, large industrial opportunity and a buoyant spirit.
>
> - W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Crisis* (1913)

The cover for rapper Ice Cube's 1991 album *Death Certificate* features Cube inside a morgue standing next to an American flag draped corpse with a foot tag that reads "Uncle Sam." Though the entire album project contributes to Ice Cube's late 1980s-early 1990s resume of politically charged gangster rap albums, one track in particular, entitled "I Wanna Kill Sam," narrates a familiar relationship that Black teenagers in America have with the military. The song opens with a mock army recruitment advertisement, highlighting that enlistment is the most lucrative and socially and economically promising avenue for Black youth. It reads:

> The army is the only way out for a young black teenager. We'll provide you with housing. We'll provide you with education. We'll provide you with everything you need to survive in life. We'll help you to be the best soldier in the U.S. of A. Because we do more before 7 A.M. than most niggers do in their lifetime.[1]

Between the album cover and the song "I Wanna Kill Sam," Ice Cube's identifies Uncle Sam as his primary enemy. Uncle Sam is a cultural discursive figure personified in the form of an elderly white man dressed in red, white and blue, bearded and stern-faced, whose widely circulated image is largely followed by a large slogan that reads "I Want You For U.S. Army." Ice Cube's antagonism towards Uncle Sam closely alludes to the antithetical relationship between African-

[1] Ice Cube, "I Wanna Kill Sam" from *Death Certificate* (1991)

Americans and the U.S. nation-state. Throughout the song, Ice Cube elucidates his plot to murder Uncle Sam after a nationwide manhunt, spanning urban ghettos all the way from California to New York City. The lyrics convey Ice Cube's stream of consciousness, expressing his carefully mapped out plan to seize the right moment to unload multiple gunshots into Uncle Sam's head, aided by the rage at generations of kidnapping, exploitation, sodomy, and extralegal forms of violence against Black bodies. The kind of rage exhibited through Ice Cube's lyrics is meant to not only convey Black people's relationship to the state, but more specifically a condition that is emblematic to the Black experience in Los Angeles throughout the 20th century.

I open with Ice Cube's sentiment in order to lay the groundwork in charting the political and cultural positionality of Los Angeles' Black residents, where Black folks' relationship to the city is one that is completely intertwined with an industry of war and militarized forms of violence and dispossession. In reading and listening to "I Wanna Kill Sam," one must not only consider Ice Cube's lyrical content, but also the significance of the time of its release. For one, the track bridges a number of critical themes that link Black positionality to histories and theories of racial and gendered captivity, labor exploitation, and gratuitous violence; themes that emerge out of histories of transatlantic slavery, settler conquest, and Reconstruction. Building from this transhistorical inquiry, its 1991 release marks the same year as the murder of Latasha Harlins and the Rodney King beating, two crucial moments that catalyzed the Los Angeles Uprisings in 1992. Ice Cube's metaphorical desire to kill Uncle Sam speaks to an overall desire to abolish the means of suffering that have been most experienced by Black Americans, especially for those that live in urban ghettos categorized as domestic war zones. "I Wanna Kill Sam" is one example of several cultural devices that link the political economy of Los Angeles to transtemporal histories of slavery and conquest, Jim Crow apartheid, counterinsurgency, and biological/social liquidation. While the first verse of

"I Wanna Kill Sam" covers much ground in the actual plot to murder Uncle Sam, the second verse touches on the point of capture between an army recruiter and a Black able-bodied teenager, Cube says:

> He came to my house, I let 'em bail in
> Cause he said he was down with the LM
> He gave up a little dap
> Then turned around, and pulled out a gat
> I knew it was a caper
> I said, "Please don't kill my mother," so he raped her
> Tied me up, took me outside
> And I was thrown in a big truck
> And it was packed like sardines
> Full of niggas, who fell for the same scheme.

This verse likens coerced military recruitment to African enslavement. Here, Cube portrays an army recruiter showing up to the front door only to be let inside the house once the recruiter makes it clear that he is a friendly ally to the family. Immediately falling victim to a violent ruse, the recruiter draws his weapon and threatens to kill the young boy's mother. In response to the young boy's desperate plea not to kill his mother, the recruiter resorts to raping her in front of the family, and then proceeds to tie the young boy up and throw him into a truck full of Black teenagers who just experienced the same scenario in their own households. Ice Cube thereby associates the invasion, deception, murder, rape, and displacement of Black families via military recruitment to draw on its deeply rooted connection to centuries of African slavery and captivity.

Exploring themes such as natal alienation (separation from kin), warehousing (the slave ship), invasion (spatial politics of the plantation, slave quarters, and auction blocks), and forced labor, I analyze how racial and gendered captivity connotes the lived state of Blackness through the material discursive realities of warfare. *Dreams Eclipsed: Culture and Warfare in Black Los Angeles* highlights the connection between racial and gendered captivity as a constitutive condition

of suffering experienced by Black people in Los Angeles. The ideological centrality that captivity holds in my study showcases Black life as oppositional to Los Angeles' promises, linking Black communities in Los Angeles to histories of Black life and suffering in the United States since the Middle Passage. I deploy "captivity" as a framework to link carcerality to the state's involvement with histories of Black subjectivity via the Middle Passage, the slave ship, plantation slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow apartheid, and mass imprisonment. The Middle Passage, slave ship, plantation slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and mass imprisonment signify the historical ideological shifts that illustrate various modes of racial and sexual domination that have (dis)positioned Black people globally.

Building from these themes, *Dreams Eclipsed* contributes to existing literature situated within carceral studies. While *Dreams Eclipsed* is not simply a historical excavation of the roots and promises of Los Angeles' carceral genesis and expansion, my overall study places Black working-class culture at the center of mid-to-late 20th century carceral critique, suggesting how visual, literary, and artistic culture may constitute a lucrative sight in understanding how the nature of the carceral state exceed well beyond the limits of the prison cell. My use of the term "carceral," i.e. the carceral state/carcerality, refers to the interlocking nexus of policing, prisons, and surveillance as constitutive features of so-called modern society. More specifically, my framing of the carceral excavates the centrality of the material and ideological components of carcerality as a modality of social engineering. I ground a particular interest in how the carceral shapes the multiple apparatuses that constitute the U.S. American city, and how culture may serve as a useful site through which theories and realities of how the carceral state is lived and endured are brought to the surface of broader social critique. This dissertation excavates a transnational history of carceral Los Angeles that explores the dialectics of culture and racial/gendered captivity. In doing so, it

links Los Angeles with the proliferation of the carceral state alongside the shifting tides of the city's relationship to global and domestic investments in war and conquest. *Dreams Eclipsed* examines how transnational logics of warfare and resistance shape the socio-political terrain of Los Angeles throughout the latter half of the 20th century. *Dreams Eclipsed* argues that Los Angeles is unique in its geographic, global, and cultural composition particularly in the ways that warfare is understood, written about, depicted, and contested. From this angle, I center the role of Black working-class cultural production in Los Angeles as a formidable site through which warfare is theorized, lived, and resisted in its global and domestic iterations. In essence, *Dreams Eclipsed* looks at how Black people in Los Angeles are impacted by warfare, and consequently, how a world at war may be impacted by culture produced by Black people in Los Angeles.

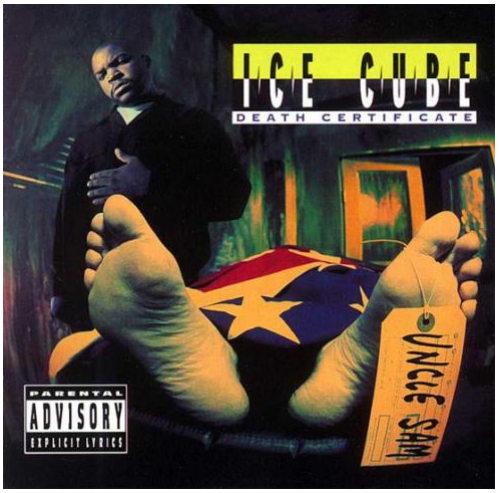

Figure 0.1: Album cover for Ice Cube *Death Certificate* (1991)

Dreams Eclipsed is a study about contradictions. Each chapter centers Los Angeles-based film, literature, and music in order to develop a theory of warfare that signifies how Black relationality has always existed in opposition to Southern California's politics of space/placement, histories of labor, counterinsurgency, and gender relations. These pillars indicate how Black life has always existed in constant contention with the discursive realities that have shaped, and

continue to shape, the ideologies, realities, and futures concerning Los Angeles and its relationship to global politics of race, class, gender, and nation. Through examining the relationship between warfare and the carceral state, *Dreams Eclipsed* tracks the impossibility of Black life and the exertion of state violence as it is expressed through warfare and racial/gendered captivity.

Mapping Dreamland Reputations and Elimination in Los Angeles

Dreams Eclipsed begins with the Second Great Migration with Los Angeles situated as a key site of interest among African-American Southern migrants during the latter years of the Great Depression. These newly arrived migrants nearly doubled the Black population of Los Angeles from approximately 67,000 in 1940 to around 125,000 by 1945. Los Angeles quickly became a geographic region marked by broadening conceptions of racial and economic progress made possible through the defense and shipping industries that characterized the region's political economic base since the beginning of World War II. Widely conceived of as a land of promise and opportunity, many urban historians have gestured to the isolated construction of Southern California, or as Carey McWilliams regarded as "an island on the land, geographically attached, rather than functionally related, to the rest of America" whose development fostered a "self-centered culture, a culture that has matured more rapidly than the culture of the other western states."[2] Southern California's wartime years not only signaled rapid population growth, but a change in racial and ethnic composition. According to historian Josh Sides, understanding a history of Black migration into Los Angeles may present a useful case study at how "American cities have developed and the way urbanites of all backgrounds have made decisions."[3] In looking at

[2] Carey McWilliams *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (New York: American Book-Stratford Press, 1946), 15.
[3] Josh Sides *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 8.

migration trends and patterns in the latter years of the Great Depression and surrounding the United States' entry into the Second World War, race would ultimately become the central modality through which decisions surrounding politics, law enforcement, housing, and education would be made, positing African-Americans as "not peripheral to the history of Los Angeles or rather large American cities but were, rather, important shapers of urban destiny in ways that have yet to be fully appreciated."[4] For a majority of African-Americans, World War II was as a key factor in promoting the economic and social promises that had long been assigned to Los Angeles several decades prior; a presumed "land of opportunity" that was supposed to counter the lives and experiences of African-American life in the Jim Crow South.[5] *Dreams Eclipsed* unearths how, and under what conditions, the experiences of Black people in Los Angeles lend a critical reckoning with to the utopic discourses that have long posed the city and region as a lucrative haven for communities of people from multiple ethnic and geographic backgrounds. Utilizing warfare as my primary analytical category, I situate Black life in Los Angeles as contradictory to Los Angeles' dreamland reputation, likening the Black experience in Los Angeles as indicative of the relationship between colonized subjects and the colonizer within the context of Third World interaction and struggle.

Many urban historians often look to Los Angeles as a kind of anomaly. For many, Los Angeles poses many exceptional traits, whose development and varied histories are not typically understood in conventional studies of other U.S. metropoles – particularly the multi-ethnic

[4] Ibid.

[5] For more on establishing the promises for African Americans in the West see: Lawrence De Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor, eds. *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001); RJ Smith *The Great Black Way: L.A. in the 1940s and the Lost African-American Renaissance* (New York: Public Affairs Press, 2006); Douglas Flamming *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón, eds. *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities* (New York: NYU Press, 2010); and California Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, *Violence in the City – An End or a Beginning? A Report by the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots* (Los Angeles: Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1965).

compositions of places like New York City, Chicago, Houston, and San Francisco, to name a few. Urban historian Robert Fogelson wrote of Los Angeles as an "anti-urban metropolis," a city most strictly defined by its ability to divide communities along solidified racial and class boundaries. Assessing Los Angeles' geographic, cultural, political, and social characteristics, Fogelson's formulation of Los Angeles as an "anti-urban metropolis" most closely associates the city's growth *through* division and segregation only to be stratified in the postwar era.[6] Similarly, historian Mike Davis offers a history of Los Angeles that takes the city's reputation of promise and fulfillment as a means to indicate the region as fertile terrain for heightened racial and class warfare, or in other words, more prone to crises in hegemony. The cohabitation of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), the Crips and Bloods gangs, real estate lobbies, the Ku Klux Klan, and migrants spanning from the U.S. American Midwest to Central America all constitute Los Angeles as a dystopian fortress and suggest how the realities of "disaster" not only shape the city's reputation, but also serve as a paradigm for postwar American urban development.[7] Both Fogelson and Davis analyze the usefulness and limitations of reading Los Angeles as a city of false promises whose contradictions are best seen and experienced through the city's most disenfranchised communities.

Robert Fogelson and Mike Davis share critical insights in the general theme of Los Angeles' falsified exceptional nature. Their works are some of many that have been informed by and have later informed many newer critical studies of Los Angeles throughout the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century. Urban historians and journalists such as Ed Soja, Rebecca Morales, Goetz Wolff, Lynell George, William Deverell, Natalia Molina, David Reiff, Andrea Gibbons, Reyner Banham, and Catherina Coquery-Vidrovitch have taken Los Angeles

[6] Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).
[7] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles* (New York: Verso Press, 1990)

from a variety of angles to assess the presumed "futurity" of the city and its entwinement with past and ongoing biological and social racial/ethnic liquidation.[8] Through housing segregation, unemployment, the undercutting of social welfare programming and resourcing, incarceration, transportation, and healthcare, many studies about Los Angeles point to the city's ability to accumulate histories and logics of erasures stemming from other parts of the country and the globe in a unique way. Concurrently, these studies gesture to the futurity of Los Angeles being largely influenced by its multi-ethnic composition as a result of immigration patterns that closely link Central and South America, Asia, the Pacific Islands, and domestic migrations from the American Midwest, east coast, and the South. At the heart of these interventions, the dominance of racial, gendered, and class diversity often posed an immediate terrain for vast conflict and exclusion – stemming from deeper histories of genocidal settler conquest and land acquisition. For example, William Deverell's *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* formulates an understanding of Los Angeles that requires "grappling with the complex and disturbing relationship between whites, especially those able to command various forms of power, and Mexican people, a Mexican past, and a Mexican landscape."[9] According to Deverell, the "city of the future" was charged through the ability for racial supremacy to thrive, immediately drawing connection between an accessible future of Los Angeles to be entirely contingent through a process

[8] See Ed Soja, Rebecca Morales, Goetz Wolff *My Los Angeles: From Urban Restructuring to Regional Urbanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Ed Soja and Allen Scott, eds. *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Lynell George *No Crystal Stair: African-Americans in the City of Angels* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992); William Deverell *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Natalia Molina *Fit To Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles 1879-1939* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006); David Rieff *Los Angeles: Capital of the Third World* (New York: Simon & Schuster Publishing, 1992); Andrea Gibbons *City of Segregation: 100 Years of Struggle for Housing in Los Angeles* (New York; Verso Press, 2018); Reyner Banham *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); and Caterina Coquery-Vidrovitch "Is L.A. a Model or a Mess?" in *American Historical Review* 105, no. 5 (December 2000), 1683-1691.

[9] William Deverell *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 6.

of whitewashing the city's "adobe past, present, and future." Futurity, in this sense, is linked to the carceral on the basis of the city's foreseeable growth and prosperity being wholly reliant on processes and logics of racial control and elimination. For carceral historian Kelly Lytle Hernandez, in her book *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965*, the past and future of Los Angeles is entirely a carceral matter, with Los Angeles leading the country in policing and incarceration budgeting, planning, and warehousing. Building from Deverell, Hernandez takes us a step further to suggest that to understand carceral Los Angeles is to understand it *as* a settler-colonial process. According to Hernandez, incarceration *is* elimination. Elimination is a logic that "has been deployed in different ways in different times against different indigenous and racially disparaged communities, but the punch line has been the same: elimination in the service of establishing, defending, and reproducing a settler society."[10] Both Deverell and Hernandez lay the necessary and critical groundwork in the trajectory of how Los Angeles will be studied in the coming decades. By bringing forth the centrality of settler colonialism and racial/ethnic conflict, the study of how Los Angeles will be remembered and where its future may lead is not to be thought of as anything other than genocidal – bearing its roots in carceral expansion and human liquidation.

Troubling War at Home and Abroad

The United States is always at war, whether against foreign "terrors" abroad or against its very own citizens. *Dreams Eclipsed* points to both realities. Engaging Black studies, carceral studies, and cultural studies, *Dreams Eclipsed* puts forth theories of warfare and captivity. Many

[10] Kelly Lytle Hernandez *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 9.

iterations of warfare center the role of militarism, situating it within the context of globalization and modernity, rooted in imperialist and colonial projects. Often placing emphasis on the role of an organized military presence on foreign lands and the material and ideological realities that connote overseas violence and conquest, studies of militarism tend to situate warfare within conventional modes of gratuitous violence against pathologically labeled "othered" communities and its centrality in the advancement of nation-building projects at home. Within a U.S. American context, warfare is most commonly uttered in coordination with whoever the United States is at war with, or more specifically, who the United States is currently invading. These renderings of warfare are important to my overall study; however, I build on an understanding of warfare that hones in more deeply on its domestic iterations, and the devastation and genocidal conditions it creates and maintains among U.S. America's most marginalized communities. Here, domestic warfare refers to the ideological and material grounds in which life is experienced on the home front, particularly in the United States, and how the violence of warfare is deployed through housing, law, policy, policing and jails, welfare, labor/unemployment, and etc. More specifically, *Dreams Eclipsed* explores how domestic militarism mirrors the processes that enable systems of violence to emerge out of key moments in U.S. American social and political life since the Second Great Migration. Building from an understanding of domestic militarism, I present a definition of warfare that constitutes the overall ideological and material logics and interconnections that exist between the international and the domestic, and how their simultaneous function informs and structures how Black social and political life is lived and experienced across the diaspora. In this regard, warfare is not an abstract phenomenon that only exists in foreign territories nor is it a metaphor. More specifically, warfare is a socially and culturally embedded set of processes and

conditions that is theorized, lived, and endured by Los Angeles' most vulnerable, colonized communities, particularly with regard to postwar Black America.

As a defining feature of the global Cold War, the United States "waged domestic and foreign counterrevolutionary, or contra, wars against movements in the United States, Latin America, Africa, and Asia, largely against those racially fashioned as 'minorities,' as formerly colonized or enslaved peoples seeking greater democratic and economic freedoms."[11] It is important to frame how the United States declares war abroad as well as at home against its own communities – most prominently seen through the Cold War counterinsurgency and the growth of the American carceral state during the latter half of the 20th century. From this point, Cold War-era "enemies" served as primal threats to western notions of democracy and the internal security of the United States, waging war against not only "criminals," but entire communities that have been criminalized as a whole.[12] To this end, U.S. American democracy is categorically unattainable without the endless declaration of war against Black, indigenous, immigrant, and working-class/poor communities wherein "warfare and policing become more dynamic and, hence, more relevant to deciphering and rewriting the dominant political template."[13] The cohabitation of Black Los Angeles and warfare, within the context of how Los Angeles has been studied over the last few decades, may best be read through anthropologist João Costa Vargas' book *Catching Hell in the City of Angeles* where he argues that incidents such as the Watts Rebellion, the Vietnam War, the War on Poverty, and the War on Drugs all point to the array of social and political divisions within the Black community in Los Angeles that date back to the

[11] Joy James, ed. *Warfare in the American Homeland: Policing and Prison in a Penal Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), xiii.
[12] For more on a historical approach to the criminalization of Black communities, see Khalil Gibran Muhammad *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010)
[13] James, ed. *Warfare in the American Homeland: Policing and Prison in a Penal Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), xiv.

1940s. My framing of warfare relates to Vargas' framing of the social "assaults on welfare program, civil rights laws, and affirmative action programs," and how they "intensified high rates of poverty caused by massive layoffs and lack of work opportunities."[14] To Vargas, wars inform the formation of subsequent wars on Los Angeles' Black communities. Whether looking at literal sites of categorical domestic war (Watts 1965), across the Pacific (Vietnam), or the deliberately targeted political-discursive foreclosures of life (Wars on Drugs/Crime/Poverty), Black working-class responses to the violence of warfare serve as fertile grounds through which the connections between these wars can most readily be seen, understood, and connected regardless of how disparate and isolated they may appear.

Through my framing of warfare, I ask to what degree does the United States wage war against its own citizens? Under what circumstances is the violence of warfare studied, experienced, and depicted? How have communities of people who directly experience conquest at home generated their own theories and depictions of warfare through the use of culture? In other words, what is the language of social analysis that emerges from Black Los Angeles to make sense of warfare? How might folks like W.E.B. Du Bois and Ice Cube speak to one another in their relative perceptions of Los Angeles? Three chapters illuminate the importance of these questions by providing cultural examinations of how warfare is embedded in the social and political blueprint of Los Angeles. In doing so, these chapters investigate how contradictions unify to make sense of how dreams are made and destroyed amidst the backdrop of a city in decay.

[14] João H. Costa Vargas *Catching Hell in the City of Angels: Life and Meanings of Blackness in South Central Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 37.

Relating Black Los Angeles to the World

Dreams Eclipsed is not simply a top-down study of Los Angeles. Instead, I write about the cohabitation of Black Angelenos with the material-discursive realities of warfare and captivity and the necessary measures of cultivating the conditions of immediate survival. I am interested in how Black writers, activists, educators, artists, musicians, and other organic intellectuals have theorized captivity as a lived state of being. While *Dreams Eclipsed* is primarily a study of Black Los Angeles, a key entity that informs my framing of Black Los Angeles is rooted in the Third World. Cold War-era insurgency situated Los Angeles as site of interest for artists, activists, intellectuals, and oppressed communities across Latin America, Africa, and the Asia Pacific. Conversely, Black communities in Los Angeles experiencing firsthand the violence of poverty, unemployment, policing, welfare, and housing discrimination sought closer relation to colonized communities across the Third World than white communities within the city and county. To many, particularly among Black Angelenos, Black Los Angeles was understood as an internal colony of the United States, among other U.S. cities with sizeable Black populations whose socioeconomic conditions paralleled the Third World. Cynthia Young's *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of the U.S. Third World* provides lasting insight into the roots of these connections.[15] For Black artists, intellectuals, and activists in Los Angeles, as well as their Latin-American, Asian-American, and indigenous American counterparts across the city, the Third World was a lucrative site of inspiration for theorizing how global anticolonial struggle might better situate their own conditions at home, forging "new diasporic public spheres" especially during the decolonization struggles of the 1960s and 1970s.[16] *Dreams Eclipsed* builds on Cynthia Young's study on U.S.

[15] Cynthia Young *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of the U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006)
[16] Arjun Appadurai *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 22

Third World countercultures that opposed dominant narratives of racial, gendered, classed oppressions that were characteristic of an "economic and racial world order."[17] The chapters I provide demonstrate the uses of a diverse array of ideological, methodological, and creative approaches in situating Black Los Angeles as an internal colony. The cultural devices I analyze, along with their producers, demonstrate "the ways in which state practices of containment – incarceration, housing segregation, welfare bureaucracies – constitute powerful forms of individual alienation that can either impede or ignite political resistance. They showed that state violence directed at people of color not only defines U.S. democracy but also provides an insidious blueprint for U.S. imperial designs."[18] Culture produced in and about Los Angeles serves as a lucrative site that not only theorizes the carceral state through the lived experiences of the Black working-class, but adequately formulates an understanding of Black suffering in Los Angeles is part of a global anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggle.

Methodology and Framework

The methodological approach that I take in my study employs a conjunctural analysis of warfare and captivity. Building from cultural theorist Stuart Hall's elaboration of Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser's concept of "conjuncture," a conjunctural analysis brings forth the impact of living and studying contradictions and their unification. This particular approach "designates a specific moment in the life of a social formation and refers to a period when the antagonisms and contradictions, which are always at work in society, begin to 'fuse' into a ruptural unity. Conjunctural analysis deploys a type of periodization based on a distinction between moments of relative stability and those of intensifying struggles and unrest, which may result in a more general

[17] Young, 3.
[18] Ibid, 5.

social crisis. The concept covers the development of contradictions, their fusion into a crisis and its resolution."[19] My emphasis on contradictions extends a primarily historical study of Los Angeles, one that has the potential to place culture at the forefront of analyzing how Los Angeles has long served as a model of how urban cities are ideologically and materially built *through* contradictions. By conducting a conjunctural analysis, *Dreams Eclipsed* is most directly influenced by urban sociologist Clyde Woods' landmark study *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*. In a careful and rich study of African-American struggle in the Mississippi Delta region, Woods formulates a dialectical framing of the plantation and blues bloc. Informed and compelled by Black working-class self-determination, the struggle for social democracy, resistance, and survival, *Development Arrested* employs "enclosure" as a methodological approach to "understand the historical origins and current manifestations of planter bloc hegemony, the appeasement of it, resistance to it, and the roads still open to regional development based on economic democracy, social justice, and cultural sanctity."[20] With his formulation of the "blues epistemology," Woods writes:

> Like other blocs in the region, working-class African Americans in the Delta and in the Black Belt South have constructed a system of explanation that informs their daily life, organizational activity, culture, religion, and social movements. They have created their own ethno-regional epistemology. Like other traditions of interpretation, it is not a monolith; there are branches, roots, and a trunk.[21]

According to Woods, the dialectical nature between the plantation and blues blocs resides at the center of his analysis of power structures. Through framing the social, political, and economic

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[19] See: Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law & Order* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Antonio Gramsci *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 177-179; Louis Althusser *For Marx* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 249.

[20] Clyde Woods *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (New York: Verso Books, 1998), 24. For more on how enclosure and captivity can be read in the same accord in relation to carceral Los Angeles, see Damien Sojoyner *First Strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

[21] Woods, 16.

forces that comprise the Southern plantation class and its role in shaping the ideological and material terrain of the region, the plantation bloc provides the necessary workings that lend to my understanding of Los Angeles' warfare bloc. Building from the aforementioned studies of Los Angeles' "future," I suggest that the warfare bloc may be a way to read the permanence and centrality of the city's commitment to carceral growth even and especially as a result of crises in hegemony – i.e. the Watts Rebellion. The countercultures that I analyze as my central modes of critique thus constitute the blues bloc, or captive bloc. Rooted in histories of slavery and Reconstruction, and by extension the anticolonial struggle of African communities across the diaspora, the captive bloc posits and understanding that the warfare bloc is both a site of "conflict and cultural formation," where the "intellectual traditions and social organizations through which working-class African Americans lived, understood, and changed their reality have typically emerged in spite of, and in opposition to, plantation powers. This conflict is one of the defining features of African American social thought." Each chapter demonstrates how social critique emerges once contradictions are placed conversation with one another e.g. Black working-class and white elite, Black youth and LAPD, the First and Third World, and etc. *Dreams Eclipsed* deals directly with these contradictions and intends to formulate a broader understanding of how these contradictions ought to be read through culture across different eras in Los Angeles' history.

Each chapter contained in *Dreams Eclipsed* may serve as individual case studies of particular cultural devices. Though that is not my immediate intention, each chapter speaks to a particular line of inquiry about Black Los Angeles that is indicative of the era in which each particular device was produced. It is my genuine hope that each chapter serves as a snapshot to the larger concepts and themes that I attempt to embark, not limited to Los Angeles scholars and historians, but for those who are invested in the study of the intersection between Black working-

class culture, the carceral state, urbanization, and 20th century racial politics. Each chapter demonstrates different genres that operate as a terrain for oppositional critique, what these genres and devices can say about the relationship between the warfare and captive blocs as sites of knowledge production, and how Los Angeles may be read as a significant locale in the larger study of anticolonial struggle and critique.

Chapter 1, "To War or to Jail: Captivity and Coloniality in Chester Himes' Los Angeles" looks at Chester Himes' 1945 novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. A widely studied and debated novel about wartime Los Angeles, this chapter looks at the intimacy between Los Angeles, the South, and the Third World. Chronicling the life of Bob Jones, Chester Himes' fictional embodiment, this chapter discusses how the threat of war and jail encircle Jones' psyche and how he navigates the ever-present reality of literal and figurative death. Jones' life is defined through epistemic, physical, and sexual violence, all of which trace towards his circumscription with carceral enclosures i.e. racial/gendered captivity. Through an examination of Bob Jones, I argue that Chester Himes is more closely aligned with anticolonial writers across the Third World than his American counterparts because of the novel's ability to link the effects of colonialism on the human psyche. Through an examination of these effects, I conclude that warfare serves as the primal focus of Himes' intellectual and creative growth.

Chapter 2, "Inside/Outside Prison: Counterinsurgency and Genocide in Haile Gerima's *Bush Mama*" takes up Third Cinema and the Black independent film collective known as the L.A. Rebellion. In a post-Watts and post-Civil Rights world, at the height of tensions in Vietnam, I center Haile Gerima's 1975 film *Bush Mama* to examine carceral enclosure as it is experienced by a poor Black family in Watts, CA. I argue that *Bush Mama* is both an anti-genocide and anti-colonial film that showcases the omnipresence of global warfare and its domestic impact, how the

carceral state extends beyond the prison and targets Black families at the intersections of race, gender, and class, and how the counterinsurgent war against Black people was literal rather than figurative. I showcase how the film follows Dorothy and T.C. and how they both embark on their own individual processes of radicalization under the auspices of their relative incarcerations, situating how carceral constraint serves as the site of both their relative demise and politicization.

And finally chapter 3, "'They're flying their colors, we're flying ours'": *Colors*, Gangsta Rap, and Los Angeles' Late 20th Century Carceral Imagination" brings us into the 1980s. Still situated in the post-Watts and post-Civil Rights era, this chapter deals more closely with the role of economic restructuring and neoliberalism in the growth and formation of police film and gangsta rap in Los Angeles. The 1980s is a watershed decade in Los Angeles' history, a time where we see most clearly the residual effects of counterinsurgency and the neutralization of the Black Power movement, policing, deindustrialization, and the rise of Bradleyism. This chapter analyzes Dennis Hopper's 1988 film *Colors* as a response to the anti-gang initiatives and policing practices that shaped the city's ethnic relations. With the formulation of CRASH (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums), Operation HAMMER, and Operation Safe Streets, Los Angeles quickly became America's gang capital. The film employs a dialectical framing of how police and gangs occupy the same streets, and how police film grows in relevance as a genre during this era. I argue that *Colors* illuminates to the so-called war on gangs as a residual effect of the War on Drugs, War on Poverty, and the War on Crime, and how the proliferation of gang activity and membership is most closely correlated to the failures of post-Civil Rights social restructuring. While police film becomes more relevant and widespread across the nation while highlighting the projected humanity of police and necessity for law enforcement *as* order, gangsta rap poses as a "war of

position" against this central narrative. The juxtaposition of police film and gangsta rap suggests how culture is produced through crisis.

CHAPTER 1
To War or to Jail: Captivity and Coloniality in Chester Himes' Los Angeles

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.
>
> - W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)

> Under the mental corrosion of race prejudice in Los Angeles I became bitter and saturated with hate.
>
> - Chester Himes, *The Quality of Hurt* (1972)

In the final chapters of the *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), novelist Chester Himes depicts a series of events that demonstrate the clear-cut relationship between carceral containment and the U.S. military. Told through the lens of Bob Jones, the protagonist and fictional embodiment of Himes himself, the final two chapters of the novel offer a fast-paced chronicling of Jones' gradual and ultimate demise. After a workplace conflict between a white woman named Madge's refusal to work with a "nigger" Jones loses his temper and ignites a fiery conflict between him, Madge, and fellow white male coworkers. This encounter, along with a culmination of events and conflicts throughout the plot, drive Jones to murderous contemplation, fueling a prowess that compels him to fight off a desire to both kill his coworkers and to sexually assault Madge in revenge. Between feelings of disdain for his everyday life, Jones also contemplates his feelings toward Alice, his light-skinned upper middle-class girlfriend whom he loves deeply, and her family's socially elite reputation within the larger community, to which Jones also does not fit to the slightest. Jones' personal conflict is met with Alice and her family's disagreement with the way he acted out on the

job, leading to his demotion and suspension. The outcome results in Jones' reluctance to see their viewpoint but demonstrating a willingness to achieve happiness on Alice's accord for the sake of having a successful relationship despite the racial hostility of quotidian life. At the core, Jones' dilemmas in mitigating a hate for a white woman coworker, his hopes in moving forward with Alice, and his constant fear and anxiety all speak to a general thematic terrain that depicts the overwhelming precarity of Black life in Los Angeles during the early 1940s.

This chapter does two things. First, through a reading of Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go* this chapter will examine Himes' role as a race theorist of wartime California, whose work greatly exposed the depths of anti-Black racism as materially, socially, and psychologically disenfranchising. *If He Hollers* points to a number of critical features of the relationship between Black America and World War II. For one, the novel goes beyond depicting the role of Black workers in wartime industry, but rather forcefully rejects the promises endured by the Double V campaign. To Himes, the impossibility of "victory abroad and victory at home" stems from the greater issue of the United States being at war with not only the Japanese, but with its own citizens; it is a full-on assault against democracy. Building from these ideas, this chapter provides a literary and cultural lens on the production and normalization of the warfare state and into what we would eventually term the carceral state. Throughout the novel, Bob Jones' moments of conflict largely occur within confined spaces – i.e. the factory, hospital bed, holding cell, etc. My analysis of the carceral state spans multiple cultural devices throughout the scope of my study. I place emphasis on the importance of not only reading carceral expansion in mid-20th century United States in terms of the jail cell but also understanding the growing and shifting tides of both global and domestic migration. Since the carceral is tightly connected to spatial confinement, the novel posits

Jones as constantly in pursuit of the ability to move (physically and socially), remaining in constant rejection of carceral constraint.

For a place like Los Angeles, placing Chester Himes within existing narratives of the Second Great Migration brings forth a conversation about Southern California's geographic stakes in situating carceral power as a response to the region's growing relevance in global market relations that skyrocketed during World War II. This chapter situates the formulation of racial ideology that emphasizes the intersection between labor and economy, gendered violence, and nation, and how Black intellectual producers have committed to the counternarrative of African-American involvement in global wartime efforts, as juxtaposed by what has often been term "the war at home." By looking at constituent works being produced in, around, and about Los Angeles during the mid-late 1940s, this chapter highlights the political necessity of understanding Himes' relationship with Los Angeles, comparable to his Ohio roots and subsequent time spent in New York. Through a literary analysis of the novel, I argue that Chester Himes provides a radical envisioning of the racial terrors of wartime Los Angeles, one that situates Black life at the intersection of racial violence as experienced by wartime Los Angeles' most vulnerable communities, namely Mexican-Americans, Japanese-Americans, and of course African-Americans. Furthermore, I read as Himes as an anticolonial literary figure whose early works present a theory of Black Los Angeles as akin to the ideological conditions and material realities that constitute the Third World, an idea that I explore in subsequent chapters.

In addition, this chapter demonstrates the dimensions through which a racial ideology of Los Angeles during the 1940s can be understood as a conjugation of processes rather than a mere set of circumstances that lead to an ultimate end. I draw from Christina Sharpe's theorization of the "wake" in order to argue how carceral logics of racial and gendered conquest and containment

derive from histories of African slavery and settler colonialism. The study of Black life requires a critical engagement in these constitutive global truths – understanding slavery and colonialism not merely as events but rather as living forces that play an integral role in understanding how Black subjectivity occupies multiple temporalities simultaneously; as anthropologist Michel Rolph Trouillot says "pastness – is a position. Thus, in no way can we identify the past as past."[22] Los Angeles can often present a unique position within the larger narrative of Black life in America. It is often mistakenly suggested that a steady inquiry into Blackness in Southern California does not present the same merit or rigor as studying Black life in other geographic/diasporic contexts, e.g. North and South and Third World; that a Black history of the region is far too buried within the context of Latin/South American, Asian and Pacific Islander, and indigenous counterparts. However, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, however imperfect of a novel it may be, does present a unique insight into reading Los Angeles as a culmination of contested histories drawn from the realities and afterlives of slavery and colonialism, I suggest that reading the character embodiment of Himes *as* Jones is useful in thinking about how these conditions constitute the wake through which Jones must navigate, survive, and ultimately succumb to, rendering his inner and outer lives as products of a colonial narrative that likens Black people in Los Angeles to Black people across the diaspora and particularly the Third World. This thematic schema shapes my reading of Chester

[22] See: Christina Sharpe *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015). This chapter charts Black life in Los Angeles as part of a larger field of study that locates the effects and legacies of slavery and Reconstruction. In doing so, I find great use in Christina Sharpe's formulation of the "wake" in locating Black being. My reading of *If He Hollers Let Him Go* in this chapter centers how Black expressive culture depicts "aesthetically the impossibility of such resolutions by representing the paradoxes of Blackness within and after the legacies of slavery's denial of Black humanity. I name this paradox the wake, and I use the wake in all of its meanings as a means of understanding how slavery's violences emerge within the contemporary conditions of spatial, legal, psychic, material, and other dimensions of Black non/being as well as in Black modes of resistance," 14. Building from Saidiya Hartman's *Losing Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2006), Sharpe continues that "living in the wake on a global level means living the disastrous time and effects of continued marked migrations, Mediterranean and Caribbean disasters, trans-American and -African migration, structural adjustment imposed by the [IMF] that continues imperialism/colonialisms, and more." 15. See also Michel Rolph Trouillot *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 15.

Himes as an anticolonial writer, whose work places Los Angeles within larger inquiries of study that take seriously the conditions that make Black life (im)possible to locate within a broader historical colonial context.

In confronting Himes, we must ask: how does Chester Himes construct a scene of Los Angeles that is particularly dystopic by nature given larger histories of Black life that stem from the Middle Passage, antebellum plantation slavery, Emancipation, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow segregation? Chester Himes is a figure who is constantly and simultaneously at war with himself and his surroundings, whose social conditions constitute a perpetual state of captivity through which he must endure, resist, and confront as a reality and primary feature of Black life. In this sense, Himes, as read through the protagonist Bob Jones in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, is a figure whose worldview serves as a culmination of Southern, Northern, and Western racisms produced under the violent auspices of carceral constraint as experienced through labor, militarism and war, policing, and the courts. Building on these larger histories of Black life (and death) in the United States, this chapter insists on Himes' utility in providing an early rendering of a carceral genesis, one that cannot be talked about absent of the topic of war(fare) and international conflict. This chapter examines how Chester Himes posits an integral, viable framing of Los Angeles' dominant culture of warfare by juxtaposing the region's history of Black migration and working-class struggle. A Marxian analytic of contradiction highlights the study of socio-historical processes, wherein Marx and Engels "discovered the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, they discovered the contradiction between the exploiting and exploited classes and also the resultant contradiction between the economic base and its superstructure (politics, ideology, etc.), and they discovered how these contradictions inevitably lead to different

kinds of social revolution in different kinds of class society."[23] This analysis drives this chapter, as I examine Himes' wartime novels (namely *If He Hollers Let Him Go*) as cultural devices that illuminate quotidian Black life of second-wave Black migrants into Los Angeles during the late-1930s, and the parallel burgeoning war society being constructed at the same time. A study of the contradiction that exists between Black life and the Los Angeles warfare state lends itself to a study of how these processes unfold, and consequently how artists like Himes may be at the center of prophesizing a possible end to Black life as entirely circumscribed through warfare and social containment. In sum, I ask how might Himes provide a theory of how war produces a war of the *self*?

As much as this chapter is about the existing contradictions of Black Los Angeles during the early 1940s, it is also about Himes' gripping commentary on the role of hegemony. Contradiction drives an analysis how opposites unify; it concerns the process in which this unification occurs on multiple levels of the social. It also places in conversation the political and social centrality of a given set of material conditions. For this reason, my examination of Chester Himes also engages a critical dissection of how he understood the perplexity of state hegemony and how it is deployed across a place like Los Angeles; and how hegemony is challenged by Black movement and calls for agency. Drawing from cultural theorist Stuart Hall, hegemony is "not a

[23] See: Mao Tse-Tung, "On Contradiction" from *The Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (1937) and V.I. Lenin's "On the Question of Dialectics," *Collected Works, Russ*. ed, Moscow, Vol. XXXVIII (1958), 358. This chapter is a first attempt to understand the concept of dialectical materialism in the case of Chester Himes' residency in Los Angeles. Taking into account the motives that drew Black migration into Los Angeles during World War II, understanding the political economic base of Los Angeles is crucial in understanding the novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go*'s reputation as among the first and most telling and riveting accounts of wartime Los Angeles. Known for its biting commentary and dystopic rendering, the novel's reputation also signifies the treachery of Black life navigating the liberal multi-ethnic geography of Southern California. Because of these presumed opposites, I understand the novel to be not only be a critique of the city, but rather a productive device in generating a language that demonstrates the psycho-dimensions not only combatting but confronting the tensions that exist between discourses of liberal multiculturalism and the violence of anti-Blackness as experienced not only through Bob Jones (the novel's protagonist) but by Chester Himes himself. As this chapter will do, I will attempt to look at how Chester Himes can be read as an anti-colonial writer and how *If He Hollers Let Him Go* can be placed within the larger arena of Third World literature.

simple escalation of a whole class to power…but the *process* by which a historical bloc of social forces is constructed and the ascendancy of that bloc secured." Both Hall and Antonio Gramsci teach us that hegemony is not spontaneous and always visible, and that hegemony operates as a historically driven set of formations and processes that aim to secure and articulate multiple avenues of power across *all* levels of a social formation – the economic, political, and ideological. Hegemony, in the sense of the relationship between ruling ideas and the ruling classes, is "best thought of in terms of the processes of hegemonic domination," ruling classes constantly struggle to maintain domination.[24] Pairing Gramsci and Hall in my carceral analysis of Los Angeles since the 1940s suggests that hegemony was never fully achieved, but rather posed a stratified dialectical relationship between carceral discourses of social order with mass influxes of Black migration into Southern California.

California as Seductress: Southern Dreams and Nightmares

In his 1993 collection of nonfiction essays entitled *Airing Dirty Laundry*, author Ishmael Reed writes, "Himes' America is alive and well, and racism, that ugly social parasite, has found a host in other parts other than the South."[25] Himes' narrative of racial exclusion is typified in his journey to Los Angeles, which many scholars often highlight as a gateway into the plot of *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. It is worth noting, that upon his desire to write films for Warner Brothers, only to appear at the gates of the studio and be denied entry because Jack Warner himself did not "want no niggers in his lot." A truly racist and emasculating experience, this moment would be the first of many events that ultimately shape Himes' overall perception of the contradictions that define Los Angeles. Different elements of Himes' instability within the Los Angeles workforce

[24] Stuart Hall, "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism Without Guarantees," 43-44.
[25] Ishmael Reed, "Chester Himes: Writer" *Airing Dirty Laundry* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1993), 155.

are reflected through the novel, which highlights the castrating realities of living as a Black man in Los Angeles. In fact, in his autobiography *The Quality of Hurt* (1971), Himes reflects on his inability to land stable work as truly damaging to his marriage. His inability to earn as much as his wife made Himes feel as if "I was no longer a husband to my wife; I was her pimp. She didn't mind, and that hurt all the more."[26] This sentiment not only reflects Himes' frustrations with himself but reveal how his frustrations operate within a model of heteronormative patriarchy that troubles the victim/aggressor relationship that he describes with his wife. With regard to *If He Hollers*, the dialectic that is most demonstrated throughout the novel can be linked to Bob Jones himself in contradistinction to Madge – the discursive enclosures that embody a brand of white Southernness as it exists outside of the Jim Crow South. Or, more conversely, the dialectic that can be explored can be between Jones and the Atlas shipyard, from a strictly political economic point of view, and the exploitative conjectures that constitute Atlas' relationship with Los Angeles in cultivating economy of global warfare. Between Himes' personal account with his wife to Jones' interactions across the shipyard, Jones stays in constant contention of the homosocial surroundings which often serve as the basis of which his hate-driven fantasies of murdering and assaulting white people.[27] Therefore, as this chapter will address further, Jones is driven by fear, manipulation, and the realities of death that comprise his social world as it is understood and produced in opposition to the discursive promises contained within the so-called California Dream.

The way that I situate war within the context of Jones' psychological functioning has much to do with the way he confronts the ongoing assault on his racial and gendered displacement, for it is difficult throughout the novel, and Himes' own personal live, to discern healthy relationships

[26] Chester Himes, *The Quality of Hurt* (New York: Paragon House, 1971), 75.
[27] Christopher Breu, "Freudian Knot or Fordian Knot?: The Contradictions of Racialized Masculinity in Chester Himes' 'If He Hollers Let Him Go'" *Callaloo*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Summer 2003), 766-795.

with women and how women often serve as producers and outcomes of his oppression. In other words, Jones's actions are not primarily driven by the decisions and actions made by women in the novel, but rather his actions are largely driven through conflicts, overt fetishization, and desire to maintain dominance over women. As Christopher Breu writes, "the organization of Bob's sexuality affirms Eve Sedgewick's assertion that homosocial relations between men are produced through the construction of women as either objects of exchange or objects of competition."[28] These relations serve as the social grounds that breed Jones' desire to confront whiteness by wielding power over Madge first. The inextricable link between Jones' proximity to the possibilities of death (both biological and social) and his capacities as a racialized and gendered laboring subject of wartime Los Angeles is best carried out at the height of the novel, where Jones premeditates raping Madge in order to get back at her for humiliating him on the job. A large portion of the novel centers Jones' constant hovering between right and wrong, violent and non-violent, and largely Black and white, entirely surfaced by way of his desire to resist a kind of emasculation carried out by both Madge and his white coworkers. The sexual encounters between Jones and Madge constantly draw relevance to the fact that she is a white woman of a large build, slightly masculine in appearance. This would increasingly compel Jones' desire to wield power over her. In sum, *If He Hollers* is as much about sexual violence as it is about the racial politics of 1940s Black Los Angeles. Himes' ability to convey the interrelatedness between these two features suggest that one cannot be thought of without deep and careful consideration of the other. Additionally, the novel posits how discursive ideas of what California is *supposed* to be and what is actually *is* suggest a constant warring over discerning dreams from reality.

[28] Ibid, 782.

Take for example Himes' short 1943 short story "Heaven Has Changed." In the story, the main character, an unnamed World War II Black soldier, dies in battle and winds up at the funeral for a personified Uncle Tom. In a series of events that draw the Black soldier to be part of heaven's desegregation campaign, he returns to earth with a message to Black soldiers suggesting that they bear the consequences of a segregated military and that when they die, they would inevitably experience a desegregated heaven. In another short story entitled "One More Way to Die," the narrator speaks of a series of events that lead to him being lured into an alley and shot to death by white cops who were originally from Texas, illustrating "one more way to die" from Southern violence while living in Los Angeles. These stories are examples of the surreal nature of Black life that largely emphasize the connections between the real and the imagined and how the lure of the West are only realized in death.[29] Returning to A. Robert Lee's argument concerning *If He Hollers Let Him Go* suggests that like all, if not most, of Himes' novels, this one solicit the "sexual fibers of race," referring to the "flashes of taboo and myth which invest racial violence (and in this novel, most racial contact) with a sexual iconography."[30] Throughout the novel, we learn much about Bob Jones' racial displacement not solely through his antagonistic worker-overseer relationship with that of his shipyard superiors and white peers, but more gruelingly by way of his interactions with Alice, a middle-class light skinned Black woman whom he hopes to marry someday, and Madge, who ultimately becomes the source of Jones' entire demise. Drawing from Lee, reading Himes and understanding his conceptualization of racial violence as automatically subsumed with

[29] Bruce Glasrud and Laurie Champion, "No Land of the Free: Chester Himes Confronts California (1940-1946)," *College Language Association CLA Journal* Vol. 44, No. 3 (March 2001), 396-397. For more on relationship between California iconography and racial relations and tensions, see: Richard J. Orsi, *The Elusive Eden: A New History of California* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988).

[30] A. Robert Lee, "Violence Real and Imagined: The World of Chester Himes' Novels," *Negro American Literature Forum*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring, 1976), 15.

the sexual, a deadening Black masculinity under assault from multiple accords that consumes Jones' entire being on both internal and external affairs.

Himes, like Jones, never truly experienced firsthand the discursive triumph that had been paired so long with Los Angeles' social and political stature, at least compared to the South and the North. This argument proceeds from Reconstruction's destructive legacies with histories of prewar Black migration to the industrial north. According to Himes, Madge represents the shallowness of the California Dream; an embodiment of the state of California itself. Like California, Madge is "seductive, ornamental, and superficial" wherein the "attraction to the west was as devastating to Blacks as Madge was to Jones."[31] The relationship between Jones and Madge serves as a kind of master trope for California's false promises to Black people where "the depth of the promise parallels the extent of the deceit. Worse than becoming merely an unfulfilled promise, it was wrought with negative experiences."[32] Like California, Madge is completely deceitful, lustful, and better in picture rather than in person. Originally from Texas, Madge is exactly what California became realized as – distinctly "Southern" however geographically outside of the South, where Jim Crow segregation existed without "colored only" signs. Madge discursively becomes a character embodiment of when promises become a curse, where "instead of reaping the benefits from the war economy, Jones is victimized by underlying racist attitudes that cause him to feel "scared, powerless, unprotected."[33] Due to the character nature of Madge and how she tends to create meaning through her ability to wield power over Jones, the long existing trope of the Black male rapist proves to pose no geographic bounds. It is important to understand that this trope is not limited to Black men residing in Southern states, however; it is

[31] Bruce Glasrud and Laurie Champion, "No Land of the Free: Chester Himes Confronts California (1940-1946)," *College Language Association CLA Journal* Vol. 44, No. 3 (March 2001), 404.
[32] Ibid, 405.
[33] Ibid.

important that Southern ideology that was generated in the aftermath of travels to territories outside of the South, further corroborating the mythic ideas that Black men are in need of constant surveillance and within arms-reach of castration as long as white women possess the possibility of being threatened. Jones' belief in his own lynching (figuratively and literally) and his tumultuous path to rape Madge suggest that sexual violence is a fundamental feature in a racist society.[34] This reality is explored throughout the novel in every encounter that Jones has with Madge, which makes the novel as a key commentary in locating the potentiality of heightened police activity in Los Angeles during the postwar era. Jones navigates the latter half of the novel on a quest to rape Madge for humiliating him at the shipyard, even while and after Madge had sexually taunted him for so long. Again, battling consciousness from subconsciousness, Jones continues to struggle in navigating his intentions on exactly how he chooses to approach Madge – to let their conflict go or to escalate it further and seize elusive power that only exists in his imagination.

The ending sequence of events continues with Jones returning to the shipyard hoping to reinstate his employment after his workplace conflict, through attempts to make amends with his coworkers and Madge, particularly with Mac, his direct supervisor. Insisting that he had "learned his lesson," Jones reveals that his intent to behave on the job was fueled primarily through his desire to "keep out the Army."[35] Realizing that this was not enough to persuade Mac, Jones continues by mentioning that he wants to marry Alice, and that his shot at a life of stability, irrespective of the racist atmosphere of the shipyard, is contingent on him returning back to work.

[34] Angela Davis *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), 177. Here, Davis writes "racism has always served as a provocation to rape, and white women in the United States have necessarily suffered the ricochet fire of these attacks. This is one of the many ways in which racism nourishes sexism, causing white women to be indirectly victimized by the special oppression aimed at their sisters of color." This formulation informs a reading of Himes' personal relationship with his wife with Jones' relationship and confrontations with not only Madge, but Alice and Eula as well. The racism that encircles every aspect of Jones' personal life must be directly correlated to his predacious encounters with Madge on both ends, his desire to rape her and her desire to have him lynched.
[35] Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1986), 173.

In the effort to prove himself to Mac, anticipating a possible reassignment as leaderman of the deck staff, Jones contemplates either quitting on the spot or staying, paying mind to his recent promises to Alice regarding starting a new life with her despite the agony he faced on the job. It was through this moment, with Bob strolling through the superstructure of the deck contemplating his decision, that he would find himself in the engine room of the deck watching Madge secretly sleeping. Panicking in desperation to leave the isolated quarters after a physical altercation with Madge, Jones' immediate preoccupation shifted to the likelihood of being found alone with a white woman and the possibility of facing a rape accusation. When it becomes clear that their presence has been acknowledged by a group of men screaming "Get a torch! Get a sledgehammer! Call that chipper over here," who begin to break down the door threatening to kill Jones, Madge screams that she is being raped. At this moment, against the sounds of the men shouting "I'm gonna get you lynched, you nigger bastard," Jones says:

> There were only the two of us in pressing chaos. Looking at each other; our eyes locked together in a death embrace; black and white in both our minds; not hating each other; just feeling extreme outrage. I felt buck-naked and powerless, stripped of my manhood and black against the whole white world.[36]

At this point, Jones is severely brutalized to a point where it becomes difficult for him to differentiate physical from psychological pain: "I didn't feel the blow; just the explosion starting at a point underneath my skull and filling my head with a great flaming roar. And then what seemed like falling a million miles through space and hitting something hard to splatter into pieces."[37] Up until this point, as with several moments throughout the novel, Jones' inner dialogue signifies Himes' skillful and visceral use of stream of consciousness prose, which at times posit a difficulty in discerning physical from psychological anguish. In addition, at times Himes would gesture more

[36] Ibid, 181.
[37] Ibid, 182.

towards a psychological detriment being far more painful than any form of physical violence, with the spectacle of falling through "a million miles through space" being faced alongside the reality of not feeling the exploding blow "underneath my skill and filling my head with a great flaming roar." For readers, the ending chapters of *If He Hollers*, particularly the scene of Jones' vicious assault, prove to be integral to understanding the novel's gradual progression towards Jones' process of near-total desensitization to his surroundings and his incapacities at discerning between epistemic and physical anti-Black violence. The accumulation of events up until these final chapters catalyze Himes's understanding of Los Angeles as anything but its popular reputation, bearing the traits of a liberal racial oasis that exists against the backdrop of more conventionally known Southern and Northern racisms. In doing so, Himes depicts Jones as a man whose agency is completely surrendered through the violent statecraft of a wartime multi-ethnic Los Angeles, whose denouement is hardly a surprise given Jones's frequent run-ins with vigilante forms of racial and sexual violence both within and outside of the workplace.

Jones wakes up in a hospital cot unable to recollect the exact series of events that led to his current status. As Jones recounts his own thoughts and memories of the situation, he primarily only remembers images of Madge screaming while saying she will get him lynched to which Jones thinks to himself, "well, she got me lynched all right."[38] Remaining constantly aware of the possibility of Madge's words being used against his, Jones is brought to a possibility of facing a minimum of 30 years in prison, with an active warrant against him, to which the guard captain in the room says, "you're lucky you're in California. In my home state we'd have hung you."[39] The image of mob violence fills Jones' mind and hinders his ability to leave the hospital quickly. At this point, Jones is overcome by a realization: "But now I was scared in a different way. Not of the

[38] Ibid, 184.
[39] Ibid, 186.

violence. Not of the mob. Not of physical hurt. But of America, of American justice. The jury and the judge. The people themselves. Of the inexorability of one conclusion – that I was guilty."[40] Making his way out of the hospital, covered in unhealed wounds and remaining in steady physical pain, Jones immediately looks for an escape, maneuvering through Central Avenue, a historically Black district of Los Angeles, with hopes of staying under police radar: "As long as I'd kept moving my mind had remained concentrated on the action. But now a dull hopelessness settled over it, an untampered futility. I felt pressed, cornered, black, as small and weak and helpless as any Negro sharecropper facing a small white mob in Georgia. I felt without soul, without mind, at the very end. Everything was useless, fight was useless, nothing I could do would make any difference now."[41] Soon enough, he is pulled over at an intersection on Slauson Avenue when police search and interrogate him only to find a gun in his car. While being booked, the police lieutenant recognizes Jones as "…the boy they want in Pedro for that rape at Atlas," which results in placing Jones in a holding cell that he describes as a "dirty grimy cell, stinking of urine, sweat, and filth. I didn't give a goddamn; I stretched out on it. I didn't think I'd ever sleep again."[42] The novel wraps up with Jones facing the judge only to learn that Madge does not press rape charges against Jones, that the truth of Jones' innocence came about after interrogating Madge and her remaining neutral on the possibility of possible tensions arising between her and the other employees at Atlas. Consequently, the case shifts to Jones's weapons possession. Instead of facing charges for sexual assault, the judge offers Jones the option of letting him off on the gun charges on the condition that Jones enlists in the military. Jones agrees, and the novel ends with Jones' enlistment in the army. Given the sequence of the novel's concluding events, Jones is presented

[40] Ibid, 187.
[41] Ibid, 194.
[42] Ibid, 196.

with either spending time behind bars or fighting abroad, the latter presenting itself as the best-case scenario. While it may be believed that one choice is better than the other, Himes presents both as punishments of the same accord, both of which are rooted in the development and advancement of U.S. American statecraft during the Second World War. This devastating ending results in a larger critique of the warfare state, wherein Black movement/progress is not enabled nor protected by the state, but rather enables a cycle of captivity that results in involuntary service in the military or incarceration as means for indefinite punishment.

In looking at this final series of events and Jones' inevitable demise, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* can also be read as a work of carceral critique, one that likens the political economy of Los Angeles during World War II as reliant on the restriction of Black movement in multiple forms: movement via social and political agency as well as the physical maneuvering and occupancy of space i.e. captivity. Tackling themes of war and militarism, inter-ethnic relations, and Jim Crow America, the novel also provides insurmountable detail of the inner-dimensions of the colonized psyche, particularly in Jones' many iterations of a deep-seeded disdain for his current lived state of being: "What I hated most about the whole thing was I had to keep on living in the goddamned world."[43] While Bob Jones represents a fictionalized embodiment of Chester Himes, the novel's autobiographical nature presents what I understand to be an earlier piece of literature that centers the Black experience in Los Angeles as one of a colonized experience; a counternarrative to the ongoing and existing discourses of what constitutes the city as one of racial promise and social mobility. Throughout this chapter, I situate a conversation that distinguishes Chester Himes from other Black male writers of his cohort – particularly Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin – and present a reading of Chester Himes' Los Angeles novels (primarily *If He Hollers*

[43] Ibid, 200.

Let Him Go) as works of anticolonial literature; works that constitute the Black lived experience in Los Angeles as a literal state of warfare aided through the interlocking mechanisms of racial captivity, psychological anguish, and carceral containment. In doing so, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* is not only useful in the attempt to get a better sense of Bob Jones' character as a symptom of Los Angeles' racial and class climate, but also an integral device in situating Chester Himes as an anticolonial writer within the larger African-American literary canon of the first half of the twentieth century.

Captivity and Genre

Existing scholarship around Chester Himes, especially *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, has covered a number of the novel's themes of racism, labor, and sexual regression during wartime Los Angeles. These scholars have largely situated the novel as the centerpiece of the Black Los Angeles literary canon, one that disrupts a normative outlook on Los Angeles' burgeoning histories surrounding social equity and promise in tandem with a globalizing film industry, among other things. Although it is not the main argument of this chapter, here I want to introduce the concept of movement (in its literal and figurative sense) and how it can complement an anticolonial reading of the novel. If captivity is the state through which Jones and Himes alike comprehend, navigate, and resist their surroundings, then movement may be a way of rendering both figures as capable of a form of agency that may be unique to the way that Los Angeles is lived and studied.

Throughout the novel, it is worth taking note of how Jones sees Los Angeles. He sees it as virtually every other resident of the city – through his windshield. From waking up and getting ready to "get up and die" in the beginning of the novel to his ultimate pursuit by the police toward

the end, the only real and assumed possession that Jones has is his Buick Roadmaster. [44] In a car that can be seen as a Chevrolet Caprice or a Chrysler 300 in a more contemporary sense (both vehicles commonly associated with working-class Black men), Jones moves through Sepulveda Boulevard and Pacific Coast Highway, all the way up and down Sunset boulevard, Figueroa, Central Avenue, downtown and Little Tokyo, Santa Anita and Huntington Park, and San Pedro, taking readers through Los Angeles in a manner that illustrates not only the city's vastness, but its multi-ethnic composition comprised of every socio-economic lifestyle ranging from affluence to poverty. The significance of Jones' ability to drive through the streets of Los Angeles creates a visceral depiction of the relative moments where he is arguably in control of his own being. In this realm, Southern California car culture can be seen as a form of mobile agency, a reality that allows for Jones to transcend multiple geographic, socio-economic, and ideological boundaries that have been so heavily imposed on him.

Building on my overall study's engagement with the concept of captivity, which I understand as a racial and gendered material and ontological condition enabled through anti-Black carceral violence rooted in histories of transatlantic slavery, colonialism, and human warehousing and liquidation, it makes sense to understand Chester Himes as an anticolonial writer, particularly through a reading of *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, for a couple of distinct yet closely related reasons. For one, of his cohort involving social protest fiction writers such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin, Chester Himes wrote most extensively about his lived experience, with many of his protagonists serving as different literary representations of Himes during different moments of his life.[45] Ralph Story writes that Chester Himes' Los Angeles novels marked him as

[44] Ibid, 2.
[45] See: Chester Himes, *Lonely Crusade* (1950) protagonist Lee Gordon and *Cast the First Stone* (1972) later *Yesterday Will Make You Cry* (1998) protagonist Jimmy Monroe. While much of Chester Himes' reputation signal mostly to *If He Hollers Let Him Go* and his Harlem detective series with Grave Digger Jones and Coffin Ed Johnson, these

one "African-American writer of his generation who could not and would not bite his tongue for commercial, political and/or critical popularity," who would complement Harold Cruse's notion that "a writer, black or white, is either a social critic or s/he is nothing to be remembered" and that "serious novelists (black and white) are either controversial or they matter very little and cannot aim to please either blacks or whites."[46] Having suffered critical condemnation from Blacks and whites alike Story continues that "the bulk of his work reflects his discovery of life as a cutthroat, inexplicably painful, but curiously exciting, saga. Himes understood that the essence of human nature and contemporary life was uncertainty."[47] This uncertainty yielded Himes' analysis that wartime Los Angeles corroborated the Black man's experience which was "neither integrationist nor separatist."[48] Often autobiographical, and with *If He Hollers* remaining among one of the most notable works of literature about Los Angeles overall, signifying a growing popularity in racial *noir* fiction, Himes' works have largely been regarded as a blueprint for other notable works written in and about Black life in Los Angeles. Because most of these works may simply show how carceral violence is deployed across different racialized communities across the United States, Himes presents the possibilities of understanding how Black masculinity ought to be understood as produced by and within the auspices of carceral violence, which lends itself to situating how interpersonal, intracommunal, inter-ethnic, and psychological violence remain overarching themes across the genre of Los Angeles-based literature.[49] In other words, the novel is arguably the most

somewhat lesser known, popularly contested works draw as closely to narratives around Himes' personal life as much as *If He Hollers* accomplishes to do.

[46] Ralph D. Story "The Dissonant Chord: Chester Himes' 'Lonely Crusade'" *College Language Association* Vol. 49, No. 3 (March 2006), 283. For more on the African American novel as social criticism, see: Harold Cruse *The Essential Harold Cruse: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2002)

[47] Ibid, 284.

[48] Ibid.

[49] See: Rashad Shabazz *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press: 2015), 8-9. As stated in the introduction, my overall study is greatly informed by Shabazz's study on Black masculinity in Chicago. Shabazz challenges wider conceptions of masculinity being regarded as an "unmarked category." He writes of how we think and talk about "war, interpersonal violence, state

prominent of its era and genre, and what makes it even more notable is the novel's centering of a Black working-class protagonist whose life is marked by endless violent repression. According to media scholar Justus Nieland, "social protest fiction is itself a loose amalgam of the dehumanizing qualities of fictional feeling – affective strategies that blur melodramatic sentiment and ironic cruelty, and make strange bedfellows of the likes of Store, Cain, and Kafka."[50] As the novel follows Jones from beginning to end, the blending of feeling (and his inability to feel) with a grotesque fascination of the inward and outward conflicts that he must confront, *If He Hollers* more closely aligns with Albert Camus' *The Stranger* than *Native Son* or *Invisible Man* because it most closely illustrates how a protagonist, along with the plotline, is driven directly through constant confrontations of internal and external crises.[51]

If He Hollers teaches literary critics to become familiar with the political imperatives that are foundational to Black *noir* as well as to more readily identify the social conditions that influence the creation of the protest novel. Black literature leading up to, during, and following World War II, the already popular Richard Wright (*Native Son* and *Black Boy*), James Baldwin (*Go Tell it On The Mountain*), and Ralph Ellison (*Invisible Man*) joined Himes in constructing the protest novel as the necessary and isolated commentaries that gave the U.S. American public a look into the crisis of the U.S. American color line and the unavoidable questions and realities of the violence of Jim Crow segregation and failed Reconstruction. The protest novel as a genre of African-American literature hardly saw a conventional plotline of character growth and resolution. Rather, the protest novel often centered the narratives of Black male youth, often living under the

power, work, the economy, the military, the environment, sports, or cultural production as social forces, but we rarely consider how masculinity shapes these realities and contexts." My study suggests that in order to understand the carceral world beyond the prison, it is negligent to forego the realities of how carceral violence is deployed and how it must understood as racialized *and* gendered exertions of state power.

[50] Justus Nieland, "Everybody's Noir Humanism: Chester Himes, 'Lonely Crusade,' and The Quality of Hurt," *African American Review* 43, no. 2/3 (Summer/Fall 2009), 278.

[51] Hilton Als. "In Black and White: Chester Himes Takes a Walk on the Noir Side," *New Yorker*, May 27, 2001.

most precarious forms of violence and poverty, that would ultimately serve as the underlying basis for their ultimate demise. Often the protagonists in these novels are encircled in unending conditions that are largely unimaginable by white America; where crime, poverty, political unrest, and nihilism foreclose any realm of social promise and uplift. Grim by nature and bitter by popular perception, the protest novel boosted Chester Himes' stature in the literary world, leading him to be considered by many 20th century literary critics as Hip Hop's first true story teller.[52] Beginning with *If He Hollers Let Him Go* and extending into the Harlem detective series (*A Rage in Harlem*, *The Real Cool Killers*, *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, among others), literary critics, scholars, and writers cite Chester Himes as the Godfather of American crime fiction and storytelling. Other notable figures who build from Himes include folks like Stanley "Tookie" Williams, Robert "Iceberg Slim" Beck, and Sanyika "Monster Kody" Shakur.[53] In addition to these writers, as chapter three will discuss further, the growing relevance of gangsta rap in Los Angeles took on many of the important themes and genres that echo Himes' gritty realness. Most importantly, through a critical reading of Chester Himes' experiences and its translation in his works, we can formulate the prominence and utility of reading and understanding how these narratives may present lasting insight on the shifting tides of Los Angeles' political economy and its relationship to the militarized expansion of local police/sheriffs, jails, and surveillance. While autobiographical

[52] See: RJ Smith *The Great Black Way: L.S. in the 1940s and the Lost African-American Renaissance* (New York: Public Affairs Publishing, 2006), p. 101. This is a build up from notable hip-hop journalist Nelson George who once wrote, "Ice Cube, The Notorious B.I.G., Scarface and many other of the genre's master storytellers are heirs to Himes' technicolor prose." See: Nelson George *Hip Hop America* (Penguin Random House, 2005).

[53] See: Stanley Tookie Williams, *Life in Prison* (1998) and *Blue Rage Black Redemption* (2004); Robert "Iceberg Slim" Beck's *Pimp: A Story of My Life* (1967); and Sanyika Shakur *Monster* (1993). Although *If He Hollers* is not an autobiography in a traditional sense, it is important to consider its autobiographical elements and the novel's impact on the way Blackness has been studied in Los Angeles during the latter half of the twentieth century. These works are equally known for its racial and sexual violent themes as much as they center carceral violence. It is difficult, if not impossible, to read works written by and about Black men in Los Angeles without marking the interrelatedness that exists between interpersonal and sexual violence and violence experienced through police interaction, prisons/jails, surveillance, law, and courts.

writings centering the lives and voices of Black men in Los Angeles during critical moments in the city's political and social history all focus on the impact of anti-Black racism and carceral violence on the human psyche, I suggest that *If He Hollers Let Him Go* best presents a portrait of the connection between the racial and gendered politics of war and labor and its role in shaping the conditions that make the dangers of Black life cyclical and inescapable.

Like the protest novel, literary historian Lawrence Rodgers once wrote that *If He Hollers Let Him Go* should be regarded as a "fugitive migrant novel," one that departs from the traditional *Bildungsroman* and the fugitive slave narratives of the nineteenth century. What this connotes is that the fugitive migrant novel "undermines the utopian connotations derived from the popular images of the North as the biblical land of Canaan. Unable to imagine any inhabitable geography (symbolic or real), they offer the migration form's severest critique of ascent as a mechanism to achieve racial and cultural advancement."[54] The novel's ability to move between genres, appeals, and literary discourses signifies the protagonist's metaphorical and symbolic movement across boundaries of racial captivity and social mobility. In this realm, literary scholar Lynn Itagaki builds from Michel Foucault's notion of transgression to indicate movement in and out of forced boundaries. Foucault writes that transgression "forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes."[55] Marked by the hyper-awareness of living in

[54] Lynn M. Itagaki "Transgressing Race and Community in Chester Himes's 'If He Hollers Let Him Go,'" *African American Review* Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring 2003), p. 66. For more of a study of the fugitive migrant novel genre, see Lawrence R. Rodgers *Canaan Bound: The African-American Great Migration Novel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

[55] Michel Foucault "A Preface to Transgression" *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Edited and translated by Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 34-35. Foucault defines transgression as "an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses. The play of limits and transgression seems to be related by a simple obstinacy: transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration, and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable." See also: Michel Foucault *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Translated by Alan Sheridan. (New York: Vintage Press, 1977).

Black skin, the novel immediately characterizes Jones as a captive being, one who is "silenced by his inability to articulate his location, a position that excludes neither location but also belongs to neither."[56] To understand Jones as a transgressive migrant is to understand him as categorically displaced and constantly in contention with the boundaries of freedom (which he never attains) and unfreedom (which he permanently resides but constantly tries to move apart from). In this sense, Jones navigates his surroundings abysmally, remaining unsure of where he originates and is destined. Although he remains unsure of exactly how it will happen, Jones' only certainty lies in the reality of his imminent lynching, both metaphorically and literally; a reality that reinforces how Jones understands his surroundings.

The culmination of events that map Bob Jones' demise (from his work suspension, his encounter with Madge and subsequent brutalization, to his enlistment in the Army) pose a post-migration commentary of the precarity of navigating Jim Crow America even well outside of the South. From Jones saying towards the end, "What I hated most about the whole thing was I had to keep on living in the goddamned world," the opening pages of the novel establish the same sentiment on Jones' perception of his surroundings: "Living every day scared, walled in, locked up. I didn't feel like fighting anymore; I'd take a second thought before I hit a paddy now. I was tired of keeping ready to die every minute; it was too much strain. I had to fight hard enough each day just to keep on living."[57] These are few of many instances in the novel that depict Jones' fear and agitation, often meditating on the realities of death being closer than a promising life. This is what literary scholar Abdul JanMohamed refers to as the "death-bound subject," which he writes

[56] Lynn M. Itagaki "Transgressing Race and Community in Chester Himes's 'If He Hollers Let Him Go,'" *African American Review* Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring 2003), 67.
[57] Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1986), 4.

is a subject "who is formed, from infancy on, by the imminent and ubiquitous threat of death."[58] Throughout the novel, Jones understands himself as constantly under the threat of killing or being killed, at times literally but often psychologically. Understanding Jones as a "death-bound-subject" is useful in reading Jones' placement within the African-American literary world and the same types of conditions that create protagonists such as Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940). Ultimately, Jones brings to light a portrayal of racism in the American city that is outside of the geographical and ideological boundaries that constitute the North and the South but posits Los Angeles as a culmination of both arguably made worse due to governing ideologies of what Southern California *should* be to all races. Through this observation, it can be argued that among Himes' tasks through the novel is to depict Los Angeles in the same light as the South as well as in relation to the North, framing Los Angeles as particularly barbaric due to the city's multi-ethnic composition aided by its culture of a kind of cosmopolitan respectability that pointed Himes towards a kind of anti-Black racism he believed to be worse than anything he had ever experienced in the South. In his 1943 article "Zoot Suit Riots are Race Riots," Himes writes that "the outcome is simply that the South has won Los Angeles."[59] In the novel, this condition may be best correlated to Jones' disgust with Japanese internment: "I was the same colour as the Japanese and I couldn't tell the difference. 'A yeller bellied Jap' coulda meant me too."[60] As the first key instance of overt,

[58] Abdul R. JanMohamed, *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death* (Durham: North Carolina Press, 2005), 2-5. In reading Richard Wright's works, JanMohamed presents a definition of the "death-bound-subject" that assumes the trope of the Black body throughout the African-American literary tradition that "continually and systematically meditates on the effectivity of the threat of death as a mode of coercion." He continues that "the difference between ante- and postbellum societies brought about by the legal end of slavery, the one feature that links the two periods is the reliance of both societies on the threat of death and the systematic use of lynching to coerce subject populations." Building from Orlando Patterson's famous study *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (1982), JanMohamed builds on the condition of life being contingent on a "conditionally commuted death sentence" insofar as biological and civil death are inevitably premature for Blacks in both ante- and postbellum societies. I build on this notion to further explain my work's centering of the concept of captivity and its theoretical and epistemological tracings from the Middle Passage, Jim Crow, to the modern U.S. police state.
[59] Chester Himes, "Zoot Riots are Race Riots" in *Black on Black* originally published in *The Crisis* (1943), 225.
[60] Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1986), 4.

targeted racial incarceration in the novel, Jones' understanding of his subjectivity to a related form of carceral violence/enclosure would happen only in a matter of time, and that while the targeted attacks on young Mexican American zoot suiters and Japanese Americans were violent in itself, it always meant that Blacks would face the same dangers in only a matter of time.

The Ontology of Warfare

> Albert Camus once said that racism is absurd. Racism introduces absurdity into the human condition. Not only does racism express the absurdity of racists, but it generates absurdity in the victims. And the absurdity of the victims intensifies the absurdity of the racists ad infinitum. If one lives in a country where racism is held valid and practiced in all ways of life, eventually, no matter whether one is a racist or a victim, one comes to feel the absurdity of life.[61]

In his 1972 autobiography *My Life of Absurdity*, Himes draws on philosopher Albert Camus' conception of the 'absurd' to describe the nature of racism. The task of *If He Hollers Let Him Go* meditates the significance of the violent relationship that exists between the racist and the victim, often indicating a deep level of suffering experienced on both ends. It is without question that Jones recognizes and acknowledges his relationship to the absurdity of racism. Perhaps the most daunting takeaway from this realization accompanies the reality of his own reduction to objecthood. In his book *Chester Himes: A Critical Appraisal*, literary scholar Stephen Milliken examines Himes' depiction of the violence of quotidian life through Jones' vantage, "it [Los Angeles] is not unlike a prison in which the solid infrastructure of deadening routine and discipline has completely dissolved. Passions normally held in tight rein – lust, racism, anger – surge dangerously just beneath the surface."[62] While loosely, though I would argue deliberately,

[61] Chester Himes *My Life of Absurdity: The Later Years – The Autobiography of Chester Himes* (New York: Paragon House, 1976), 1.
[62] Stephen F. Milliken *Chester Himes: A Critical Appraisal* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1976), 75.

employing "prison" as a primary descriptor to indicate the violence of racial and social constraint, Milliken posits the importance of centering Jones' paranoia as a common thread that structures the novel from beginning to end. To continue, it is in fact "fear" that constitutes Jones' character trope – a man in constant fear of his surroundings that allows the novel to serve as what Milliken describes as a "concentrated study of the genesis of panic, the progressive deterioration of a personality under the deadly pressure of a huge and inescapable fear."[63] These important observations extracted from Himes' personal experiences and its impact on his earlier novels are rightfully situated in the examination and theorization of the relationship between the carceral state and racial psychoanalysis. Drawing from these notions, I want to highlight the use of the novel's ability to translate the interrelatedness between Jones' feelings of constant domination by his surroundings and his affective psycho-social behaviors that are produced as a result of his perpetual status of living in daily fear. If we can situate ontology as the study of the metaphysics of being, then we can read Jones as a figure whose ontology is constructed not only through fear, but also through objecthood. Jones' reduction from person to object generates a lens through which the imposing realities of the intersection of warfare (via military and industry) and the prison (via the jail cell, the police and his constant fear and paranoia) are revealed and written as a constitutive feature of 1940s Los Angeles. Like Himes, Jones' ontology is largely comprehended through an intimacy with death, a condition that is wantonly imposed within the colonial settings in which they both inhabit.

The relationship between race and nation was posed as an integral feature of reconciling the possibilities of freedom existing on both domestic and global scales. The steady belief in Black participation in war efforts was largely seen as the main, overarching way in which the problems

[63] Ibid.

along the color-line at home would be resolved, or at least reveal the contradictions paved through liberal democratic endeavors. Many Black workers, for instance, sought this moment as an opportunity to lobby for the desegregation of both the workplace and the military. Incidentally, Terminal Island in Los Angeles (from which the Atlas shipyard is based on in the novel) became a forefront in the pursuit of desegregation in the workforce. It was at a place like Terminal Island where Black workers found that the greatest barrier to equality was organized labor, and that workplace priorities were set on defending the sanctity of its white workers.[64] In the novel, Jones hears from a fellow worker "'That's the trouble with you coloured people,' he shouted, getting agitated. 'You forget we're in a war. This isn't any time for private gripes. We're fighting fascism – we're not fighting the companies and we're not fighting each other – we're all fighting fascism together and in order to beat fascism we got to have unity. We got to have unity in the union and unity on the job."[65] While many Black American workers believed that fascism was a threat to dominant conceptions of global order and national security, the material base of Black labor highlighted the contradictions set out by the wartime industry's notion that unity abroad means unity at home. Black workers contended that, in fact, there could be no unity abroad if there is no unity at home.

Himes' confrontation with the symbolic gestures of democracy can be traced to his initial desire to come to California – to work as a screenwriter for Warner Brothers. Himes generates an understanding that democracy cannot be limited to "Negro accomplishment," but instead warranted a "kind of radical equality that has never actually existed, and that, when demanded, as

[64] Josh Sides *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 58-61.
[65] Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1986), 123.

in the Double V strategy, reveals itself as foundationally unruly and paradoxical."[66] In his 1943 essay "Now is the Time! Here is the Place!" Himes states:

> And yet, in this peculiar paradox which finds this nation of Negro Americans within this great nation of the United States of America forced into a fight for freedom at home so as to give meaning to its participation in the fight of the United Nations for the freedom of all the world, there are those who say that this is disunity, subversive.[67]

Himes remained steady in his belief that Black American participation in U.S. war efforts were necessary and compulsory; however, what that meant Black struggle was "not within the 'boundaries of an existing interpretation of freedom' codified by statute and administration but through a contemporaneous, concurrent fight for freedom at home."[68] Where I believe Himes departs from the seemingly commonplace trajectory of assessing the double bind between freedom at home and abroad is that his experience in Los Angeles marks a thorough engagement with the fallacies of liberal promises of racial equality that sparked a deep examination of the constant terror and psychological despair of navigating such a strange, alienating environment. For many Black Americans, the existing contradictions could not have been more obvious, as it was seen that New Deal reform posed many limitations that would often correlate to increased racial stratification. According to historian Nikhil Pal Singh, what the war would do, however, was "sharpen the dialectic of race and nation - color and democracy - as U.S. blacks viewed their own struggles, in Himes's words, as 'the very essence of the fight for freedom of all the peoples of the world.'"[69]Through the lens of global conflict, the existing dialectic between race and nation would

[66] Justus Nieland, "Everybody's Noir Humanism: Chester Himes, 'Lonely Crusade,' and The Quality of Hurt," *African American Review* 43, no. 2/3 (Summer/Fall 2009), 285.
[67] Chester Himes "Now is the Time! Here is the Place!" *Black on Black: Baby Sister and Selected Writings* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 217.
[68] Nikhil Pal Singh *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 103.
[69] Ibid, 108.

reflect the existing dialectic between Black and white, belonging and exclusion – all central tenets in the American protest novel. As mentioned, Himes demonstrates the inner dimensions of Bob Jones' social displacement, characterized by frequent agitation by his surroundings, which also directly impacts his ability to distinguish his conscious from subconscious. In fact, many of Jones' most revealing conflicts occur through the many dreams that haunt him – all of which demonstrate Jones' inability to navigate his social surroundings in any sort of harmonizing way; he wakes up with a rabid tension that mixes a kind of psychological incapacity with sexual restraint. Most chapters of the book begin with Jones starting each day waking up from dreams that allude to his quotidian detachment and tensions; it becomes routine. As readers begin to learn about Jones early in the novel, evidence reveals what the war has done for him both personally and interpersonally with the people he encounters across the racial and gendered spectrum.

Given Jones' exposure to the violence experienced at the expense of Japanese and Mexican Americans, it is important to understand and situate Himes as an anticolonial writer. I make this assertion in order to emphasize Himes' Los Angeles years as entirely situated within a political economy shaped by World War II and McCarthyism, which was foundational to his subsequent novel *Lonely Crusade* (1945), while understanding how integral Los Angeles was to Himes' political growth and literary commitments over the next few decades. Because of this, I understand Himes as writing not simply along or in response to global events such as war and the domestic war on communism, but rather against these wars. In doing so, Himes may arguably be among the most useful and earliest of writers in reading how a place Los Angeles can serve as a key site through which the contradictions enabled through war all collide and are most damaging towards the Black working-class. My overall assertation is that *If He Hollers Let Him Go* is not simply a novel about wartime Los Angeles, but an examination of how the Black working-class relationship

to the city parallels the relationship that the colonized has with the colonizer. In essence, the novel presents Los Angeles as a Third World city in constant decay, a topic that my next chapter will cover in greater detail.

As I mentioned earlier, Chester Himes is often placed among other notable Black male writers of the era – namely Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and to a lesser extent James Baldwin. Rather, my reading of Himes more closely aligns him with anticolonial intellectuals such as Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, and Aimé Césaire. These mid-20th century anticolonial writers are among many who took seriously matters concerning how the material and ideological realities of racial Blackness are conceived of and lived within a colonial context and the commonalities that exist among African descendants and other colonized communities across the globe. When it comes to reading Himes as an anticolonial writer, West Indian psychiatrist and political philosopher Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) is key for this intervention. Having read and built from *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, Fanon cites Chester Himes among many cultural producers of the time that have demonstrated in their works the relationship between colonialism, the psyche, and racial pathology. To both Fanon and Himes, war plays a central tenet in understanding how Black people navigate the colonial world. Literary scholar David Marriott writes extensively on Fanon's relationship to war:

> Fanon runs the language of war into the language of psychoanalysis and psychiatry; more accurately, he shows up how these languages can be made to advance on the notion of conflict between two opposed, or warring, forces. At issue is the war between Black and white men, certainly, but also – and perhaps more urgently for Fanon – the Black man irrevocably and unforgettably at war with himself. That quasi-internal war, or wars, is there throughout, engaging Fanon's own war-time experience alongside his incessant conflicts with a range of psychoanalytic and politico-philosophical texts. In short, war is already installed in Fanon's thinking, a war that is endless and confined, neither internalized or externalized – irresistible. It consists, in effect, of multiple fronts and frontiers as the war on the outside crosses over onto the inside, attacking other fronts.[70]

[70] David Marriott, *On Black Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 66-67.

This passage in particular draws on the centrality of war that Fanon placed in the study of language and the Black psyche. Fanon largely thinks and writes through war. To Marriott, as well as Fanon and Himes alike, war is constant and twofold – the battle between the colonizer and the colonized *also* exists in the psyche. It begins with the warring reality of the Black subject coming to terms with their own negation which begins the initial war of self. This is drawn from the Hegelian notion of "reciprocal recognitions," constituting "an ontological war in which existence 'is always a question of annihilation or triumph', is also a tenacious street war over the simple right to live."[71] *In Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon writes that "affect is exacerbated in the Negro, he is full of rage because he feels small, he suffers from an inadequacy in all human communication, and all these factors chain him with an unbearable insularity."[72] In my reading, Fanon is useful to place in conversation with Himes, particularly through the figure of Bob Jones in order to draw on a phenomenology of race that is applicable to the Black psyche, specifically in confronting wartime Los Angeles.[73] Propelled by rage, Jones' nihilistic world view is constantly at the center of many of Jones' interactions with others, both Black and white, and ultimately dials back to his own views of himself, understanding himself as constantly being under threat and likely to die at any moment particularly when he says, "Living every day scared, walled in, locked up. I didn't feel like fighting anymore; I'd take a second thought before I hit a paddy now. I was tired

[71] Ibid, 88.
[72] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 50.
[73] See: David Woodruff Smith, "Phenomenology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/>. The definition of phenomenology is stated as "the study of structures of experience, or consciousness. Literally, phenomenology is the study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first-person point of view." Distinguishing from ontology i.e. the study of being, which this section of the chapter also deals with, phenomenology may be useful in understanding how the world appears to be from Bob Jones' vantage as it may reflect on a larger scale the iterations of the colonial world as seen through a colonized lens. This may also lend to addressing Jones' conscious and subconscious, his inability to often distinguish between the two, and how his quotidian encounters construct his overall being (i.e. ontology) in relation to his anti-Black violent surroundings.

of keeping ready to die every minute; it was too much strain. I had to fight hard enough each day just to keep on living. All I wanted was for the white folks to let me alone; not say anything to me; not even look at me. They could take the goddamned world and go to hell with it."[74] Speaking not solely of physical but rather psychological constraint, Jones articulates a worldview defined through captivity; his psychological and physical captivity are tightly-woven and both stake their dominance since the very beginning of the novel towards the very end. Jones evokes a desire to be left alone for the sake of not having to run the risk of "hanging somebody sure as hell," which he describes as a daily contemplation during his time in Cleveland and an ultimate deciding factor that prompts his move to Los Angeles.[75] In essence, he contemplates killing and being killed, exuding an intimacy with his own forged inferiority matched with a desire to be left alone by whites.

The line that if the chance were to come for him to see a psychiatrist that "they'd have put me away" reveals Jones' own tensions with understanding himself as illegible, which throughout the novel can be seen through many moments of Jones' self-imposed expectations to repress his own emotions and actions in order to avoid conflict.[76] Fanon writes:

> The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation….The Negro's behavior makes him akin to an obsessive neurotic type, or, if one prefers, he puts himself into a complete situational neurosis. In the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence. Whenever a man of color protests, there is alienation. Whenever a man of color rebukes, there is alienation. The attitude of the Black man toward the white, or toward his own race, often duplicates almost completely a constellation of delirium, frequently bordering on the region of the pathological.[77]

[74] Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1986), 4.
[75] Ibid., 3-4.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 60.

Here, Fanon writes of the relationship between the Black man and the white man as conjoined by inferiority and superiority, while he argues that both result in a pathological demise. It is without question that Jones lives not only in a constant state of fear and agitation, but also in constant protest – both a protest of white society and in protest of his own self. For example, Jones falls victim to many instances where he has difficulty navigating whether his dreams are real or not (the first and last chapters of the novel start off with Jones waking up from violent dreams). Through his observations of racial prejudice against other communities, for instance Japanese Americans, to his dreams, his relationships, Jones is deeply driven through his own sort of fascination with oppression – he is aware of it, he speaks of it, he speaks to it, he confronts it, protests it, and knowingly falls victim to it. To this end, Fanon continues, "Unable to be assimilated, unable to pass unnoticed, he consoles himself by associating with the dead, or at least the absent. And his associations, unlike his life, ignore the barriers of centuries and oceans."[78] This is a very dominant theme throughout Himes' work. Take for example *Yesterday Will Make You Cry*. Carceral scholar Dennis Childs writes of the protagonist Jimmy's "struggle with punitive abjection" that it "is not simply a matter of a too-close physical proximity to the dead; rather, the oblivion of prolonged encagement – of being transformed from a living being into a number on a prison board – has brought him into a perilous experiential identification with the dead."[79] From this notion, Himes makes clear the intimacy that exists between Jones (or Jimmy or Himes himself) and death, speaking to the omnipresent nature of the realities that result in physical and social degradation - situating warfare as a lived reality rather than as a metaphor. This lived reality is best described

[78] Ibid, 65.
[79] Dennis Childs, *Slaves of the State: Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 143.

and articulated by way of its proximity to death (or the dead) and its dominant stake on the multiple sectors that constitute U.S. American social life.

Thus, my formulation of warfare throughout my study ties directly to the logics, mechanisms, discourses, and relations that suggest that war is a necessary feature of Western social life especially in the United States during the twentieth century. Enabled through conquest and genocide, my formulation of warfare in relation to reading Himes suggests that Jones embodies the metaphysical and material realities that normalize genocide as a constitutive feature of U.S. America's nation-building project at home and abroad.[80] For example, this may point to Jones' conceptualization that the onset of Japanese internment suggests the inevitability of an impeding moment (or series of moments) of racial incarceration that would be wantonly deployed onto him – or the Black working-class as a whole: "*Is it now? Is now the time?*"[81] As previously stated, since the beginning of the novel it is established that Jones lives in constant paranoia, and that his questioning of "is it now? Is now the time?" immediately draws connection to an identification with the targeted population e.g. Japanese Americans. Here, it is presumed that the severity of witnessing anti-Japanese violence signifies the inevitable nature that at some point those same conditions would apply directly towards Black people if it hadn't been applied already.[82] Aided by Jones' general disdain for Los Angeles and how it shapes his understandings of his own relative subjectivity, it can be claimed that Jones premeditates on the conditions of his own demise from the earliest pages of the novel, and how Japanese internment gives added context in shaping how multi-ethnic violence always meant fully deployed violence against Blacks.

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[80] See: Joy James (ed.), *Warfare in the American Homeland: Policing and Prison in a Penal Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) and Dylan Rodriguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
[81] Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1986), 4.
[82] See: Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

This gesture by Jones points to his acknowledgement of his own nothingness, one that more closely identifies with objects and death. Fanon says is best in his noteworthy chapter "The Fact of Blackness" in *Black Skin White Masks,* stating: "I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects."[83] The "fact" at hand suggests a kind of racial confrontation that renders the Black man to be reduced to negation. In this instance, Fanon is overdetermined by his surroundings and conflated by way of his confrontation with the white subject – he is everything that the white world reduces him to on a basis of value and appearance. Because of the "fact," Fanon presents the notion that ontology "does not permit us to understand the being of the Black man," that "being" is associated with "humans" to which Bob Jones is constantly reminded of everyday that he is not: "I felt torn all loose inside, shriveled, paralyzed, as if after a while I'd have to get up and die."[84] Fanon adds, "The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty...A slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world – such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather a definitive structuring of the self and of the world - definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world."[85] Here, we can see that Jones' detachment from his own bodily schema is the ontological conflict that determines his relationship with his surroundings and how they influence the relationship he has with himself. The fact that Fanon describes is a central tenet of the colonial world that bears the possibilities of drawing ideological and material parallels between places like Algeria and Los Angeles, and how the warfare state's survival and growth is wholly contingent on the continued negation of its colonized inhabitants.

[83] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 109.
[84] Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1986), 2.
[85] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 110-111.

The parallels between both Himes and Fanon provide evidence in understanding the relationship between warfare and death. If it is true that by reading Himes one can understand warfare as solely being reduced to the ideological and material means through which militarized violence and conquest is deployed overseas but also as a literal state of being that transcends geographic and ideological borders, then we can see premature death as the inevitable causation of the conditions produced through warfare. Both Himes and Fanon understand their relative subjectivities to always be in constant contention with their surroundings and that the white world relies so heavily on Black degradation and civil/biological death. Lastly, it is important to see how both Himes and Fanon understand that within a colonial context what makes whites more human is constant dehumanization, that colonial projects are contingent on the negation and debasement of its colonized subjects.

Conclusion

In a 1946 review entitled "History as Nightmare," James Baldwin describes *If He Hollers Let Him Go* as a book that was "difficult to find any satisfactory classification: not a good novel but more than a tract, relentlessly honest, and carried by the fury and pain of the man who wrote it."[86] Like much of the critical reception of the novel at the time of its publication, many readers found it difficult to find the book entertaining or pleasurable in the slightest. Many found the novel to be daunting, nothing more than a scathing critique of one man's experience with racism in Southern California. Baldwin continues by saying "It seemed to me then one of the few books written by either whites or Negroes about Negroes which considered the enormous role which white guilt and tension play in what has been more accurately called the American dilemma."[87]

[86] James Baldwin "History as Nightmare" *The New Leader* (October 25, 1947)
[87] Ibid.

The novel's rendering of Bob as a kind of hero-victim may allow for readers to suggest that the novel is about more than just racism. More so, the novel presents a multitude of layers that suggest racism resides at the core of Bob's inability to resist and fall victim to the conditions produced at the intersections of militarism and war, sexual regression, and overall social displacement. However, I would reiterate that the novel's journey through Bob's life, on the exterior but more importantly his interior, is best understood in the context of a violence produced specifically as a byproduct of Los Angeles' global relevance amidst the backdrop of a heightening political economy based on warfare. To reiterate an earlier point, combining multi-ethnic antagonisms alongside a prevailing anti-Blackness, Himes' formulation of a California racism was fueled by his understanding that war was most distinctly experienced on the home turf first. Throughout the novel's arc lies the constant anticipation of when a Black rupture would occur in the same light as the conditions that bred both Japanese internment and the Zoot Suit Riots. Himes' ability to merge multiracial violence with the rapid expansion of wartime manufacturing aided by American involvement in the Second World War suggests that racial/sexual violence and militarism are intertwined. More specifically, the novel possesses the ability to clearly mark the relationship between international conflict with domestic terror as wantonly deployed upon Black, Brown and Asian bodies, a theme that spans much of Himes' bibliography. Additionally, the commonalities that exist between international conflict and domestic terror most importantly showcase the novel's use in understanding the centrality of racial violence as indicative of U.S. American conquest and nation-building.

CHAPTER 2
Inside/Outside Prison: Counterinsurgency and Genocide in Haile Gerima's *Bush Mama*

> But, for a policeman, all black men, especially young black men, are probably Black Panthers and all black women and children are probably allied with them: just as, in a Vietnamese village, the entire population, men, women, children, are considered probable Vietcong.
>
> - James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (1972)

On August 11, 1965, 21-year-old Marquette Frye was pulled over by police within blocks from his home in Watts, CA. The situation escalated as police proceeded to physically assault him, his brother, and mother, quickly gathering upwards of 200 onlookers at the site. The assault quickly ignited rage among the crowd once 25 squad cars pulled to the scene, as people took to the streets to burn and destroy surrounding property in protest of one police assault too many. The unrest would last for another five days, provoking the masses of the local community to partake in the largest civil uprising of the decade. By the second day, close to 7,000 people took to the streets and raided stores and business along 103rd street. Violence escalated even further as Chief William H. Parker of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) called in the National Guard, bringing 21,000 national guardsmen to Watts by August 13. The *Los Angeles Times* had officially declared the region a warzone, a guerilla war taking place on disaster territory. This immediately ignited national and international attention. By the end of five days of unrest, it was reported that 3,438 people were arrested, 1,032 people were injured, and 34 people dead and an estimated $40 million in damage, making it the largest urban uprising in U.S. American history at the time.

One important aspect that made the Watts Rebellion so significant is not solely based on the scale of the events, but that it occurred within days of the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

Media sources at the local, national, and international level saw Watts as a site of interest in magnifying the residual effects of constant police abuse and generational unemployment. By this time, it was not uncommon to see Watts *as* a perpetual warzone even in the aftermath of the rebellion. Because of this, the reality and impact of the Watts Rebellion immediately counterposed the long-held narrative that the United States was on a steady path towards racial equality and social justice, a narrative that occupied a majority of the Civil Rights efforts that took place during the 1950s and 1960s. Historian Gerald Horne writes that the "overall quality of Black life fell precipitously during this period."[88] In looking at the Watts Rebellion as an incident of domestic guerilla warfare, it must be understood that communities of color in Los Angeles were informed "directly through other wars, declared and undeclared, beneficial and devastating: the Vietnam War, the War on Poverty, and the wars across the globe that affected Black and Brown diasporas."[89] By understanding the nexus of these competing wars, Watts then becomes central in analyzing the interdependency of global and domestic warfare on the continued war against Black communities at home and abroad. Placing particular emphasis on the continued U.S. imperialist and colonial efforts taking place across the Third World throughout the 1960s, the Watts Rebellion, the Vietnam War, the War on Poverty, and the undeclared wars on the liberation movements in cities across the U.S. are all central to this chapter's analysis of Los Angeles-based Black independent film via UCLA's Los Angeles Rebellion film collective as a key cultural network responding to how the precarious mechanisms of war, incarceration, and genocide interlock and construct a multi-generational assault on Black life in the United States.

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[88] Gerald Horne *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 3.

[89] Gaye Theresa Johnson "Cold Wars and Counter WAR(s): Coalitional Politics in an Age of Violence" *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 86.

The L.A. Rebellion film collective is a movement of student filmmakers who entered UCLA's school of Theater, Film, and Television under the Department of Ethno-Communications beginning in 1967. This department sought to open the doors of opportunity for students who came from colonized backgrounds. Operating under the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement, the Watts Insurrection of 1965, and the fruition of the Black Power Movement, this collective of African and African-American students would generate a cinematic landscape through which they would be authors of their own narratives that would set the stage for Black independent filmmaking for the next two decades. They would, in retrospect, create films that not only challenged Hollywood images of Black people, but also demonstrated through film how Black life both impacts and was impacted by global social and political change. Among its original members were Charles Burnett (*Killer of Sheep*), Ben Caldwell (*Medea*), Julie Dash (*Daughters of the Dust*), Haile Gerima (*Bush Mama*), Billy Woodbury (*Bless Their Little Hearts*), Alile Sharon-Larkin (*The Kitchen*), Barbara McCullough (*Water Ritual #1*), and Jamaa Fanaka (*A Day in the Life of Willie Faust*), among others. Under the mentorship of Teshome Gabriel, film scholar and professor at UCLA, this new generation of filmmakers generated a praxis that geared toward Third Cinema, a radical political aesthetic mediated through film that had its roots in documentary filmmaking, was labeled militant and oppositional to social and political dominance, did not fit into a particular formula, and was widening in global cultural and social relevance with the backdrop of the liberation efforts of Africa, Asia, and Latin-America. Owing much of its roots to the decolonization efforts of Latin America and Africa, L.A. Rebellion films did not always seek to smoothly translate into a U.S. context, as it was widely believed that films centering Black American issues were not globally marketable. For the next twenty years, L.A. Rebellion filmmakers would continue to generate and inspire new generations of Black independent filmmakers who were committed to a

politics of liberation and self-determination both on and off screen. These films and their makers made significant contributions to this 20th century Black insurgent artform and serve as an integral part of a collective envisioning of a society in which Black power would have a dominant stake in the liberation efforts of North America and beyond.

Stemming from my engagement in chapter one with Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go* where I focus on the novel's anticolonial elements that begin my overall framing of Black Los Angeles as an internal colony of Los Angeles and the United States writ large, this chapter analyzes shifting discourses of warfare as a formative feature of Cold War popular discourse that ultimately helps us understand the advent of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, the explosion of Watts in 1965, and the U.S. invasion of Vietnam. In addition, in this chapter I explore the growing cultural relevance of Los Angeles-based Black insurgent filmmaking that emerges alongside Hollywood's continued growth in the U.S. cultural mainstream in relation to the rapid growth of the Los Angeles Police Department, made notorious under the leadership of Chief William Parker beginning in 1950. Considering the widespread impact of McCarthyite doctrine on the political economy of race and class in Los Angeles during the postwar period, this chapter formulates an argument for Haile Gerima's 1979 film *Bush Mama* as a critical artifact that illuminates the intersecting realities of domestic warfare – as mobilized through racialized and gendered trauma, poverty, policing, and labor - as indicative of Black Los Angeles' burgeoning global significance especially in relation to other notorious Black ghettos across the United States.

In this chapter, I build on cultural scholar Cynthia Young's reading of Haile Gerima's *Bush Mama* and Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* as representations of how state violence is a "routine strategy of containment and control pepper with instances of physical violence but necessarily dominated by them." Centering the quotidian nature of state violence and its "slow eroding of

individuals until they can no longer imagine alternatives, until their very existence represents a powerful, if limited, form of resistance," I analyze *Bush Mama* as a critical intervention in understanding the interrelatedness of how colonial state violence entails a process of both physical and psychological domination – a dominant theme that a connects to my overall engagement with racial and gendered captivity in Los Angeles.[90] *Bush Mama* is an anti-genocide and anti-colonial film. It seeks not only to make sense of Watts, but to depict Watts in the years following the 1965 uprisings, especially within the context of the ongoing Third World decolonization efforts occurring across Latin America and Africa during the same years. In order to read *Bush Mama* to as an anticolonial and anti-genocide film, I offer a broadened understanding of the social and political contexts that led to the creation of the L.A. Rebellion film collective at the University of California, Los Angeles and the role of Cold War-era Black insurgent film as a frontal cultural assault, or war of position, of the heightened class tensions that were made hypervisible through the Watts Uprising in 1965. Stemming from the theoretical approach that guided the previous chapters' literary analysis of wartime Los Angeles – the uses of contradiction and the psychological dimensions of living in perpetual states of a "warfare interior" – in this chapter I read *Bush Mama* as a necessary and oppositional response to Hollywood's enabling of the proliferation and militarization of local police forces, the protection of the sanctity of a commodity-driven economy, and the process of exploring the multiple dimensions under which Black people in Los Angeles seek the rights to life rather than mere survival. Because Third World struggle serves as a crucial site in understanding the politicization of the Black working-class, *Bush Mama'*s

[90] Cynthia A. Young *Soul Power: Culture. Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 214.

anticolonial and anti-genocidal elements place Los Angeles at center stage in critiquing and theorizing domestic counterinsurgency efforts and its translations across the Third World.

In this chapter, I ask: how does *Bush Mama* make sense of Black life in Los Angeles in the immediate aftermath of the Watts Rebellion and the U.S. invasion of Vietnam? Additionally, what are the varied iterations of the warfare state as it is theorized in the film? How does domestic militarism circumscribe every facet of U.S. life, and its socially debilitating nature in the active reversal of the victories of the Civil Rights Movement? Although the film is not solely a critique of police repression, I argue that *Bush Mama* presents a portrait of Black Los Angeles that is most indicative of a deindustrialized Los Angeles in the years following the Vietnam War, and explore how the film skillfully presents a useful and necessary theory of the warfare state that bridges the trans-Pacific terrors of Vietnam with the domestic precarity of the U.S. carceral state. The film is a landmark in Los Angeles film history, artistically blending documentary with psychodrama to indicate the precarity of Black captivity and its relationship to carceral violence. As a genre, Third Cinema relied much more heavily on narrative than documentary, a style that was often taken up by L.A. Rebellion filmmakers. By doing so, Haile Gerima's skillful use of allegory, surrealism, and artistic introspection forcefully bring together the interrelatedness of psychological torment, jailing, welfare and housing, and policing as manifestations of domestic warfare by doing two things: 1) presenting the dialectical relationship between racial and gendered captivity and social agency as indicative of Black life, positing 1970s Watts as a case study for the Black American ghetto in the deindustrial era; and 2) showcasing a grotesque examination of the macro elements of warfare and theoretical underpinnings of movement that engineer a post-Civil Rights/post-Watts quotidian Black life in ruin. Through a combination of both of these key points, situating *Bush Mama* as an anticolonial and anti-genocide film follows a trajectory that opens up a larger analysis

of counterinsurgency and anti-Black genocide, both as key features of the growth and maintenance of carceral violence and nation-making in the post-Civil Rights era.

Haile Gerima's Symbolic Reality of Black Life

Referred to as the "creator of a New Black Cinema," Haile Gerima's work has proven itself to be instrumental in generating a terrain for Black independent cinema, one that eschews "traditional genre distinctions between fictions and documentary and is dominated by angry tones and urgent expressions."[91] Haile Gerima's film career can likely be traced to his earliest days in the U.S., having immigrated from Ethiopia to Chicago in 1967 to attend the Goodman School of Drama with the intent of studying to be an actor. Since his early childhood days, Gerima particularly credits his grandmother and father for exposing him to the art of storytelling. Being that his time in Chicago would serve as his immediate gateway to U.S. racism, Gerima would find solace in reading about the political and social oppression he faced by studying the writings of Black militants of the 1960s and by identifying with African-American communities; this he says, "helped him regain his sanity and identity."[92] Two years later, in 1969, Gerima would move to Los Angeles to attend UCLA, continuing his study of drama but branching out and deciding that filmmaking was more of a necessary and useful medium that would be more of a platform to apply the growing knowledge he was acquiring while studying the writings of African and Latin American revolutionaries. At UCLA, after enrolling in the Department of Ethno-Communications School of Theater, Film, and Television under the direct mentorship of Teshome Gabriel, Gerima and his other L.A. Rebellion peers would quickly adapt the emerging genre of Third Cinema and

[91] Tony Safford and William Triplett. "Haile Gerima: Radical Departures to a New Black Cinema," in *Independent American Narrative Filmmaking* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 66.
[92] Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike. "Haile Gerima (Ethiopia)," 261.

would be galvanized alongside his deepening interest in the works of Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Walter Rodney, Che Guevara, among others. Developing a theory of liberation as it may be imagined and achieved through film moved to the forefront of Gerima's political and artistic maturation. Third Cinema, emerging from Africa and Central/South America, with a Marxist dialectical focus, served as Gerima's primary framework, which would lead him to produce a revolutionary film bibliography that was "experimental with form and content as well as the exploitation of artistic, technical, and political possibilities of the film medium."[93] Up to this point, Gerima credits African-American culture with helping him "defy that colonial position and link up with my father's resistance tradition."[94] *Bush Mama*, then, is understood as Gerima's "attempt to depict Watts as a microcosm of both the United States and the Third World, a site constructed by forms of violence and terrorism so destructive and brutal that armed self-defensive emerges as the only alternative."[95] Through *Bush Mama*, Gerima regarded his immediate confrontation with Black America not as distant but rather intimately linked if not entirely the same as the Third World.

Perhaps what's most compelling about Gerima's approach to film is his belief in the connections that exist between culture and (neo)colonialism. While Gerima identifies as a Third World independent filmmaker, all of whose films take place in the U.S. (aside from his 1974 film *Harvest: 3,000 Years*), Gerima's study and early film practice emerged in tandem with the growing global popularity of films from Africa and Central/South America. Literary and film scholar

[93] Ibid, 265.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Cynthia A. Young *Soul Power: Culture. Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 235.

François Pfaff writes about Gerima's unique blending of African and African-American consciousness. He states:

> Coming to the United States was also a divisive step in the shaping of Gerima's sociopolitical consciousness and the rediscovery of his cultural heritage…At this time he began reading the writings of Malcolm X and other Black militants of the 1960s…Interestingly, it is through their search for African roots that Gerima reasserted his own Africanness.[96]

What makes Gerima's case most compelling in this regard is his growing consciousness and deepening investment in Third Cinema outside of the academy and his growing reach as an African-born filmmaker making films in and about African-American communities and experiences; these combined to fortify the "symbolic reality of Black life" in his work. To Gerima, his process of Black radicalization was aided through an understanding of how Black American radical thinkers understood themselves as colonial subjects. Through an ideological positioning of colonial being, Gerima would reinforce his own rendering of being African, witnessing a kind of unification between his relationship with his home country in Ethiopia with his new surroundings in U.S. cities with burgeoning Black communities. One iteration of this stems from Gerima's own personal experience of living in Los Angeles and his deliberate incorporation of the quotidian into his film plots. Referring to *Bush Mama,* Gerima states:

> I cut from a man leaving for a job interview to a scene with him in prison. Now, one of the experiences of being Black in America is not going where you want to go, being stopped. When I used to edit my films at night at UCLA, I was always stopped by police as I passed through Beverly Hills. It is a truthful representation to cut from him leaving for the job interview to a prison scene without justifying how he got in jail. The story is of the symbolic reality. In America when a Black human functions how does he or she fit into the context of symbols?[97]

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[96] Françoise Pfaff, "Haile Gerima (1946 -)," in *Twenty Five Black African Filmmakers: A Critical Study, with Filmography and Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 139.
[97] Tony Safford and William Triplett. "Haile Gerima: Radical Departures to a New Black Cinema," in *Independent American Narrative Filmmaking* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 62.

My assertion here links Gerima's position as an arbiter of Black life's symbolic reality through film to an overall theoretical positioning of Black life as being in a state of perpetual captivity, clearly demonstrated through Gerima's own personal meditation on his interactions with police while exercising agency via physical movement. Here, Gerima describes the moment of the film where T.C. discusses with Dorothy the promise of a new job. Although Dorothy makes clear that T.C. "don't know nothin' about computers" and that soon he would embark on a vocational career that was meant to reverse the family's current condition, Gerima quickly pans from that scene to another where T.C. is shown handcuffed while being escorted to his jail cell, tightly juxtaposing the promises of Black life to the inescapable symbolic reality of being prone to cyclical social, civil, and biological forms of bondage. In this case, T.C. serves as the embodiment in which the multiple forces of carceral erasure may collide into a single moment, one that directly ties the promise of stable employment with the even tighter promise of being held captive by the state for no immediate justified reason, leaving viewers to wonder why T.C. would be incarcerated throughout the remainder of the film. Gerima's framing of this particular scene is contingent upon his own experience, one that carefully and skillfully blends the real-life experiences of Black Angelenos with the experiences of T.C. and Dorothy, seemingly blurring the lines between fiction and documentary, due to Gerima's personal and political involvement with the film's overall message.[98] Like the scene, Gerima's observation is impossible to separate into two;

[98] Yoomy Namm. "Cinéma Vérité vs. Direct Cinema: An Introduction," in New York Film Academy's Student Resources: https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/cinema-verite-vs-direct-cinema-an-introduction/ (New York, 15 November 2015). Like other L.A. Rebellion films, *Bush Mama* is considered a work of cinema verité. "French for "truth cinema," cinema vérité was first developed by French ethnologist and filmmaker, Jean Rouch during the early 1960s and brought to documentary filmmaking a natural dialogue and authenticity of action. But unlike its direct counterpart, the philosophy behind this technique was that the filmmaker actively participates in the film as a subjective observer where necessary; combining observational AND participatory filming in the same breath." For more on relationship between Haile Gerima and documentary realness, see Phyllis R. Klotman and Janet K. Cutler "Interviews with Filmmakers" in *Struggles for Representation: African American Documentary Film and Video*, ed. Klotman and Cutler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 352.

ideologically/conceptually he may as well be T.C. and T.C. may as well be him. What this does is demonstrate the possibility of this reality transcending the screen, allowing Gerima to regard his condition as that of a captive being similar, if not identical, to the likes of T.C. by asking "in America, when a Black human functions, does he or she fit into the context of symbols?" Gerima relates to the condition of his own subjectivity that traces the precarity of Black people's contingency within the realities of racial and gendered captivity. The question of Black humans functioning within the context of symbols extends Gerima's character tropes embodied by Dorothy and T.C., arguably leading both figures to operate as characters who are constrained to fit into symbols that are constantly prone to violent forms of erasure and captive status. This careful blending of Gerima's personal anecdote and this particular scene in the film suggests that the symbolic reality that Gerima speaks of is one that is carefully entwined with ongoing histories of colonial violence and racial exclusion, as T.C. and Dorothy are key figures in Gerima's own process of radicalization within the context of the widening relevance of Third Cinema in the United States against the backdrop of the liberation of Latin/South America and Africa.

Following this idea of the symbolic reality of Gerima's film can bring us to a pivotal moment at the very beginning of the film's production where Gerima and his film crew are being searched and interrogated by LAPD. For one, the film opens up with the chaotic sonic layering of helicopters, police intercoms, voiceovers, and sirens that would register to viewers the occurrence of a constant state of emergency. Amidst the rapid layering of these sounds is an unclear, almost undecipherable panning into a scene of a group of Black men who we learn is Gerima and his film crew. Acting as a kind of "circumstantial cinema verité," this particular scene is generally indistinguishable from the film's plot, particularly concerning the film's critical layering of the

multi-dimensionality of carceral forces being deployed onto every sector of Black life.[99] What then arises is a question of the role of the camera, as this scene is all-too reminiscent to the popular viewership and amateur recording of the infamous Rodney King beating in March 1991. What Gerima does, however intentionally or not, is give meaning to the viewer, centering the ideological importance of spectatorship in the framing of Black life on camera, especially concerning the dialectical relationship between the police as colonial occupiers and the colonized residents of Watts. The way that Black people (i.e. Gerima's film crew) are criminalized leads viewers to frame (or reframe) police as "representatives of an oppressive colonial government," which may demonstrate how the film as a whole can be forever situated and viewed as a work of anti-colonial art.[100] Understanding Gerima and his film crew as colonized subjects on camera, vis-à-vis a recorded police encounter, intertwines a relationship between Gerima and his crew and the viewer, or what Frantz Fanon refers to as "the people who give substance to the gaze."[101]

[99] Casey Shoop, "Angela Davis, the L.A. Rebellion, and the Undercommons," in https://post45.org/2019/02/angela-davis-the-l-a-rebellion-and-the-undercommons/, Feb. 5, 2019. This point is an extension from Teshome Gabriel's book *Third Cinema in the Third World* (1982) where he draws on the concept of "interpellation" from French philosopher Louis Althusser, to "describe how the camera acts as an ideological instrument that slots its viewers into a politically constructed point of view." Merging this notion with Frantz Fanon's framing of ideological critique as an instrument of anti-colonial liberation, Teshome Gabriel generates what he coins the "Third World experience." This will be instrumental in understanding not only this particular opening scene of Gerima and his production team being accosted by the LAPD, but in terms of thinking about Los Angeles, particularly Watts, as a Third World city.

[100] Casey Shoop, "Angela Davis, the L.A. Rebellion, and the Undercommons," in https://post45.org/2019/02/angela-davis-the-l-a-rebellion-and-the-undercommons/, Feb. 5, 2019.

[101] See: Teshome Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1982)

Figure 2.1: Opening scene of film crew being accosted by LAPD officers in Watts

Historian Daniel Widener emphasizes the active role of the LAPD in the film, stating that "the story of the LAPD's interference with Gerima's film is important, both because it reflects the continuing problem of a police force bent on behaving as an army of occupation and because it reflects a long history of police interference in the affairs of Black artists."[102] Combining these two elements of policing as it relates to the film's introduction, one can conclude that a dominant function of policing is to construct and reinforce a violent modality of militarized social order while culturally neutralizing the artistic possibilities that come with targeting Black artists and musicians whose works are largely, if not entirely, driven by a larger critique of the institutions that both constitute and legitimize policing. This opening scene can therefore be said to present a kind of "paradigmatic case of the quotidian violence visited upon the Black life by the State, as well as a practical and theoretical demonstration of the camera's power to fight back in the name of the community under siege."[103] The routinization of carceral violence entirely encircles not only

[102] Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 258.
[103] Shoop, "Angela Davis, the L.A. Rebellion, and the Undercommons"

the plots of many L.A. Rebellion films, but literally posits itself on the same grounds of its filmmakers both on and off camera.

Incarcerating the Black Family – Locating Domestic Warfare

Among L.A. Rebellion films, *Bush Mama* stands as among the more better-known films of the genre of Black insurgent film. Because of this, the film ought to be revisited for its lasting impact on Cold War-era Black radical avant-gardism; it bears a necessary and insightful critique of the burgeoning militarism at home as a result of international conflict. To expand on this notion, the intersection of domestic militarism and racial, gendered, and economic captivity present the overall thematic of *Bush Mama's* radical legacy, bridging Black cultural renditions of (un)belonging as both an ideological and material result of living under war-like conditions. My reading of domestic militarism emphasizes the conditions that led to the creation and production of *Bush Mama* as a representation of Watts in the years immediately following the 1965 Uprising, the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the U.S. invasion of Vietnam, and the global push to end the spread of communism. Domestic militarism demonstrates the ideological and material grounds in which life in the United States is most precarious for communities who experience mass violence of housing, law, policy, police, jails, welfare, and unemployment. Additionally, domestic militarism is suggestive of my project's expansion and conceptualization of racial and gendered captivity as an enabling condition of anti-Black violence at the hands of the state made entirely possible through the carceral state and its agents (i.e. housing, education, law, labor, etc.). Militarism, in this regard, refers to the set of ideologies and discourses that allow for militarized, weaponized forms of violence and control to be situated as constitutive features of any modern society's overall conception of international safety, order, and progression. Henceforth, with

regard to my reading of *Bush Mama*, this ideology of militarism connotes the genocidal material conditions that construct the lived realities of Black people in Los Angeles especially at the height of armed conflict in Vietnam, the War on Drugs, and deindustrialization. Drawing from these points, *Bush Mama* presents both a forceful critique and a necessary portrait of the violence of welfare-warfare liberalism that defines postwar Black America, with emphasis on Los Angeles as a site of interest in Red Scare crackdown and the cyclical repression of Black radical and other Third World collectives.[104] With these components in mind, Los Angeles becomes a truly carceral city made evident through the work of Gerima – demonstrating the dispersal of carceral control at both the level of the state and the intracommunal.

Directly informed by the Civil Rights, student, and antiwar movements of the 1960s, Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse took on the question of the relationship between capitalist state power and the opposition forces it is met with. In his 1964 book *One Dimensional Man*, Marcuse writes that the welfare-warfare state is a "state of unfreedom" because its total administration is the systematic restriction of (a) "technically" available free time; (b) the quantity and quality of goods and services "technically" available for vital individual needs; (c) the intelligence (conscious and unconscious) capable of comprehending and realizing the possibilities of self-determination.[105] In identifying the dialectical relationships that exist between improvement and destruction, protection and danger, and of course welfare and warfare, Marcuse writes of a working-class state of being, one that critically assess the nature of integration. According to Marcuse, a society reaches one-dimensionality once its workers become "integrated" into it, ultimately foreclosing the means of opposition that would inevitably follow. From this

[104] Casey Shoop, "Angela Davis, the L.A. Rebellion, and the Undercommons," in https://post45.org/2019/02/angela-davis-the-l-a-rebellion-and-the-undercommons/, Feb. 5, 2019.
[105] Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press), 1964

point, capitalism is not simply a matter of exploiting the proletariat, but rather becomes a matter of violently repressing proletariat opposition. According to Marcuse, the welfare-warfare state "reduces politics to the work of increases in securing standards of living," meaning human life itself does not constitute the grounds which makes critical theory possible. In doing so, Marcuse identifies the historically specified means through which power disallows the sustenance of human life itself; what makes human life essentially unlivable.[106] He writes: "Under such conditions, decline of freedom and opposition is not a matter of moral or intellectual deterioration or corruption. It is rather an objective societal process insofar as the production and distribution of an increasing quantity of goods and services make compliance a rational technological attitude."[107] To Marcuse, the revolutionary movements of the 1960s meant that "the beginning of the end of a period" was on the horizon, and that the radical efforts of the Black working-class was a suitable terrain in locating a foreseeable end to the "one-dimensionality" that had been violently imposed on them via apparatuses of the carceral state.

Bush Mama is a critique of the one-dimensional society that Marcuse theorized a decade prior and is directly concerned with Black life-making as it exists under the violent constraints

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[106] Adam Sitze, "The Paralysis in Criticism," *Theory & Event* Volume 20, no. 3 (July 2017): 6-7. This passage expands on the notion of human life being at the center of Marcuse's analysis of the welfare-warfare state. To be expanded on in later portions of this chapter, this point serves as an entry point into which *Bush Mama* can be read as an anti-genocidal critique of American counterinsurgency against the Black community, particularly in the 1960s. Sitze writes, "His two value judgments provide a clue. Established society's plan for the actualization of the potentiality of human life (the welfare state) is equally and manifestly also, Marcuse argues, a plan for the elimination of human life (the warfare state). The state – an apparatus designed for the purpose of protecting and developing human life – now itself poses a danger to the very populations it proposes to safeguard. The irrationality of this arrangement, in other words is that it negates the very human life it also claims to affirm, because it rationalizes the means of preserving human life to the point of endangering human life, to the point where the means for the protection of human life becomes inseparable from the means for the destruction of human life. And human life itself, which is increasingly unlivable in light of new developments in military technology (e.g. the atomic weapon), nevertheless also, because of the same technological advances that intensify the destructive." For more on "one-dimensional society" and "welfare-warfare liberalism," see: Herbert Marcuse "Philosophy and Critical Theory," and "Struggle Against Liberalism in Totalitarianism," in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, Trans. Jeremy Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968); Ronald Aronson "Marcuse Today," *Boston Review*, Novemeber 17, 2014, http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/ronald-aronson-herbert-marcuse-one-dimensional-man-today

[107] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*

imposed by the realities of the welfare-warfare state. *Bush Mama* contends that the welfare-warfare state's permanence in quotidian Black life serves as a model for which violence is deployed among Black communities nationwide, serving as a kind of political economic terrain that allows for the materialization of the carceral state to be made possible. Therefore, drawing on this theory, I understand *Bush Mama* as a radical envisioning of profound urban critique, one that allows for a theory of the welfare-warfare state to intersect with the burgeoning reliance on carceral state violence in order to conceptualize the necessary solutions to social and political crises in Cold War North America, showcasing not its benefits to society, but rather its overall failures.

The film's ability to convey the inner and outer dimensions of both Dorothy and T.C.'s lives suggest a few things. For one, both Dorothy and T.C. experience the violent entanglements that constitute the nature of the welfare-warfare state's reliance on carceral technologies of containment. Whether through Dorothy's police encounters and unemployment or T.C.'s actual life behind bars, the film shows the interrelatedness of the prison regime and the welfare state especially as their synergy is a direct manifestation of a domestic militarized regime of racial, gendered, and class violence. Second, the film complements the overall arch of my dissertation by offering a theory of racial and gendered captivity, which I understand as a conceptual understanding of anti-Black violence that is made possible and enabled through carceral warfare, tracing back to the Middle Passage and antebellum slavery and through Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and neoliberalism. Racially charged and fortified through its gendered specificity in showing how carceral violence is deployed among Black bodies, the film skillfully depicts Dorothy and T.C.'s life-worlds as those of captive beings; lives whose experiences are results of restricted mobility by way of both physical and ideological movement.[108] Altogether, the framing of the cohabitation of

[108] Hortense Spillers. "The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Post Date," *boundary 2* Volume 21, No. 3 (Fall 1994): 106. I use the term "life-world" here to draw Spillers' writing on African-American intellectual culture in a post-

the welfare-warfare state with the carceral state suggests not only an expanded theory of "unfreedom" and "restriction," but also a necessary terrain through which Dorothy and T.C. experience moments of serious and profound processes of radical becoming. The entanglement of their lives within these systems of militarized mass physical and epistemological violence actually serves as a necessary means through which both characters experience, conceptualize, and fortify understandings of freedom and liberation.

Set in 1970s Watts, *Bush Mama* chronicles the life of Dorothy, played by Barbara O. Jones, whose life is posited within the multiple intersections of motherhood, poverty, and unemployment that constitutes a post-Civil Rights deindustrial world. Haile Gerima is undoubtedly interested in the complicated politics of resistance that exist within the Black family household especially in the years following the Watts Rebellion. We follow Dorothy, who is both the protagonist as well as the film's central consciousness, whose character arc brings us from the very beginning to the very ending of the film.[109] The opening scene follows Dorothy as she trails along city sidewalks, leaving viewers unclear about exactly where she's going, only knowing that she is en route with a kind of persistence, walking to the pace of upbeat jazz music playing in the background. In this opening scene, Dorothy's purse is snatched by a young boy, who successfully escapes after a brief wrestle with Dorothy. Next, she arrives at the welfare office. Over the sounds of loud talking and arguing, an unnamed man appears at the front of the office doors wielding an axe, upon which the police are called and he is immediately shot to death. Following these initial events, we learn more

World War II era. Here she writes that the "life-world" is a "motion of *crisis*, as the urgent immediacy, overwhelmed by the 'real,' it, therefore, has no *theory* of the past, even though it brims over with it as the coercive, unreflected principle, or law, of our present." In fact, it is a "symbolic geography that would explain 1) diasporic movement, 2) internal migration, and 3) the mechanisms of fantasy and ambition that contextualize African-American struggle." Centering the importance of 'movement,' here Spillers' use of "life world" signifies a kind of 'symbolic reality' that would lend its hand at understanding the many cultural iterations of Black movement that exist in the epistemological, ideological, physical, and material sense.

[109] Richard Brody. "'Bush Mama'": A Landmark Film, and a Reminder of Cinema's Exclusionary History," *The New Yorker*, (April 26, 2017).

about Dorothy, her daughter Luann, and her two main friends, Molly and Angi, both of whom represent opposite ends of the political spectrum, and all of whom play key influences on Dorothy's radical unearthing. Fraught with the stresses of unemployment, pregnancy, and hoping to maintain a meaningful relationship with her partner, T.C., who is incarcerated throughout most of the film, Dorothy's life is characterized by the shouldering of an intense burden, deep uncertainty, and rabid hopelessness, all of which serve to ignite Dorothy's process of radical becoming. I argue that Dorothy is an emblematic figure in understanding the constraints of living under war-like conditions enabled through the carceral state; how everything from the theoretical conjectures of Dorothy's movement (i.e. her ability and inability to maneuver space both materially and abstractly) to her racial and gendered subjectivity and the carceral state's multiple appendages provides a lens for illuminating how ideological and material warfare impede on every aspect of Black individual and collective life in the decades following the Civil Rights movement.

Although the film focuses largely on Dorothy, the protagonist, her process of radicalization presents the necessary possibilities of the multi-layered processes of radical becoming that we see in the characters T.C., Luann, Angi, and Molly – all of whom play central roles in Dorothy's political growth. Considering Watts as the setting of the film, the film demonstrates how apparatuses of the warfare state are primary sites of Black working-class radicalization, as we will see through T.C.'s incarceration and Dorothy's cyclical run-ins with the welfare state and the police, an extension of what Herbert Marcuse refers to as the "welfare-warfare state."[110] Given the film's setting, the strategic placement and creation of the L.A. Rebellion, and the film's storyline, *Bush Mama* can be imagined and situated as a film that is representative of the growing relevance and permanence of Third Cinema during the 1970s. In the years following both the Civil Rights

[110] Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964)

Movement and a leveling of Watts after the 1965 Rebellion, Watts can then provide a case study of a material and ideological theory of the Third World city, whose conditions point in the direction of how colonialism and racism cohabit urban landscapes and are enabled through the multiple intersections of the warfare state's permanence in a post-Civil Rights society.

Along with Dorothy, T.C. remains a character of deep interest throughout the film. While much of what we are exposed to of him takes place after his imprisonment, the viewer's relationship to T.C. is just about as distant as Dorothy's; only taking place through a series of monologues. What we do know about T.C. is that he suffers from PTSD, often waking up from deep tremors after having nightmares from his time serving in Vietnam. In the beginning of the film, as viewers are introduced to Dorothy through long shots of her walking along the sidewalks, having her purse snatched by a young boy, and witnessing a police shooting outside of the window of the unemployment office that she frequents, T.C. appears to be the only source of promise. He informs Dorothy and Luan of the probability of him working with computers as a way to get them out of the ghetto even while Dorothy worries about this plan's seeming unfeasibility due to his lack of education, to which she exclaims "you don't know nothin' about computers!" From that moment, the scene immediately pans to T.C. being incarcerated, the beginning of both Dorothy and viewers' relationship to him being primarily through the jail cell. He spends the remainder of the film undergoing a deep, yet gradual process of radicalization – as he spends a majority of his time educating himself on matters concerning his and Dorothy's relative (dis)placements in society as a poor, Black family. As the film progresses, T.C.'s audio letters appear to grow more distant and impersonal, seemingly less geared towards the promises of his love life with Dorothy yet somehow bearing the impulse to serve as a necessary appendage in Dorothy's radical self-becoming. T.C., unlike Dorothy, becomes increasingly more institutionalized by the film's end,

while arguably Dorothy operates inversely, becoming far less institutionalized in a traditional sense to the point to which she becomes the "bush mama" woman holding a baby in the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) poster on the wall. According to Mike Murashige, "the poster of the African woman works towards a recoding of what black bodies mean within representational politics. Rather than being a site of deprivation, pain, despair and victimization, this image embodies a very material form of political and social insurgency."[111] Dorothy's poster gaze is significant for a couple of reasons: first, Angi brings the poster home after having gone to a Black Power rally in the local neighborhood, and second, 1975 marks the year of both Angolan independence as well as *Bush Mama*'s filming, both occurring simultaneously.

Figure 2.2: Photo of the MPLA poster hanging on the wall of Dorothy's apartment.

Figure 2.3: Dorothy repeated gazes at the poster while pacing back and forth.

[111] Mike Murashige "Haile Gerima and the Political Economy of Cinematic Resistance" in *Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video*, ed. Valerie Smith (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 187.

Haile Gerima makes deliberate and useful critiques of gendered carcerality. Both T.C. and Dorothy share distinct, yet entirely differentiated relationships to the state. Throughout the film, both seem to occupy endless cycles of nothingness and uncertainty, while much of what we see are scenes panning Dorothy walking to unknown destinations, waiting at bus stops and street corners, and T.C.'s gaze affixed through prison bars. Viewers are then brought to a realization that neither Dorothy or T.C.'s conditions outweigh one over the other – to be jailed or to endure unemployment, welfare, and a pregnancy that the state seeks to terminate. In a very real sense, Dorothy and T.C. are captive subjects of the carceral state, wherein their lives indicate the militaristic conjectures through which carceral violence is wantonly deployed among them. In a literal sense, we understand T.C.'s relationship to the carceral state by way of his incarceration. However, that can be traced even further back to his status as a Vietnam veteran who suffers from PTSD and how his interpersonal relationships with Dorothy and Luann are shaped through trauma, exploitation, and a false promise of likely employment. Dorothy, on the other hand, experiences carceral containment quite literally through the way her body navigates and occupies space, as an impoverished welfare mother who the state tries to pressure into an abortion and who experiences one after being beaten in jail in the wake of being arrested for killing a police officer who rapes Luann. While it is easy to analyze the carceral component of the film by solely examining T.C.'s life behind bars, it is important to situate Dorothy as both a critique of the multiple apparatuses that constitute the carceral state as well as the subsequent resistance to its violence.

In a sense, Dorothy and T.C. represent a kind of cinematic rendition of Angela Davis and George Jackson, especially as *Bush Mama* serves as a kind of continuation of Gerima's previous film *Child of Resistance* (also starring Barbara O.), which was his personal homage to his infatuation with Angela Davis at the time. Additionally, T.C.'s major role in the film as a subject

who lives through voiced-over letters from his cell was intended as a kind of revitalization of George Jackson on-screen. In his prison letters, George Jackson often spoke to the inside-outside prison, which ideologically posits the juxtaposition of Dorothy's incarceration outside of an actual prison cell operating in tandem with T.C.'s actual life behind bars. In one scene, Prison Letter #1, "the camera pans a row of cells, 'a series of images of captured Black men' who stare at the camera through prison bars. The scene culminates in a tight close-up of Dorothy, who is looking out her window…much like many of these Black men locked up in prison.' The image is cut so tightly that the window frame looks to us like prison bars. Then the wind blows the curtain across Dorothy's face, and we realize that she is at home, but also that 'home is no different than prison.'"[112] The parallel lives of Dorothy and T.C. highlight the gendered dimensions of how carceral violence is deployed among Black households. As both characters embark on processes of radical growth, it may suffice to say that both individual processes are conjoined by crisis. The social factors that impact Dorothy and T.C. suggest a crisis of the neoliberal state, legitimated through counterinsurgency and the overall destruction of the Black family structure.

Figure 2.4: T.C. speaking to Dorothy through the viewer.

[112] Greg Thomas. "Close-Up: Dragons!: George Jackson in the Cinema with Haile Gerima – from the Watts Films to Teza," *Black Camera,* Vol. 4, No. 2 (Spring 2013), 64.

Many scenes between Dorothy and T.C. pan out to one other. Between the many instances of T.C. delivering voiced-over prison letters to Dorothy and growing more and more distant from her by the end of the film (indicating the gradual institutional effects of carceral containment), much of the content of the letters indicate T.C.'s desire to study. He often shares with Dorothy that he has been reading, learning about "our people" since before slavery, and how he anticipates a kind of homegrown revolution led by Black people. On the other hand, Dorothy's studying is often rendered as her steady gazes at the MPLA poster while either pacing back and forth in the room or lying in bed, juxtaposing T.C.'s incarceration with her own incarceration in her own house. For instance, we see the "camera's focus and refocus alternate a series of close-up shots of Dorothy and 'Angola woman' to emphasize the equation, now at the level of image (headdress and visage), ancestry (Africanity) as well as political agency, violence, or counterviolence (Pan-African resistance or revolt)."[113] Bridging these two matters, Gerima indicates that both T.C. and Dorothy are preparing for a Pan-African revolt due to their statuses as contained/captive beings. In essence, they radicalize each other, with the conclusion indicating how all three of them, T.C., Dorothy, and Luann, have all endured the same manifestations of the racist and sexist carceral state, embodied either by "some street cop, welfare case worker, clinical staff, medical doctor, or prison guard, in or out of uniform."[114] By this end, Dorothy's character arc wraps right back around to the Angola woman, not simply by her surrendering her wig, but in the sense that Dorothy becomes a warrior woman enduring her own conditions of colonial warfare, while ensuring the duty of protecting her daughter from the same colonial forces that seek to destroy the family as a whole. The film ends with Dorothy's incarceration and a closing letter to T.C., alluding to the overall counterinsurgent efforts to neutralize the U.S. Third World left:

[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid, 66.

> T.C. they beat our baby out of me. They wouldn't let me see nobody, not even a doctor for ten days. We got to make changes so we can raise our kids with both of us at home so things can go right. I've been blaming myself all this time 'cuz things wasn't right. I thought that I was born to be poor and pushed around and stepped on. I don't want Luann growin' up thinking like that. I can see now that my problem was a place I was born into, a place with law that protect the people who got money, doctors and hospitals for people who got money. I have to get to know myself, to read and to study. We all have to so we can change it so we can know how to talk to each other. Talking to each other's not easy. I know you're in jail, T.C. and angry, but most of the time I don't understand your letters. Talk to me easy T.C. cuz I want to understand. It's not easy to win over people like me. There's a lot of people like me and we have many things to fight for just to live. But the idea is to win over more of our people. Talk the same talk but easy T.C. You remember you used to ask why I always wear a wig all day and all night, when I eat, when I sleep. T.C. the wig is off my head. The wig is off my head. I never saw what was under it. I just saw on top, the glitter, the wig. The wig is off my head.

In this final scene, Dorothy is believed to have reached a complete turning point. In repeatedly gesturing to her wig being off, Dorothy demands a particular sensibility from T.C. that foresees a future where Luann does not have to bear not only the consequences and realities of state violence, but the inherent shortcomings of the radical intellectual. State violence remains a crucial terrain in understanding Dorothy's elevation and demise, which extends all the way from T.C.'s prison cell to her womb. While the film ought to be understood as a full process encircled around Dorothy's experiences with people in her surroundings, this ending connotes the beginning of a new process that requires her wig to remain off her head.

LA Rebellion, Hollywood, and Self Determination on Screen

Although it is true, it is not enough to simply write Third Cinema as a direct opposition to Western (specifically Hollywood) film. Maintaining independence was important to L.A. Rebellion filmmakers; however, what they called closer attention to was how cultural imperialism "not only centered Europe and the United States, but it also neglected and distorted the experiences

of people of color."[115] In this realm, L.A. Rebellion filmmakers emphasized the importance of understanding colonial subjects as cultural and knowledge producers.[116] Film historians largely gravitate towards the L.A. Rebellion because of the collective's inherent contradistinction to not only the Hollywood formula, but to the film industry's relationship to the Black working-class. In Jacqueline Stewart's chapter "L.A. Rebellion Plays Itself," she argues that the cultural underpinnings of the Rebellion were not merely centered on the notion of self-representation, but rather reckoned with the role of the Black filmmaker in the material environments from which they came. This is an expansion of what writer and filmmaker Trinh T. Manh-Ha calls the "cultural, sexual, political inter-realities involved in filmmaking: that the filmmaker as subjects; that of the subject filmed; and that of the cinematic apparatus," or the "machinery of creating and presenting the work." Rebellion filmmakers serve as authentic interpreters, reinforcing what historian Clyde Taylor refers to as the "realness dimension" of Black filmmaking.

Building from a neorealist sensibility, L.A. Rebellion films respond to a postwar Italian aesthetic of street film, one that bridges the authentic ins and outs of working-class life sounds, conflicts, spaces, and complexities. Neorealism, in this regard, emphasizes the utility of on-site filming in working-class, poor neighborhoods, centering the quotidian nuances of the city's most disenfranchised communities, whose members are not only primary actors in the films, but are also the producers from which the films are made. As a postwar cinematic genre, neorealist film demonstrated a Marxist-inspired idea of film making and production, which indicated Cold War-era independent artistic production and guerilla media. In critiquing Clyde Taylor, Cynthia Young places more emphasis on L.A. Rebellion films possessing an "eclectic filmmaking tendency" that

[115] Cynthia A. Young *Soul Power: Culture. Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 220
[116] Ed Guerrero "Be Black and Buy" in *Sight and Sound* vol. 10 no. 12 (2000), 34-37.

locates "ideology and politics" as "perhaps the most critical link to Third Cinema, which includes styles that are 'as varied as the social processes it inhabits.' In other words, style was defined both by historical imperative and material context rather than abstract principles."[117] L.A. Rebellion filmmakers not only adapted the realness dimensional approach to filmmaking, but weaponized the racial geography of Los Angeles' relationship to Hollywood as both an ideological and material separation from Hollywood while situating their films in relation to Third Cinema and vice versa.[118] Expanding from this notion, the documentary element that L.A. Rebellion films possess, wherein the film and the filmmakers mobilize the material environments and sensibilities in which they are produced as primary actors of the film, presents a situation in which "objects become subjects," or as previously emphasized, how colonial subjects are written as cultural and knowledge producers.

Many of the L.A. Rebellion collective did not originate from Los Angeles. Haile Gerima, who was born and raised in Ethiopia and came to the United States from Chicago before settling in Los Angeles in 1969, is one of the only African-born members of the group. Among this cohort of filmmakers, Los Angeles proved to be a site of radical promise with parallels in political climate to other Black ghettoes across the nation, but with the unique proximity to Hollywood. Without the access or budgets to film in conventional film studios, the neorealist dimension of L.A. Rebellion films emphasized the importance of incorporating the largely unseen parts of the city of Los Angeles as key signs of the films' political stature and social relevance. Since Gerima identified as a "Third World Filmmaker," he strongly believed that anyone who had an interest in

[117] Cynthia A. Young *Soul Power: Culture. Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 217.
[118] For more on Third Cinema aesthetic and Black independent film, see Clyde Taylor "Black Cinema in the Post-aesthetic Era" in *Questions of Third Cinema,* ed. Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: British Film Institute, 1989), 96 and Paul Willeman "The Third Cinema Question: Notes and Reflections" in *Questions of Third Cinema,* ed. Jim Pines and Willemen (London: British Film Institute, 1989), 15.

filmmaking should avoid Los Angeles at all costs. He even asserted that Hollywood (or Los Angeles more broadly) had "exhausted motion pictures" and that "independent filmmakers can really contribute to America if they stationed themselves in different places – where they were born, where they have worked and known people."[119] He added:

> …independence is a declaration. We believe that the existing system fails to respond to our cultural needs. And it is a militant position in saying that this society fails to respond to my kind and my people and myself. It dehydrates our cultural status not only in this country but in the world. Declaring independence means equally economic, political, and cultural independence. The issue is not to make a statement. The issue is do you control your statement – the aesthetics and the benefit of that product.[120]

These ideas are central from Gerima's ideological positioning as a Third World filmmaker. He recognizes the colonial positionality that resides even within the culture industry, with Hollywood representing a kind of occupier that operates to continually bankrupt the means of production created by Black and other Third World cultures. Gerima believed that film was his means of assessing the rights to not just self-representation, but more so to self-determination on screen, and how integral it is for African people to create and own their culture as a necessary means for survival. Drawing from the work of activist-historian Walter Rodney, Gerima insisted that it is not capital that sustains a community of people, but the empowerment of being "culturally restored to your human essence, when you look at the world from your own vantage point."[121] In this realm, Gerima alludes to the relationship between African diasporic cultural production and mainstream film distribution by framing it around neocolonialism. He describes his introduction to cinema culture as a kind of "imperialist cultural manifestation," one that made him realize his

[119] Tony Safford and William Triplett. "Haile Gerima: Radical Departures to a New Black Cinema," in *Independent American Narrative Filmmaking* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 62.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike. "Haile Gerima (Ethiopia)," 261.

position as "a subjugated African amongst others" rather "than as an active participant in any of the branches of the film business."[122] Gerima credits his exposure to African-American culture as integral to his overall process of realization and resistance to his colonial position as an African-born filmmaker operating in the West. Because of this, considering his views on the Hollywood culture industry as emblematic of a colonial relationship between the West and the colonized world, Gerima's take on film creates alternative platform through which the experiences of Black people in film are not homogenized into one depiction, even as he expands on the notion of "human life in Black communities" not being "a concern for Hollywood films."[123]

Therefore, Black independent film, according to Gerima, must present a counterhegemonic tradition through which films engage politically and socially relevant themes under the direction of younger generations of Black filmmakers and actors who do not care about the amount of money they might make as much as they possess a deeper concern to make relevant films. Gerima asserts the need not to reinvent the wheel of existing African cinema, but to generate a unique line of cinematic practice that is historically rooted in the very storytelling traditions he once learned from his father and grandmother:

> Our historic task, therefore, is to invent our own cinema. In fact, we do not need to invent African cinema, since it has existed for thirty-five to forty years. All we have to do is to contribute our share, irrespective of how imperfect it may be. I do not think, given the confusion in African film practice, that there will automatically be what might be termed a pure African cinema. There will be experiments and explorations, but we have the right and a historic responsibility to design and forge our cinematic language or languages.[124]

Framing the invention of "our own cinema" in this regard places African cinema in a position to be self-represented, with emphasis on "however imperfect it may be." What makes this

[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid1.
[124] Ibid2.

statement so profound is how Gerima situates an African filmmaking tradition in a way that is both open to experimentation and redefinition; he suggests that the overall dexterity of African film is precisely in its ability to be changed throughout different time periods. He insists on the necessity of self-determination and artistic freedom coexisting as a means to produce counternarratives not only in response to Hollywood representations of African diasporic communities, but despite those portrayals.

All Eyes on a Homegrown War – Confronting Genocide and Counterinsurgency in Watts

In March 1966, French Marxist philosopher Guy Debord published his essay entitled "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy." With the intention to read the Watts Uprisings not merely to justify the actions of Watts citizens, but rather to "elucidate their perspectives, to explain theoretically the truth for which such practical action expresses the search," Debord expands on a commonly shared notion with Martin Luther King, Jr's observation that Watts was a "class riot."[125] According to Debord's formulation, Watts was a literal scene of warfare, a tragic "response to the unnatural and inhuman society of commodity abundance."[126] In an examination of the role of the "spectacle," which in Debord's formulation signifies late capitalism in decay and generates a concern not on social life but rather its representation, Debord explains how the Watts Rebellion revealed the troubling and pathological relationship between members in a given society and commodities – an elaboration of Marx's theory of the commodity fetish told from the vantage of an urban uprising.[127] To him, the Watts Rebellion was a "rebellion against the commodity, against the world of the commodity in which worker-consumers are

[125] Guy Debord "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy" in *Internationale Situationniste #10*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, March 1966, https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/decline.html
[126] Ibid.
[127] See: Guy Debord *The Society of the Spectacle* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Black & Red, 1970)

hierarchically subordinated to commodity standards."[128] In his analysis of Watts, Debord applies the Algerian revolution as his point of reference for its role in constructing a global framing of revolutions occurring as a direct result of the genocidal conditions enabled and deployed by colonial forces, leading to the question of what a place like Algeria can teach about revolutionary movements in other parts of the world? For Debord, Black residents in Watts possessed the capabilities to "unmask the contradictions of the most advanced capitalist system," that a dialectical theory of "survival" and "spectacle" are verified through the rebellion and are ultimately "incomprehensible to American false consciousness."[129] He situates the National guardsmen and the police as active servants to the commodity, whose complete submission to objects is done with the sole purpose of maintaining the value of a commodity without having to become the commodity itself. The role of the colonized subject, whether in Algeria or Watts, is to "reject the humiliation of being subject to police" while at the same time "rejecting the humiliation of being subject to commodities."[130] In rejecting submission to the police as arbiters of commodity use-value as well as the commodities themselves, Watts demonstrates a new proletarian consciousness being brought to the world stage, a consciousness that steadily confronts the modern capitalist notion that assigns Blacks as a direct representation of poverty bearing no structural power in a society of hierarchized wealth. Ultimately, what can be gathered from Debord's analysis can be seen in his closing remarks. To him, capitalism has proven itself to be insufficient when it comes to acquiring and distributing social welfare to its poorest citizens, and Watts becomes a global case study in the result of capitalist neglect and its grave shortcomings: "the Blacks pose the problems of *life;* what they are really demanding is not to survive but to *live*."[131]

[128] Debord, "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy"
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid2.
[131] Ibid3.

The significance of Debord's analysis raises a few important points. For one, for so long, Black people in Los Angeles have been seen as "irreconcilable enemies, not of the great majority of Americans, but of the alienated way of life of the entire modern society." In a place like Los Angeles, where the standard and quality of living is categorically higher than in any other American city, Watts' separation from the spectacle of a global city illustrates a higher danger and likelihood of an insurrection taking place, where the contradictions are less of a glass ceiling and more indicative of a burning "endless ladder." Second, Debord contends that "American society itself must disappear," and suggests that Watts can be seen as an example of how societies that mirror that of the United States ought to disappear as well. The Watts insurrection is an avid and thorough rejection of the conditions that have been enabled and created through the genocidal state, ascribing the rebellion as inevitable and customary given the city's precarious histories of policing and incarceration, housing and redlining, and deindustrialization. Historian Jordan Camp regards the Watts Uprising as a "formal end to a period of economic growth in postwar America," which also included the "decline of industrial urbanization, and the rise of permanent structural unemployment in the political economy."[132] These events, and the political economic structures that lead into and follow the rebellion, directly link the interrelatedness of American counterinsurgency efforts abroad being directly translated into a place like Watts, and how genocide operates as a primal feature of domestic militarism and late capitalism. I understand the L.A. Rebellion filmmakers as insurgent curators of a post-Rebellion Watts, whose films largely center the themes of anti-Black genocide and war to present an artistic lens at the ongoing and multigenerational counterinsurgent war on urban Black communities in postwar U.S. America. From this point, one must ask to what degree do the realities and constraints of colonial genocide

[132] Jordan T. Camp, "The Explosion in Watts: The Second Reconstruction and the Cold War Roots of the Carceral State," *Incarcerating the Crisis: Freedom Struggles and the Rise of the Neoliberal State* (2016), 34-35.

invigorate Black arts in Los Angeles, and at what point can a place like Watts be understood as an internal colony, whose structural and economic conditions resemble a place like Vietnam (or the Third World more broadly) than Hollywood or Westwood – both of which are only within a 20-mile drive away from Watts?

Bush Mama is a cinematic critique of the multiple dimensions that constitute state-sanctioned racial genocide. Within the past several decades, studies of genocide have largely applied iterations stemming from the United Nations definition of genocide to the conceptual realities of mass human liquidation on a racialized urban axis as they exist in cities and nations commonly labeled liberal and modern – namely the United States. My conceptual framing of genocide is greatly informed by the works of carceral scholars Dylan Rodriguez and João Costa Vargas, whose detailed elaborations of genocide build from several decades worth of scholarship that have honed in on the question of the nature and mechanisms of how genocide operates in a domestic racial context.[133] In particular, naming genocide in a U.S. American postwar context is most closely associated with counterinsurgency, labelling the proximity of war as a constitutive element of the suffering and mass death of Black communities – mainly poor and working-class – as total recipients of the violences of domestic and international colonial conquest. I suggest that counterinsurgency is the material and positional means through which genocide is carried out among Black communities in North America and a most steady and prevailing example of the direct translation of the U.S. American conquest into Vietnam as consubstantial to the conquest of Watts during the same time period. According to the United Nations General Assembly, article II

[133] See: Dylan Rodriguez *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) and *Suspended Apocalypse: White Supremacy, Genocide, and the Filipino Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); and João H. Costa Vargas *Never Meant to Survive: Genocide and Utopias in Black Diaspora Communities* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008)

states that genocide constitutes "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group as such:

a) Killing members of the group;
b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to member of the group;
c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."[134]

While this definition is useful and posits an initial framework of understanding genocide not solely through its more conventional widespread means i.e. the Jewish Holocaust, I find great use in indigenous scholar Ward Churchill's "functional definition" of genocide as one that indicates the transhistoricity of genocide, which encompasses the complexities of what constitutes the rights and means to exist and survive regardless of the state's "intent" to commit acts of genocide.[135] Drawing from legal scholar Raphael Lemkin's 1944 text *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, Churchill conceives a definition of genocide that is defined through three primary forms: physical, biological, and cultural.[136] For scholars such as Rodriguez and Vargas, racial terror must be understood as a central tenet of any genocidal regime especially in the event of understanding the condition of Black life in North America. Through histories of racial terror as seen and experienced through the Middle Passage and antebellum slavery, Reconstruction and Jim Crow apartheid,

[134] Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Approved by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 260 A (III) of 9 December 1948; entry into force 12 January 1951 in accordance with article XII.
[135] Ward Churchill *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997), 423-433. Churchill makes the following suggestion: "Although it may or may not involve killing. Per se, genocide is a denial of the right of existence of entire human groups, as homicide is the denial of the right to live of individual human beings…Many instances of such crimes have occurred, when racial, religious, political, and other groups have been destroyed, in whole or in part. The punishment of the crime of genocide is therefore a matter of grave international concern." From here, Churchill goes on to elaborate on how acts of genocide are usually, though not always, combination of its three primary forms: physical, biological, and cultural.
[136] Ward Churchill *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present*, 410. See: Raphael Lemkin *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944) and "Genocide as a Crime Under International Law," *American Journal of International Law* 41, no. 1 (1947), 145-151.

genocide has long been a frame of inquiry in investigating how processes of mass extermination and other forms of violent state subjection operate within and across different historical epochs, each being informed by one another. Studies of genocide have, in many ways, pointed directly to different historical, social and political processes that have led to and sanctioned acts of genocide against African diasporic communities over the last few centuries. African diasporic communities often share similar experiences within the realm of being exposed to and confronting genocidal living conditions. Stemming from this socio-historical fact, on December 17, 1951, the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) published their noteworthy petition to the United Nations entitled *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government Against the Negro People*. Edited by the National Executive Secretary of the CRC, William Patterson, the petition addresses the already existing UN General Assembly's formulation of the international criteria of genocide but rather from a domestic vantage. The opening lines read:

> The responsibility of being the first in history to charge the government of the United States of America with the crime of genocide is not one your petitioners take lightly. The responsibility is particularly grave when citizens must charge their own government with mass murder of its own nationals, with institutionalized oppression and persistent slaughter of the Negro people in the United States on a basis of "race," a crime abhorred by mankind and prohibited by the conscience of the world in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.[137]

Informed by and responding directly to the UN General Assembly's classification of genocide, *We Charge Genocide* presents a lasting and critical intervention into the way that genocide has been understood and conceived in a North American context, situating genocide as a "multifacted

[137] Civil Rights Congress, *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government Against the Negro People*, ed. William L. Patterson (New York: Civil Rights Congress, 1951), 3. See also William Patterson *The Man Who Cried Genocide: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

phenomenon" that not only referred to individual forms of white on Black violence, but "implied fascism at home and abroad, often leading to genocidal war against racialized nations: 'white supremacy at home makes for colored massacres abroad.'"[138] Written at the height of the Cold War, the main contradiction that *We Charge Genocide* operated against was the increased rate of lynchings across the Jim Crow South at a time when the United States was presenting itself as the paragon of democracy and global order, a nation at center stage of the global fight to end the threat of communist totalitarianism abroad. It is critical to understand, however, that *We Charge Genocide* did not just focus on compiling a list of incidents documenting interpersonal anti-Black vigilante and state violence, but rather showcased how genocide was a constitutive feature in U.S. nation building and the overall protection of white civility at home and abroad. It argued that genocide was a culturally embedded phenomenon that likened the Black condition in the United States to the colonial conditions of nations across the Third World – with an emphasis on the relation between the United States and African diasporic communities across Latin/South America and Africa. According to Vargas, "The multi-dimensional perspective on genocide is expressed in deadly physical violence, institutionalized discrimination by and in the police, courts, and legislatures; psychological terror; economic and political marginalization; and militarization. These various facets highlight that, at the core of the Black genocidal processes in the United States, resides a set of dominant values and representation that dehumanize Blacks, exclude them from the realm of the good society, and justify their continued disrespect and death."[139] For members of the Civil Rights Congress, anti-Black genocide was directly linked to the global

[138] João H. Costa Vargas *Never Meant to Survive: Genocide and Utopias in Black Diaspora Communities* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 3-4; and Civil Rights Congress, *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government Against the Negro People*, ed. William L. Patterson (New York: Civil Rights Congress, 1951), 5.
[139] Vargas, 4.

capitalist/imperialist efforts that propelled the United States to the global stage during the Cold War and was a continued set of logics, practices, mechanisms, and discourses that had long predated U.S. war efforts across the globe. Although true, instead of solely understanding genocide as a set of historical events that stem from histories of slavery up to Jim Crow apartheid, the CRC understood anti-Black genocide as a fundamental feature of the liberal economic structure of North America, one that relied heavily on targeting Black communities in every entity of social and political life that fed "the mechanics of capitalist exploitation," further subjecting Black communities to the racializing, gendering, and sexualizing processes that are violently imposed within a capitalist market. Thus, anti-Black genocide must be treated as a direct constituent of international war and a direct modality through which war is translated and resisted on domestic grounds. Within this context, it is important to situate how anti-Black genocide took many shapes and forms in events leading up to and following the Civil Rights Movement – including but not limited to the lynching of Emmett Till, the desegregation of schools and public transportation, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Vietnam War.

Widely referred to as the Second Reconstruction, the Civil Rights efforts of the 1950s and 1960s were primarily characterized through the overthrowing of Jim Crow segregation and the passing of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts of 1964 and 1965. These victories stemmed from the Black freedom, labor and socialist collectives that trace back to the 1930s. Amidst the backdrop of these victories, Civil Rights victories proved to be short shrift in the overall effort to overturn the increasing polarity between wealth and poverty. It was reported that 60% of the Black working-class lived in urban industrial centers that were "defined by poverty, exploitation, unemployment, inadequate education, and negligent health care – conditions also experienced by at least fifty million poor and working people of all colors. This dynamic pointed to the central

contradictions of race and class in U.S. cities and regions in the postwar era."[140] Moving into and through the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, anti-Black genocide took the form of counterinsurgency efforts that further materialized Black American life as a literal site of warfare.

The political tradition that informed organizations like the Civil Rights Congress began to analyze the direct translation of the U.S. military's counterinsurgency campaigns in Vietnam into the treatment of Black Americans since the 1960s. The campaigns to assault and exterminate suspected members of the Viet Cong and Black communities at home informed one another and would serve as a basis to legitimize the colonial invasions of Central America in subsequent years. Ideologically departing from the Civil Rights efforts that sought to advocate for justice within legal means, Black nationalist, African internationalist, and Pan-Africanist organizations and collectives would enter the arena of discourse that would seek to organize the poor and working-class Black masses, drawing close comparison to the relationship between colonialism and capitalism. Often presenting competing, although similarly justified ideological reasoning, the fundamental basis resided in the need to pose an anti-genocide, anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist framework that would seek to unify the masses of Black people across the United States and the diaspora. Generating a definition of counterinsurgency that links Cold War discourse with the decimation of Black radical organizations and figures in the years leading up to the end of the Second Reconstruction, the counterinsurgency war against the Black masses (particularly the working-class) was inextricably linked to the 'war on drugs.'[141] Organizations such as the African People's

[140] Jordan T. Camp, "The Explosion in Watts: The Second Reconstruction and the Cold War Roots of the Carceral State," *Incarcerating the Crisis: Freedom Struggles and the Rise of the Neoliberal State* (2016), 40.

[141] Ibid, 39. Drawing the use of "Second Reconstruction" in reference to counterinsurgency as framed through the overthrow of Jim Crow and the passage of the Civil and Voting Rights acts (e.g. "victories borne of an alliance between Black freedom, radical labor, and socialism rooted in the 1930s). This marks what Camp refers to as a "dramatic turning point in the history of social movements." Additionally, Camp makes the important observation that counterinsurgency had been theorized by both W.E.B. Du Bois and William L. Patterson of the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) as the "'conscious attempt to place the brand of criminality' upon the Black working-class, whom he defined as victims of the Jim Crow police state."

Socialist Party (APSP) contended that a "war is a conflict between contending military forces" and that as Black people "we are talking about is a conflict between contending social forces" in a direct framing of counterinsurgency as a program that promotes "population and resource control." This is done in a three-tier system of establishing and strengthening government authority, severing the links between the guerillas and the people, and identifying and neutralizing the organization within the community.[142] Figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. directly linked the counterinsurgency campaigns in Vietnam to the suppression of the Watts and Detroit insurrections not as immediate "markers of the collapse of the Civil Rights movement" but rather as "signs of unfinished business" and part of an even more elaborate scheme that recruited Black, Brown and other working-class communities into a war and "away from the social wage and toward the militarization of the political economy."[143]

Bush Mama pieces counterinsurgency and genocide together in a way that cinematically continues the legacy of *We Charge Genocide.* The culmination of the wars in Vietnam, on poverty, and its collapsing into the counterinsurgent war on the Black poor and working-class make way for the genesis of the wars on crime and drugs, both of which also politically inform not only the plot for *Bush Mama*, but the overall political grounding among L.A. Rebellion filmmakers. With its devastating critique of the liberalism that aided many of the victories of the Civil Rights movement, *Bush Mama* emphasizes the importance of reading Black life in America as entirely in a state of anti-Black genocide that had so long been fraught with the damages created and deployed through U.S. American counterinsurgency.

[142] Omali Yeshitela, "The Dialectics of Black Revolution: The Struggle to Defeat the Counterinsurgency in the U.S.," (January 1990), 27-28.
[143] Camp, 38.

Conclusion

Politically, Watts has been a subject of interest for many people around the world, largely due to the events leading up to and following the uprisings of 1965. That same year, Governor Edmund G. Brown established the McCone Commission to investigate what ultimately led to the uprising. It concluded that by the beginning of 1965, 25,000 Blacks were unemployed in Los Angeles, which was a big reason for the region's failures in matters of unemployment. The community would regard the commission as an inadequate attempt to reforming the Black ghetto with no tangible solutions offered as a result.[144] With its reputation of police abuse and increasing unemployment in once booming automotive, aerospace and shipping industries since World War II, Black Los Angeles was beginning to pose a threat to the overall global cultural reputation of the U.S., undercutting political and economic promises of prior decades. The importance of the Watts Rebellion is that it "marked a new stage in the Afro-American's struggle for freedom. It was a recognition of the need to go beyond the actions carried on so far, that used civil disobedience and passive resistance as the methods and civil rights and integration as the goals. The methods in the Watts rebellion were sabotage and violence and the goal was human rights, the complete recognition of the Negro as a human being."[145]

It is clear that many elements of *Bush Mama* respond to of the shifting political and socio-economic climate of the period. The legacy of Gerima and the remainder of the L.A. Rebellion collective would suggest that their films possess the means to speak to, and about, the radical movements of the prior decades. This is the case not only of Depression-era labor organizing across the United States, leading into the Civil Rights movement, and so on, but also the liberation efforts being fought in the global South. What makes L.A. Rebellion film so useful is that, while adding

[144] Della Rossa *Why Watts Exploded: How the Ghetto Fought Back* (New York: Merit Publisher, 1969), 18-19.
[145] Ibid.

to the Los Angeles Black cultural canon of the mid-twentieth century, their works also make the effort not to essentialize Los Angeles as the end all and be all exemplar of Black America. However, what it does is situate Los Angeles, specifically Black Los Angeles, as part of the larger trajectory of focus when thinking about movement-shifting events and circumstances where state violence is wantonly and widely executed among Black and other colonized communities. This puts Los Angeles in the same light as other Black American ghettoes outside of the Jim Crow South such as Detroit, Chicago, New York City, and Philadelphia.

With the cultural efforts being produced in, around, and about Los Angeles, in relation to these other Black American cities, Los Angeles became a point of interest for many folks advocating for justice and freedom in cities ranging from Johannesburg, Dar Es-Salaam, Palestine, Guinea, and Vietnam, to name a few. In a 1965 speech at the annual Conference of Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies (CONCP), Amilcar Cabral asserted that as colonized people that "we are with the Blacks of North America, we are with them in the streets of Los Angeles, and when they are deprived of all possibility of life, we suffer with them."[146] Similarly, after a visit to Los Angeles in December 1965, I.B. Tabata, President of Unity Movement of South Africa, wrote that Watts "reminded me of my own country, and I saw that we are indeed the same people…" and "a burning up, a setting into flames, of a past, a whole past of suffering, generations of suffering, were going up into flames, from the days of slavery, right up to this day…"

The L.A. Rebellion's ascent into the world of Third World media and its lasting impact on the ways which Black independent filmmaking would take shape for subsequent generations to come suggests a more encompassing correlation between the global Third World and the Black American ghetto. Coming together in the unsettled ashes of the Watts Rebellion, L.A. film would

[146] Amilcar Cabral, "The Nationalist Movements of the Portuguese Colonies" in *Revolution in Guinea,* stage 1, London. (Dar Es-Salaam, Tanzania: 1965), pp. 62-69.

arguably change forever. As discussed in other parts of this chapter, the juxtaposition between Hollywood and L.A. Rebellion cinema in the wake of Watts would serve as a model of how film would be imagined, implemented, and created in response to crisis. Since then, and even preceding Watts as a manifestation of Cold War counterinsurgency against working-class and poor Black and other colonized descendants living in North America, the 1960s is often written as an era of constant and outright warfare against the figures and organizations that would ultimately lead to a Black revolution in America. The counterinsurgency movement during the 1960s can best be understood and displayed through a series of surveillance and policing tactics, changes in policy and legislation, and a wider cultural push to neutralize any perceived threat to U.S. democratic capitalism. With its roots predating the start of the Cold War, extending back to the Depression-era organizing of the 1930s, counterinsurgency has long targeted the entirety of Black America as well as the working-class. It wasn't until the 1960s on the tail end of the passage of both the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 that counterinsurgency (made notorious through the FBI's COINTELPRO) aimed its efforts at Black Power, the working-class and poor, and the Third World, women's, LGBTQ+, student, and the antiwar movements. With the escalation of the U.S. conflict in Vietnam and the proliferation of these movements on the home turf, the escalation of mass forms of material and physical violence would characterize what could be regarded as a war on all fronts, constituting a full-fledged assault on the Black poor and working-class and other colonized communities in America and abroad as well as Vietnam.[147]

[147] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography" in *The Professional Geographer* (Volume 54, no. 1), February 2002.

CHAPTER 3
"They're flying their colors, we're flying ours": *Colors*, Gangsta Rap, and Los Angeles' Late 20th Century Carceral Imagination

It's the movie that forced America to choose a side... now it's your turn.

- Tagline for *Colors* (1988)

My life is violent, but violence is life
Peace is a dream, reality is a knife
My colors, my honor.

- Ice T "Colors" (1988)

The legacies imparted by the L.A. Rebellion remain a constant force in the way that Los Angeles has been and continues to be studied through film. The previous chapter discusses how Black independent film in Los Angeles sought to make sense of a post-Watts Los Angeles, and how it generated a theory of the warfare state that was enriched by Third World politics and aesthetics. Produced in the ashes of the Watts Rebellion that had not fully settled, with the nation's attention still drawn towards Vietnam, Los Angeles film (both independent and large scale Hollywood produced film) continues to be a dominant medium through which theories of the warfare state demonstrate the cohabitation between international and domestic conflict, the racial politics of space and conquest in Southern California, and the colonial iterations of interpersonal violence against the backdrop of narratives of survival and triumph. With the Johnson administration's "Great Society" initiatives put in place in the direct aftermath of the urban unrest stemming from the Civil Rights movement, the subsequent declaration of the War on Poverty and its immediate and radical shift into the war on crime became a benchmark of the shortsightedness of U.S. American liberalism, particularly in understanding the genesis of carceral growth as we

know it today.[148] With the continued counterinsurgency efforts that stemmed beyond the actions carried out by the FBI's counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) since its formal end in 1971, the 1970s became marked by the full neutralization of the Black Power movement, deindustrialization, and the War on Drugs. From these conditions arose two dominant American cultural forms: police media and Hip Hop. This chapter carries on the conversation of the previous chapter that seeks to center the role of Los Angeles-based film in understanding how global and domestic narratives relate to carceral expansion and the multi-dimensional war against the Black working-class and how Black Los Angeles continues to be rendered as an internal colony of Southern California (or California more broadly). This chapter continues and elaborates on the cultural and aesthetic grounds that allow police film and Hip Hop to emerge in popularity and relevance tangentially and how both cultural forms ultimately construct a prevailing identity of Los Angeles from the 1970s onward.

Images of Watts and Vietnam continued to circulate around the globe during the late 1960s and 1970s. Specific to post-Watts Los Angeles, discourses concerning Black youth criminality became far more mainstream in media outlets across the nation. As the previous chapter mentions, Watts ultimately allowed the growing tensions between police and Black communities across Los Angeles to surface on a much larger scale, revealing the limitations of Civil Rights victories not being fully applicable to Black folks who did not occupy the growing Black middle-class. With the Watts Rebellion, heightened tensions in Vietnam, the Johnson administration's rollbacks on Great Society funding initiatives and a deepening infrastructure that would ultimately pave the roads for Richard Nixon's impeding War on Drugs, the curtailment of the Black Power Movement, and deindustrialization, Los Angeles would come to be understood as a site where an accumulation

[148] Elizabeth Hinton "'A War Within Our Own Boundaries': Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and the Rise of the Carceral State," *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 2015): 100-112.

of contradictions would all collide and lead to the growing relevance of and membership in street organizations among Black mostly male youth.[149] These moments constitute what cultural theorist Stuart Hall et. al referred to as a "crisis in hegemony" in their monumental study *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law & Order*. In it they write:

> A crisis in hegemony marks a moment of profound rupture in the political and economic life of a society, an accumulation of contradictions. If in moments of 'hegemony' everything works spontaneously so as to sustain and enforce a particular form of class domination while rendering the basis of that social authority invisible through the mechanisms of the production of consent, then moments when the equilibrium of consent is disturbed, or where the contending class forces are so nearly balanced that neither can achieve that sway from which a resolution to the crisis can be promulgated, are moments when the whole basis of political leadership and cultural authority becomes exposed and contested.[150]

This chapter analyzes Dennis Hopper's 1988 film *Colors* and how the film can be read as a visual depiction of Los Angeles' crisis in hegemony seen most prominently during the entirety of the 1980s. Building from the contradictions set forth by the War on Drugs policy and discourse, met with deindustrialization and a rapidly growing prison industry, I situate *Colors* as a film that presents a realness dimension at the level of state power through the lens of the police in order to convey to mass audiences the increasing social necessity of anti-gang policing while creating a viable platform that would allow the masses to eliminate misconceptions that had commonly been tied to both police and local gang affiliated youth. Like any form of cultural media, *Colors* must be understood within the social and political context within which it was produced and released.

[149] A note on terminology: I use the word "gang" largely to signify the colloquial sense of how organized collective of Black and Brown youth are identified. However, my preference leans towards the usage of the term "street organizations" to underwrite the organizing components that take root in the earliest formations of the Bloods and Crips of Los Angeles. Rather than situate Black and Brown youth as pure deviants lacking morale and structure, I only use "gang" as a signifier of its popular discourse (especially in terming "gangsta rap") and "street organization" to highlight the deliberate formation of Black (mostly male) youth to collectively resist police repression.

[150] Stuart Hall, et. al *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law & Order* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 214.

With Los Angeles widely noted as the gang capital of the United States, with membership numbers that greatly outnumbered New York City and Chicago, the National School Safety Center reported that Los Angeles gang membership topped 70,000, labelling Black gang youth as an enormous and depoliticized "Viet Cong of our society."[151] Street organization violence was something that was no longer limited to the geographic limitations of Los Angeles' Black communities, and instead spread into white middle-class neighborhoods and well into surrounding parts of the county and beyond. District Attorney Ira Reiner told the *Los Angeles Times*:

> [Gangs] are highly mobile and they are reaching out into every community. Every part of Los Angeles from Beverly Hills to Westwood to the fine communities out into the deep suburbs, there is strong, heavy – emphasis on the word 'heavy' – gang activity…So, for those who feel that yes, the problems in the ghettos are serious and must be addressed, they ought also to understand that this is not a ghetto problem any longer. But when they step outside their door and they walk on the streets of their neighborhood 30 miles removed from the ghetto…Uzi machine guns have to be stuffed in their ear and their head blown off as well as if they were in the ghetto.[152]

The proliferation of street organizations among Black youth directly correlates to 1980s Los Angeles, which was in much worse economic shape than it was in the immediate aftermath of the Watts Rebellion. Historian Mike Davis points to the role of youth violence and its direct relationship to poverty and increasing tensions with law enforcement, as street organization proliferation led to established Bloods and Crips sets that spanned from Arizona to Alaska, labelling the "gang crisis" as a kind of "epidemic" that likened gang cohorts to the "murderous

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[151] For more on rising numbers of street organization membership see: Mike Davis *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso Press, 1990); Stanley Meisler, 'Nothing Works,' *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 1989; Matt Lait, "The Battle to Control 50,000 Gang Members on the Streets of Los Angeles," *The Washington Post*, March 12, 1988, cited in United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crips and Bloods: Drug Gangs* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1992), in FBI Records: The Vault http://vault.fbi.gov/gangs-extremist-groups, accessed April 15, 2021

[152] Felicia Angeja Viator "Gangster Boogie: Los Angeles and the Rise of Gangsta Rap, 1965-1992" (PhD Dissertation, University of California Berkeley, 2012), 83. For more on District Attorney Reiner, see California State Judiciary, *Interim Hearing on Juvenile Gang Violence, October 15, 1986* (Sacramento, CA: Joint Publications, 1987), 6.

militias of Beirut."[153] Backed by Hollywood, which in turn was also supported and consulted by Los Angeles police and county sheriffs as the film's technical support staff, *Colors* can be read as a cultural stand-in for how police should be depicted on a wider scale, one that emphasized Dennis Hopper's commitment to "realism and social commentary" that would serve as an "unconventional drama that would explore the lives of both the Los Angeles Police and the gang members they pursued. These subjects, Hopper told the press, had either been ignored or misunderstood, and it was his intention to reveal their truths."[154] Chapter two's reading of *Bush Mama* primarily dealt with Haile Gerima's ability to blend social realism with psychodrama, both serving as substantial characteristics of Black independent film produced by the L.A. Rebellion. Departing from independent Third Cinema in Los Angeles, this chapter addresses ideas relating to the carceral state that were centered in *Bush Mama'*s narrative but through the vantage of the State i.e. Hollywood.[155] The dialectic between Third Cinema and Hollywood suggests that, unlike L.A. Rebellion film, Hollywood does not bear the same level of critique of how carceral violence plagues every entity that comprises Black life as a Third World state of being, but rather a film like *Colors* ought to be read in terms of indicating the shifting political beliefs that invigorate popular discourses that relate directly to social and political crises. On the contrary, it is important to understand that while Hollywood remains fully situated within the violent statecraft of the larger political economy of Los Angeles, the growing presence of Hip Hop (specifically gangsta rap)

[153] Mike Davis *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso Press, 1990), 268 and Meisler, 'Nothing Works,' *Los Angeles Times,* May 7, 1989.
[154] Viator "Gangster Boogie: Los Angeles and the Rise of Gangsta Rap, 1965-1992," 99. For more on misconceptions linking police activity with gang proliferation, see Robert Reinhold, "Police Deployed to Curb Gangs in Los Angeles," *New York Times,* April 9, 1988 and Michael Reese, "War on the Mean Streets," *Newsweek,* April 18, 1988, 73A.
[155] My understanding of the State via Hollywood is informed by the cultural and political impact that the entertainment industry holds in a broader analysis of the political economy of Los Angeles. It is important to understand how Hollywood operates as an apparatus of dominant statecraft in forging global ideologies relating to conquest, subjection, belonging, and exclusion.

forms a culturally and geographically-specific organic intelligentsia that was birthed out of the conditions immediately following the Watts Rebellion.

Directed by Dennis Hopper and starring Sean Penn and Robert Duvall, the release of *Colors* in 1988 signaled a closer look at Los Angeles' urban landscape with the intent of providing the kind of realness dimension that rivaled the Black insurgent film movement of the L.A. Rebellion in the decade prior, but rather from a top-to-bottom point of view. Through the commanding lens of Haskell Wexler, the lead cinematographer known for his use of cinema verité and most famous for his Vietnam War film *Introduction to the Enemy* (1974) and *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) among several others, the film crew scouted the grimiest parts of Los Angeles to serve as key filming locations, parts of the city that Dennis Hopper himself stated "even the police won't go into unless there's a body lying there."[156] Adding to the authenticity realm, the film crew also employed background roles for the young men in the neighborhood who were actively involved in street organizations with the intention to not only earn neighborhood trust, but to also serve as protection for the film crew. Upon its release, the marketing of the film promoted epigraphs that graced movie posters across the nation, in which they read: **"**70,000 gang members. One million guns. Two cops;" "Two cops. Two gangs. One hell of a war;" "In the heart of our cities people die for wearing the wrong colors;" "Gangs. The war is here. The war is now." These taglines were complemented by a national consensus that Los Angeles had quickly become a symbol of the violent tensions that existed between the LAPD and local street organizations formed primarily by Black and Brown (mostly male) youth. Discursively situated, the marketing of the film and its subsequent release created shockwaves across the nation, bringing to light the means through which such a debilitating crisis surrounding drugs and "gangs" could be debated

[156] Bill Kelley, "'Colors,' Controversy & Hopper," *Sun Sentinel*, April 17, 1988.

and ultimately curtailed. In an article in the *Los Angeles Sentinel,* Alan Bell remarked that the film posed a "legitimate problem," that would "convince a few more white people why they should be fearful of young Blacks carrying big radios."[157] *Colors'* reception was wide and varied, with critical acclaim raving that the film was among the most authentic portrayals of not just police life, but the inner working dimensions of anti-gang policing specific to Los Angeles during the 1980s. Many whites also chastised the film, labeling it as "too liberal," and giving too much of a platform for Black urban youth, writing the film off as classic "pro-gang" propaganda. On the other hand, the film has been criticized by an array of Black and Brown working-class residents of Los Angeles, many of whom believed the film was a highly sensationalized depiction of multi-ethnic Los Angeles at best and at worst an attempt at envisioning well-meaning, humanized policing gone wrong.

Colors is a sensation. Its relevance continues to be widely debated and contested among communities across the racial and class spectrum to this day. The release and box office success of *Colors* marks a significant time. At the height of the city's bloodiest years and a full-on assault on Black youth, the film grossed $7 million in its opening weekend and was shown in 1,400 screens nationwide by its third week. After ten weeks, the film generated $46 million nationwide, making it among Orion Pictures' top three grossing films of the year.[158] The year 1988 marks the year that the California Street Terrorism Enforcement and Protection (STEP) Act was passed, one year after the formation of the Los Angeles Police Department's Operation HAMMER, giving rise to gang sweeps across the city under Chief Darryl Gates' command.[159] This also marks nine years since the formation of the LAPD CRASH unit (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums), which

[157] Alan Bell, "'Colors,' Was This Film Necessary?" *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 21, 1988, B8.
[158] John Voland, "Weekend Box Office: Colors' Gives Orion a Big Boost," *Los Angeles Times,* May 3, 1988.
[159] Robert Stewart and Paul Feldman, "Arrests Top 850 as Anti-Gang Drive Continues," *Los Angeles Times,* April 10, 1988.

aimed to curtail gang-related crime through Operation HAMMER and the Los Angeles Sheriff Department's Operation Safe Streets (OSS).[160] Under the command of Chief of Los Angeles Police Daryl Gates, the film's release also coincided with series of routinized gang sweeps under CRASH which directly resembled a Vietnam-era "search and destroy" mission that arrested more Black youth at any time since the Watts Rebellion.

It is also known that many CRASH police officers were proud Vietnam veterans.[161] Many of these officers were visible veterans of the war and to Chief Darryl Gates' recollection, these officers would be known for "jacking up thousands of local teenagers at random like so many surprised peasants."[162] The 1980s was an era of full-blown assault on working-class Black and Brown communities across the nation, many of whom began to populate U.S. American prisons in staggering numbers. This marked the beginnings of the material and ideological realities of mass imprisonment as we know it today, and what scholars have been studying since the late- 1990s as the result of a fully catalyzed War on Drugs. By this time, Los Angeles had become a national epicenter through which variegated processes of warfare had fully and wantonly been deployed for the past four decades at the expense of the city's Black and Brown communities. However, what situates Los Angeles primarily as a center of interest among other urban ghettos across the nation would be the city's housing of a burgeoning film and music industry, which continues to

[160] See: Donna Murch, "Crack in Los Angeles: Crisis, Militarization, and Black Response to the Late Twentieth-Century War on Drugs" in *Journal of American History*, Volume 102, Issue 1, June 2015, p. 165 and Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Harvard University Press: 2016). The year 1967 marked the inauguration of the SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) team of the LAPD. With funding pushed forth by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), the LAPD created Total Resources Against Street Hoodlums (TRASH) in 1972. As it became used more towards controlling community protests, the name was changed to Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums (CRASH) which ultimately led to it becoming the city's most notorious anti-gang unit in coordination with the LA county sheriff's Operation Safe Streets (OSS). For more on SWAT, see Stuart Schrader, "Order Maintenance and the Genealogy of SWAT" from *Badges Without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 2019).

[161] Mike Davis *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso Press, 1990)

[162] Ibid, 268.

fortify the region's political economic base as well as serving as a cultural epicenter to envision the dialectical responses to United States warfare as it is deployed by the state and experienced by local residents. In doing so, films such as *Colors* and the growing relevance and popularity of "gangsta rap" locate the 1980s as an era through which cultural production on both ends of the dialectic signify the efforts to 1) humanize police/policing and culturally legitimize anti-gang/drug discourse; and 2) demonstrate the visual and sonic possibilities of urban youth life and social terrors of places like South Central Los Angeles as categorical "warzones" enabled through violent police repression and the capitalist state.

This chapter investigates the interrelatedness of the film *Colors* and the growing relevance of gangsta rap as an era and regionally specific subgenre of Hip Hop in order to demonstrate how the late 1970s through the early 1990s provides a notable landscape for understanding how these cultural devices theorize the literal nature of and ongoing war on drugs and gangs. Both police film and gangsta rap represent competing modes of knowledge production that are largely understood as being resolved through violence, positing an antithetical relationship resembling that of the colonizer versus the colonized. I argue that in reading *Colors* – as well as the events leading up to and following its release - we may be able to understand the cultural permanence of anti-gang and anti-drug policing, and the necessary and subsequent relevance of gangsta rap and its constituencies as organic responses to social and political turmoil as a result of neoliberal policy, economic restructuring, and anti-gang rhetoric enveloped through War on Drugs policy and discourse.

The significance of reading both *Colors* and gangsta rap together is to take note of the era and regionally specific entities that comprise a neoliberal California. This chapter will discuss how the cultural landscape of 1980s Los Angeles points to the larger and growing relevance of the U.S.

prison system as a modality of social control and order. In fact, the year 1982 marked the beginning of the biggest "prison construction program in the history of the world, the number in the California Department of Corrections (CDC) prisons rose 400% - to 156,000."[163] Nationally, the moral panic induction of President Richard Nixon's 1968 "tough on crime" initiative, a platform built on "law and order," would increase the U.S. prison population to 1.4 million people. As carceral geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore points out in her important study of globalization and Keynesian economics during the post-Civil Rights era, an economy of punishment can best be read within the context of 1970s /80s California as an ideological and material manifestation of the widening use of drugs and prison expansion. As the world's eighth largest economy, California stands as an example of what Gilmore terms a "plausible future for polities within and outside national borders," a kind of focal point through which activist/leftist/progressive communities across the nation "keenly emulate." She expands:

> According to this scenario – as news stories, sensational television programs, popular music and movies and politicians' anecdotes made abundantly clear – communities, especially poor communities of color, would be more deeply decimated by addiction, drug dealing, and gang violence were it not for the restraining force of prisons. The explanation rests on two assumptions: first, that drug use exploded in the 1980s and, second, that the sometimes violent organization of city neighborhoods into gang enclaves was accomplished in order to secure drug markets.[164]

Like previous chapters, this chapter takes seriously the cultural and ideological impact of how moral panics operate throughout society. Perhaps in a study of Los Angeles, or any postindustrial neoliberal U.S. metropolis, moral panics can best be read in the aftermath of Nixon's coining of the term "war on drugs," attributing carceral expansion to the racial and class disparities that

[163] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Globalization and US prison growth: from military Keynesianism to post-Keynesian militarism," *Institute of Race Relations* 40, Issue 2-3, March 1, 1999, p. 172
[164] Ibid1.

comprise the U.S. prison system as we understand it today. The deepening resurgence of the political Right sought to address the failures of the liberal politics that categorized the crises of the 1960s, which brings us to the year 1968 as a year through which a moral panic surrounding drug abuse that would bring a place like Los Angeles into its defining atmosphere that can arguably lead us into the Los Angeles Uprisings of 1992 – if we take seriously the militarization efforts of local police and the increasing spectacle of anti-Black violence as it is mass produced on screen. Culturally, the moral panic around drug abuse was driven by the desire to attain an orderly society in the aftermath of the racial/class-driven uprisings that categorized key moments of civil unrest of the 1960s. Continuing to operate under Red Scare anti-communist sentiment, the continued counterinsurgency efforts against Black and Third World radical collectives, and the overall widespread imperative to protect civilians from both foreign and domestic enemies, the moral panic around crime began to demonstrate drug abuse as a uniquely urban problem, one that attributed deviant behavior to the city's most vulnerable communities. By framing this chapter within the time frame of 1973 to 1992, I posit integral cultural moments that bridge Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society" plans with the Black freedom struggle of the 1960s to make for a greater conceptualization of Richard Nixon's moral panic induced society.[165] Additionally, these years provide an index through which non-reformist anti-police organizing began to take on deeper relevance and community control under the worsening conditions of the neoliberal political landscape of the 1980s, a decade of severe social and political violence that was made pertinent through anti-drug and anti-gang warfare tactics against Blacks and Latinos.

[165] See: Elizabeth Hinton, "A War Withing Our Own Boundaries": Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and the Rise of the Carceral State" from her book *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Harvard University Press: 2016); Heather Ann Thompson and Donna Murch, "Rethinking Urban American through the Lens of the Carceral State in the *Journal of Urban History* vol. 41(5) pp. 751-755; and Naomi Murakawa, "The Origins of the Carceral Crisis: Racial Order as 'Law and Order' in Postwar American Politics" in *Race and American Political Development* (Routledge: New York 2008) and *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (Oxford University Press: 2014).

The novelty of this chapter is twofold. When it comes to cultural histories of Los Angeles during the War on Drugs, existing scholarship largely points toward critical historical readings of *Colors* and its larger relevance in studies of policing urban spaces and the criminalization of Black and Brown youth.[166] At this time, as well as reading the soundtrack of the film performed by rapper Ice T (Tracy Marrow), the film is often read alongside the growing popularity of gangsta rap serving as an aesthetic and performative subgenre of Hip Hop that was specific to Los Angeles, or California more broadly, with gangsta rap scenes ranging from San Diego all the way to Sacramento. These existing discourses constitute a substantial terrain through which Los Angeles-based police film and gangsta rap unearth into the U.S. mainstream. With this chapter, not only do I situate the cultural impact of the two entities, but I discuss the theoretical significance through which we can possibly understand how both inform one another, highlighting the unification of presumed opposites that exist in any society and how cultural devices such as film and music may mirror the outcome of these opposites. Additionally, this chapter engages with existing scholarship on the relationship between constructions of Black masculinity (labeled 'threat') in *Colors* and gangsta rap and subsequent film and television that gain notoriety in the years leading into and following the 1992 Uprisings.[167] How, and where, might discourses of racialized masculinities

[166] See: Cesar Rodriguez, "The Oscar Grant 'Moment': The Principal Contradiction of Racial Capitalism, Extrajudicial Police Murders, and Popular Self-Activity," PhD dissertation, (University of California, 2014); Cid Martinez, *The Neighborhood Has Its Own Rules: Latinos and African Americans in South Los Angeles* (New York: NYU Press, 2016); Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 2008); Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 2013); George Lipsitz, "We Know What Time It Is: Race, Class, and Youth Culture in the Nineties," in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture*, eds. Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose (New York: Routledge, 1994); Mona Lynch, et.al, "Policing the Progressive City: The Racialized Geography of Drug Law Enforcement" in *Theoretical Criminology*,17 no. 3 (2013); Edward Escobar, *Race, Police and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945*, first edition (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UC Press, 1999); Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2017); Victor Rios, *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys.* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

[167] See: Dionne Bennet, "Looking for the Hood and Finding Community: South Central, Race, and Media" in *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities* eds. Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón (NYU Press: 2010).

between police film and gangsta rap as genres of urban spectacle allow for a greater understanding of domestic militarism? What might be some of the larger, generating principles of police films of the 1980s that speak directly to the state of policing and what it's become in the post-Civil Rights era? Additionally, what can a film like *Colors* do in terms of understanding what Hollywood not only hopes to do, but actually accomplishes in terms of highlighting the interconnectedness between police, drug abuse, inter-ethnic relations, gender, and power? What does this tell us about policing overall as a cultural practice? Also, what might these contradictions tell us about the role of the police in Black life both on and off screen? Lastly, how do the wars on drugs and gangs intersect, especially as logical extensions of the wars on crime and poverty that took shape during the 1960s, paying mind to the racialized and gendered discourses of criminality that soon generated and signaled the professionalization and militarization (or professionalization *as* militarization) of police? Driven by these questions, this chapter touches on a few key points of intersection within the fields of carceral studies, film studies, and Los Angeles history. These questions combined with a cultural analysis of film, music, and other forms of media operate to provide insight to the cohabitation of both the Hollywood/warfare and gangsta rap/captive blocs – showcasing the two ends as being in constant contention with one another thus producing a unique landscape of Los Angeles as a premier American carceral city.

This chapter brackets the years 1973-1993 as integral in the study of how Los Angeles can be read as a key site of interest in reading the proliferation of carceral logics in every aspect of

This piece is particularly useful in understanding how hood flicks became a genre of LA film during the 1990s, with a new wave of Black filmmakers that included John Singleton and Allen and Albert Hughes. In events leading to and following the 1992 LA uprisings, Bennet points to Los Angeles' Black film history that relied on a particular fascination with South Central since the Watts insurrection of 1965. Sustained by gangsta rap culture, geographic proximity to Hollywood, finance and entertainment overall, bringing in South Central Los Angeles not just as a location of interest, but as a key protagonist in LA-based films during the 1980s and 1990s meant that the economic restructuring, neoliberalism, and wars on drugs and gangs served as necessary entities for filmmakers to present both social realism with urban authenticity as a means to depict Los Angeles as a city of drastic economic, racial, and political change.

Black social life across Southern California, with an emphasis on the entertainment industry. Expanding on the previous chapter's usage of the realness dimension reading Black urban film, *Colors* represents a product of the advent and culmination of social and public policy discourse that gave rise to LAPD's CRASH unit and the enactment of the California's penal code 186.20 – otherwise known as the STEP Act of 1988.[168] Combined, the implementation of CRASH and STEP categorically framed racial and gendered criminal discourse originally birthed through the decade prior's widening popularity surrounding "tough on crime." Drawing from Louis Althusser, film theorist Jared Sexton writes about the implementation of film and television in critically intervening existing discourses of power that circulate around competing notions of race, gender, and class. The usefulness in centering multimodal avenues such as film, television, and music would allow for a broader, more conceptual understanding of how culture intersects with existing apparatuses of state power, especially as they operate in response to crisis. Specifically in the case of Los Angeles, *Colors* serves as a device through which the series of events, figures, and policies that categorize the wars on drugs and gangs are given global appeal and may catalyze from the same ideological grounding that legitimizes U.S. forms of imperial conquest across the globe. Sexton writes:

> For the reassertion of patriarchal values so vital to the maintenance of an embattled American global hegemony – militarily, economically, politically – requires the simultaneous preservation of an antiblack matrix of value deeply rooted in American history and a cultural myth of racial equality and liberal democracy supposed to distinguish the USA from the rest of the world. If film and television are rightly regarded as aspects of an ideological state apparatus, then we should expect that the ambiguity and ambivalence of constituted power at home and abroad will play out in vivid detail on screens large and

[168] California penal code Chapter 11 Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act [186.20 - 186.36], effective 26 September 1988. Section (a) writes, "Any person who actively participates in any criminal street gang with knowledge that its members engage in, or have engaged in, a pattern of criminal gang activity, and who willfully promotes, furthers, or assists in any felonious criminal conduct by members of that gang, shall be punished by imprisonment in a county jail for a period not to exceed one year, or by imprisonment in the state prison for 16 months, or two or three years.

> small, year after year, as the interpretive frame of public discourse shifts from post-civil rights to post-cold war to post-9/11 or, more recently, from post-racial to post-truth.[169]

According to this passage, Sexton points to film and television as "aspects of an ideological state apparatus," which would make it a viable terrain through which global conflict would not only be reflected on screen, but hold discursive weight in understanding the multiple factors that signify key epochal changes in American political and social life.[170] In Hollywood, and through police film more specifically, the post-Civil Rights era marks parallel moments through which global and domestic conflict become almost indistinguishable, especially with heightened police repression correlating directly to ongoing efforts of the Black freedom movement, Chicano movement, anti-war demonstrations, and the student movement. Warfare, in its broadest sense, becomes the grounds through which American exceptionalism becomes intertwined with military intervention and the suppression of counterhegemonic actions, people, and communities becomes socially and politically imperative. In considering these points, in reading *Colors*, how does this film, and other related films and television programs, seek to humanize the police's otherwise dehumanizing tactics, while seeking to portray heightened police presence in Hollywood depicted South Central neighborhoods as urgent and necessary? At what point does the film succeed in doing the work of police, demonstrating Hollywood's response to ongoing "moral panics" of the region, by way of the furthering of sensationalized images of racial criminality, urban wastelands, and social pathology?

Key moments in Los Angeles history signify the region as a landscape through which the unifying forces of racial triumph and conflict cohabitated the same space as economic promise and

[169] Jared Sexton, *Black Masculinity and the Cinema of Policing* (Palgrave MacMillan: 2017), viii.
[170] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (Monthly Review Press: 1970).

restructuring between 1973 and 1993. In relation to the previous chapter's engagement with counterinsurgency efforts that ultimately led to the collapse of key Black Power organizations and collectives as depicted through *Bush Mama*, this chapter discusses the continuation of those efforts as it is shaped through the shifting trends of this 20-year span. These moments include: 1) Tom Bradley's 1973 election as Los Angeles' first Black mayor; 2) the appointment of Daryl Gates as chief of the Los Angeles Police Department in 1978; 3) the Volcker Shock of 1980-81; 4) the election of Ronald Reagan in 1981; 5) the 1984 Olympics; 6) the passing of the California STEP Act of 1988; 6) the L.A. Uprisings of 1992; and finally, the exit of both Daryl Gates and Tom Bradley from positions of leadership in 1992 and 1993. Much of Los Angeles history during this era points to the complexities that define the relationship between Tom Bradley and Daryl Gates. During his mayoral campaign, Bradley garnered public appeal through opposing much of Gates' policing tactics, but often resorted to appearing to collaborate with him publicly in hopes of retaining healthy relations between the LAPD and the Black community. Once a vocal critic of former mayor Sam Yorty due to his race-baiting politics in the aftermath of the Watts Rebellion, Bradley quickly became reconfigured as an embodiment of Los Angeles' Promised Land reputation, having risen through the ranks as a Black LAPD officer to his successful mayoral and the subsequent L.A.-based multiracial campaigns to formulated in response to his victory. However, Bradley's years as mayor would radically shift from an era of presumed social progress to governmental neglect and avid support for anti-gang police legislation and practice. This chapter aims to put into context these major events as a culmination of the social and economic downturns that characterized a time in the city's history that is arguably more disastrous than the years leading up to and following the Watts insurrection of 1965. By this time, the full effect of deindustrialization and economic restructuring had fully materialized and blue-collar jobs that

were once occupied by the city's Black working-class were virtually non-existent. Increased poverty and inter-ethnic tension gave rise to demographic changes conjoined by the excessive use of paramilitary forms of policing and surveillance against Black youth. Given such, these watershed moments occurring in such short intervals signified a crisis in hegemony, a tension of social forces through which a moment of "profound rupture in the political and economic life of a society, an accumulation of contradictions."[171] Because of the collision of these particular events and landmarks, these integral years constitute crucial years through which mass imprisonment began to fully take the form in which we understand it today, coming into full circle as a response to the economic restructuring and the massive job loss it entailed as a means to regulate social and political crises. It became fully evident that mass imprisonment would not only satisfy a major entity of U.S. popular political culture but become a crucial governing terrain that would characterize U.S. American life during the latter decades of the 20th century.[172]

When placed into conversation with one another, major Hollywood produced films like *Colors* and Third Cinema films indicate a dialectical formation of the coexisting qualities of racial and gendered captivity as it exists, and is reproduced by, the warfare state. In a very real sense, Hollywood may not present a critique of the carceral state due to the fact that it shares the same level of cultural and political potency as other apparatuses of state power including, but not limited to, government, education, health care, and real estate. Because of this, Hollywood-produced films possess the ability to indicate the many shifting political strides that invigorate mainstream discourses of social and political crises. In other words, instead of depicting the conditions through

[171] Stuart Hall et. al. *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law & Order*. Macmillan Education, 1978, pp. 214–215. Hall et. al provide an elaboration of Antonio Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony in the realm of social crisis, wherein hegemony "involves the 'passage of a crisis from its material base in productive life through to the complex spheres of the superstructures.' Nevertheless, what hegemony ultimately secures is the long-term social conditions for the continuing reproduction of capital."

[172] Jordan Camp. *Incarcerating the Crisis: Freedom Struggles and the Rise of the Neoliberal State*. (University of California Press, 2016), p. 102.

which Third World filmmakers and viewers may articulate and resist colonialism, *Colors* articulates the conditions through which colonial conquest must be carried out as a mechanism through which community safety and order are to be attained through racialized and gendered repression of Black and Brown agency.

Historian Mike Davis writes on the genre blending of street organization culture operating adjacent to *Colors*. The growing prominence of "gangsta" urban youth culture reveals a larger tradition of a Black cultural realness dimension, a need to provide unsanitized and unsensationalized images and personas relating to the grim realities of street life, or "keeping it real." Davis writes, "Los Angeles gangster rappers disclaim all ideology except the primitive accumulation of wealth by any means necessary. In supposedly stripping bare the reality of the streets, 'telling it like it is,' they also offer an uncritical mirror to fantasy power-trips of violence, sexism, and greed."[173] From this, Davis suggests that gangsta rappers operate in a culture of opposition, one that challenges and counters ideologies that assume various forms of social acceptance and mobility; even so much that it includes the "fantasy power-trips" that occupy horizontal modes of violence in the form of interpersonal violence and sexism. Gangsta rappers also contribute to a larger pedigree of oppositional cultural producers. Building from sociologist George Lipsitz's 1986 essay 'Cruisin' Around the Historical Bloc,' Davis situates gangster rappers as part of an 'organic intelligentsia' along the same tenure as punk rockers, artists, and dancers of the same time period.[174] For example, like rapper Ice T, Hip Hop supergroup NWA (Niggaz Wit

[173] Mike Davis. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles.* (New York: Verso, 1990), 87.

[174] George Lipsitz. "Cruising Around the Historical Bloc: Postmodernism and Popular Music in East Los Angeles," in *Cultural Critique*, No. 5, (Winter, 1986-1987), pp. 157-177. Rather than "traditional" intellectuals that Antonio Gramsci identifies as being a part of the professional realm of literature, sciences, and politics stemming from various historical class formations, organic intellectuals "are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong." Excerpt drawn from Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith's introduction to Gramsci's 1949 essay "The Intellectuals" in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers), pp. 3-23.

Attitudes), WC and the MAAD Circle, and Compton's Most Wanted carried on with the widening popularity of gangsta rap music and further constituted an aesthetic that was rooted in Black youth terror since the late 1980s. In their beginning years in the industry, dialectically situated alongside the genre of police film that included *Colors* and the experiences of NWA, "suggests that Hollywood is eager to mine Los Angeles' barrios and ghettoes for every last lurid image of self-destruction and community holocaust."[175] With the growing relevance and overall popularity of gangsta rap and its constituents (including punk rockers, B-boys and girls, graffiti artists, etc.), this bloc of organic intellectuals, generating a language of social critique of Los Angeles became a cultural foreground through which the warfare state was articulated and confronted most critically and concisely and made legible to Black ghettoes across the nation. More broadly, in bridging *Colors* with gangsta rap, Los Angeles had become a fully visible war-torn metropolis, epitomizing a U.S. urban wasteland (i.e. a Third World city) that stood in stark contradistinction of the Los Angeles created and attained as a symptom of Black middle-class neglect of the Bradley regime and the prevalence of white social order. Ice T, having served as the primary voice of the *Colors* soundtrack, explained that the significance of the film was that it made "people around the country aware that there was a serious gang scene in L.A."[176]

Gangsta Rap as Postindustrial Critique

Historians of Hip Hop, and Black music more broadly, have widely studied the genre's advent out of New York City, with adherents to funk and soul music of the 1960s and 1970s. Many historians draw attention to Hip Hop's permanence in generating a social critique of racial and

[175] Mike Davis. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles.* (New York: Verso, 1990), 87.
[176] Tracy "Ice T" Marrow and Douglas Century, *Ice: A Memoir of Gangster Life and Redemption – From South Central to Hollywood* (New York: One World Books, 2012), 109.

economic turmoil as it is experienced by Black and Brown youth living in urban metropoles. Journalist and historian Nelson George, in his 1998 book *Hip Hop America,* wrote:

> At its most elemental level hip hop is a product of post-civil rights era America, a set of cultural forms originally nurtured African-American, Caribbean-American, and Latin-American youth in the '70s. Its most popular vehicle for expression has been music, though dance, painting, fashion, video, crime, and commerce are also its playing fields. It's a postmodern art in that it shamelessly raids older forms of pop culture—kung fu movies, chitlin' circuit comedy, '70s funk, and other equally disparate sources—and reshapes the material to fit the personality of an individual artist and the taste of the times.[177]

While it is important to situate a common understanding of Hip Hop as such, especially within the context of the rise of the neoliberal state, worsening urban poverty, and a stagflation in U.S. prison population, it is important to situate Los Angeles-based gangsta rap as part of the longer tradition of oppositional critique that had long shaped Los Angeles' Black and Third World communities faced with the onslaught of Los Angeles' postindustrial urban ruins. Historian Robin Kelley wrote extensively on the connection between the political economy of Los Angeles in relation to the larger historical tradition of working-class Black expression. In his chapter "Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics: Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles," Kelley wrote:

> Like the economy and the city itself, the criminal justice system hanged just when hip hop was born. Prisons were no longer just places to discipline; they became dumping grounds to corral bodies labeled a menace to society. Police in the late twentieth century was designed not to stop or reduce crime in inner-city communities but to manage it. Economic restructuring resulting in massive unemployment has created criminals out of Black youth, which is what gangsta rappers acknowledge. [178]

[177] Nelson George, *Hip Hop America* (New York: Viking, 1998), viii.
[178] Robin Kelley, "Kickin' Reality Kickin' Ballistics: Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles" in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working-Class* (Free Press, 1994), 185. For more on the historicization of Hip Hop and deindustrialization, urban poverty, and economic decline, see Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005)

Here, Kelley notes the relationship between economy, culture, and criminal justice being intertwined, which is a key feature of carcerality. Like much of the Black artistic tradition, Hip Hop's genesis and proliferation stems from economic and political maneuvers that indicate social crises, which Hip Hop functions to critique. The generations-long calibration of Black youth as criminals functioned as a means to legitimize totalizing state control by way of warehousing deviancy rather than rehabilitation. Hip Hop's growth signified an era in which mass imprisonment shaped U.S. political discourses of maintaining social order, while the growth of gangsta rap as a subgenre coincided with not only the rise of neoliberalism and mass imprisonment, but the economic restructuring of a city that still operated in the aftermath of the Watts Rebellion. Because of this, gangsta rappers were the ones to generate a language the bridged these events together, while acknowledging the criminalization of Black youth as means to expand the necessity of a burgeoning prison industry. Operating in the same light as what sociologist Clyde Woods termed the "blues epistemology," gangsta rap posits a bloc through which the auspices of the warfare state are theorized, critiqued, and resisted by Black working-class communities, often formalizing amidst social and political crises.[179] Gangsta rap can then be read in light of the conditions that enable a theory of racial and gendered captivity specific to Los Angeles' postindustrial atmosphere; it speaks to the site-specific moment of a city both in massive economic decline and militarized police proliferation in the decades following the Watts insurrection and the wars on crime and poverty. Within the same trajectory, the fully formed warfare bloc as a product of the wars on crime and poverty of the 1960s, akin to Woods' formulation of the plantation bloc, is directly linked to the growth and power of the gangsta rap bloc that we see during the 1980s. In this case, it is plausible to justify the warfare bloc as fully contested, a site of both conflict and

[179] Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (New York: Verso Press, 1998), 30.

cultural formation.[180] Within the context of Los Angeles, the warfare bloc, as exemplified through *Colors* (or Hollywood police film more broadly), operates as a postindustrial wasteland of liberal promise which is always in contention with the quotidian experiences of the Black working-class that serves as the primary subject of the gangsta rap bloc. My reading of gangsta rap is in the spirit of Clyde Woods' compelling and always urgent framing of the blues bloc, especially in framing Black working-class cultural production. He wrote, "Like other blocs in the region, working-class African Americans in the Delta and in the Black Belt South have constructed a system of explanation that informs their daily life, organizational activity, culture, religion, and social movements. They have created their own ethno-regional epistemology. Like other traditions of interpretation, it is not a monolith; there are branches, roots, and a trunk. This central tradition is referred to in this work as the blues epistemology."[181] Also important is Woods' framing of the blues epistemology's two foundations: "1) Constant reestablishment of collective sensibility in the face of constant attacks by the plantation bloc and its allies, and in the face also of a daily community life that is often chaotic and deadly; and 2) Social relations in the plantation South as one of the foundational pillars of African American culture. The plantation was a site both of conflict and cultural formation; Black migrants often measure social progress and spirituality in relation to the physical and psychological distance from 'down home.' – 1980s represented a reversal of progress and collapse of the Second Reconstruction and the return to older forms of oppression that they fled the South to escape."[182] Gangsta rap can be read as an era and regionally specific subgenre of Hip Hop that points to Los Angeles' postindustrial atmosphere. Unlike most other genres in the Black music tradition, gangsta rap's genesis operated entirely against the

[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid1.
[182] Ibid2.

background of the postindustrial city. Because police violence ultimately serves as the genre's primary target, gangsta rap points to the conditions of postindustrial Los Angeles' dependency on creating warzones out of places like South Central, Compton, Long Beach, East Los Angeles, and etc. Los Angeles' postindustrial landscape was made in part by deindustrialization that occurred in the 1970s, with the massive shutdown of steel and rubber factories that were largely occupied by Black laborers. High tech manufacturers in the aerospace industry began to hold deeper permanence in the region – with companies like Lockheed, Boeing, and Raytheon sprouting in lesser populated parts of the city, even as far as Orange County and Silicon Valley. With Black Los Angeles existing in the backdrop of the 1965 Watts Uprising, by 1980 it was believed that conditions had significantly worsened. In a 1982 report from the California Legislature revealed that "South Central neighborhoods experienced a 50 percent rise in unemployment while purchasing power dropped by one-third. The median income for South Central LA's residents was a paltry $5,900-$2,500 below the median income for the Black population a few years earlier."[183] As a feature of Reaganomics, in coordination with deindustrialization, labor outsourcing, and decreased spending, the years 1981-1982 served as key years through which the worsening effects of economic restructuring would hyper-saturate poverty as it is experienced by the city's Black and Brown communities. The after- effects of the Watts Uprising of 1965 in terms of understanding the likely trajectory of South Central's political economy ultimately pointed directly towards capitalism, war, and labor as key features of maintaining social control over the Black community. In describing rapper Ice T's "Escape from the Killing Fields," Kelley writes that while the song's lyrics allude to recent film on Cambodia as a metaphor for warlike conditions, in which Ice T "blames capitalism entirely, which he defines as much more than alienating wage labor; the

[183] Robin Kelley, "Kickin' Reality Kickin' Ballistics: Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles" in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working-Class* (Free Press, 1994), 192.

marketplace itself as well as a variety of social institutions are intended to exercise total control over African Americans."[184] Perhaps most telling would be the final verse of the song:

> There'll never be any good schools in the hood
> There'll never be any cops that are any good!
> The hospital is a great place to go to die
> Real estate's cheap, let me tell ya why
> The man's got a sure-fire system:
> A economic prison!

The overt criticism of capitalism in Ice T's lyrics signify the larger intertwining of capitalism and warfare, with this particular verse pointing towards a declining schooling, housing, and health care system that is characteristic of a place like South Central. The overall task of the gangsta rapper then becomes a matter of discerning between global conquest (i.e. the U.S. invasion of Cambodia) and the domestic conquest through which capitalist decline give route to an "economic prison." Popular discourses of warfare up until the mid-1980s had largely been assigned to international conquest (i.e. globalization and imperial expansion), ultimately leading gangsta rappers as urban America's organic intelligentsia to generate a language of counterinsurgency that would place international and domestic warfare within the same arena.

Gangsta rap also doesn't come without its own limitations and grounds for critical intervention and speculation. For one, although gangsta rap's advent was largely seen through the political-economic realm of social critique, it is also important to bear in mind the violent constraints that plays active part in the lives of Black men who helped to create the genre and aesthetic. Coupled with the Black cultural tradition operating against the background of racial progress, gangsta rap should also be considered along the lines of conquests surrounding masculinity and sexuality. Using Ice T as an example again, we go from "Escape from the Killing

[184] Ibid, 193.

Fields" to "Somebody's Gotta Do It [Pimpin' Ain't Easy]." Other examples include NWA's shift from "Fuck The Police" to "A Bitch is a Bitch," "One Less Bitch," and "To Kill a Hooker," to name a few. Robin Kelley thoughtfully makes the connection that it is difficult to imagine what Ulf Hammer calls "streetcorner mythmaking" without exploration of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report on the myth of the Black matriarch.[185] Therefore, Los Angeles can be a logical case study to read the impact of postindustrial economic violence in shaping and distorting gender relations among the city's lumpen class, one that falsely embraces boyhood as worthy of conquest and domination over women. On this note, police film may arguably present a similar route through which policing may be both a solution to Black male violence (against other men and ultimately women) as well as assigning social order to be made solely possible through the white male patriarchal figure of police. It might also be said that the more violent LAPD became, the more overtly sexist gangsta rap turned out to be.

Colors as Genre

The film begins in an LAPD precinct during a briefing session of newly implemented CRASH tactics. Seemingly organized between the newer cops and the veterans, the opening scene brings together the two main protagonists of the film – Officers Bob Hodges (played by Robert Duvall), a Vietnam veteran who has been on the force for 19 years and Danny McGavin, also known as "Pac Man" (played by Sean Penn), his rookie partner on assignment. Building around the tensions that may seem to alienate the veteran street-smarts of Officer Hodges and the hot-

[185] For greater detail on the relationship between urban poverty, culture, and interpersonal/intracommunal violence(s), see: Robin D.G. Kelley, Kickin' Reality Kickin' Ballistics: Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles" in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working-Class* (Free Press, 1994), 216 and *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*; Ulf Hannerz, *Soulside: Inquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).

headed rookie tendencies of Officer McGavin, the film's plot follows the two on a variety of interactions, some more outwardly violent than others, through the duo's duty to enact control over the local gang crisis. The tensions and largely contradictory tactics between the two serve as a canonical struggle of good versus bad, in the attempt to depict the inner dimensions of the social necessity of a kind of holistic, human-centered form of policing that the film seeks to embody from start to finish. The central narrative of the film is as follows: gang youth and police are alike in the sense that they are both in a war for survival and it is evident that the police are losing, and as historian Felicia Viator states, the film's screenplay treated most of its subjects, "cop, citizen, and criminal alike – as individuals challenged by complex social and economic ills."[186] Both police and gang members cast throughout the film are equally relentless, trigger-happy, and prone to succumbing to street violence.

Where warfare is concerned, it can be argued that the film's main approach is to highlight the inner-city dimensions of Los Angeles serving as the epicenter through which gang violence had reached full capacity, rivaling and often in contradistinction to the notable densely populated gang cities such as Chicago and New York City. In fact, Robert De Lillo originally wrote the script to take place in Chicago, with the intent to focus primarily on the city's drug problem rather than its gang violence. Later, Michael Schiffer would take on the full role of restructuring the script to focus on Los Angeles, as it was seen that the gang problem was far more prevalent to the film's plot than originally intended. By placing "colors" at the center of the notorious intracommunal struggle between rivaling Bloods and Crips gangs of Los Angeles, what the film actually coordinates is the existing war between the police and local street organizations. This is indicated

[186] See: Felicia Angeja Viator "Gangster Boogie: Los Angeles and the Rise of Gangsta Rap, 1965-1992" (PhD Dissertation, University of California Berkeley, 2012) and her book *To Life and Defy in LA: How Gangsta Rap Changed America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020).

in the opening scene when it is prompted to the group of deputies that "they're flying their colors, we're flying ours." Aside from the previous chapter's engagement with *Bush Mama* at the level of centering Black insurgent film as a cultural device through which counterinsurgency and a critique of the welfare-warfare state can take form, an analysis of *Colors* imparts an understanding of the racial and gendered dimensions of anti-gang police tactics during the 1980s war on drugs and gangs that remains in constant opposition to the lasting impact of a burgeoning gangsta rap subgenre of Hip Hop. What I mean to say is that the embodied white maleness of the film's protagonists suggests the inevitable possibilities of triumph and mobility to be experienced throughout the LAPD, while the streets of Los Angeles will continue to remain the war-torn wasteland that it had gained reputation as; serving as the key site through which Black and Brown demise is not only expected, but necessary. Centering this notion allows a window where gangsta rap not only grew in popularity but grew as a necessary entity through which racial and gendered captivity would not only be given a voice but would be read as the warfare state's primal oppositional critique that was fortified through *Colors*. The film is often praised for its sense of "chilling urgency and pure style," a kind of masterpiece that is often heralded as not requiring much acting at all due to the film's presumed realness. In a *New York Times* film review, *Colors* is best believed to have "create[d] a sense of place and a climate of fear, to capture the vivid mark that gang life has left upon the downtown Los Angeles landscape."[187] With scenes ranging from downtown to Venice, San Pedro, Watts, and East LA, *Colors* depicts a city through the police vantage point, one in which the city's residents can only be seen through the windshield of an unmarked police car or at the end of a pistol. Conversely, in a *Los Angeles Times* review, it is noted

[187] Janet Maslin. "Review/Film; Police vs. Street Gangs In Hopper's '*Colors*'" – The New York Times https://www.nytimes.com/1988/04/15/movies/review-film-police-vs-street-gangs-in-hopper-s-colors.html. 15 April 1988.

that a key fault of the film was its negation of context that would ultimately provide reason as to how and why a "gang crisis" would occur. In a 2018 interview with *Vibe* magazine, various figureheads in the California underground Hip Hop scene provided commentary on their own reception of the film. One noteworthy commentary from rapper Murs stated, "*Colors,* at best, was another classic ploy by the American government to further the chaos, violence and division in the black community. At worst, it's a 'well-intentioned' dagger jabbed in the back of the black community by yet another clueless white male fascinated with our plight and culture."[188] Other input may state at the inverse the film's authenticity in depicting the real dangers of street life in Los Angeles. Rapper Del Tha Funky Homosapien stated, "it began to expose the craziness that had been hidden in South Central from the rest of the world. I remember New York cats used to clown us, like we all blonde chicks and surfers out here. *Colors* came out and it started to show you. You don't even know half of what really be going on out here, the shit is straight up war zone. How it could be hidden for as long as it was, or not believed to be really happening...is crazy."[189] While the film does not exactly seek to glamorize street organization culture (it in fact does the opposite), those cast as gang members are rather situated as "rebels without a context by doing nothing to sketch in the social and economic pressures that lead kids to see gangs as the only brotherhood in a bleak and hopeless world."[190] This lack of depth problematizes the film overall, wherein it is widely assumed that law-abiding citizens could not possibly exist within the South Central and East LA areas, the very people who must endure the precarity of a drug-infested society regardless of affiliation with a

[188] Preezy Brown. "Colors' Impact Stands The Test Of Time 30 Years Later" – Vibe Magazine https://www.vibe.com/2018/04/colors-movie-anniversary-interviews. 16 April 2018.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Sheila Benson. "Movie Review: Complexity and Context Washed Out of *Colors*" – The Los Angeles Times https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-04-15-ca-1305-story.html. 15 April 1988.

street organization. It becomes apparent that *Colors* has "an 'us versus them' mentality but, peculiarly, the 'us' don't seem to be its Black or Latino parents or inner-city residents. If the movie has a martyr, you can be sure that the martyr will be in a policeman's uniform, not a housecoat or a pair of out-at-the knee jeans."[191] Both reviews point to the spectrum through which the film's reception is understood as a product of the times. On one hand it is believed that the film is the best of its kind, an authentic portrayal of the pressing issue of inner-city violence and drug abuse. On the other, the film presents nothing more than a sensationalized "melodrama in realistic clothing," reducing Black and Brown city inhabitants as people who not only lack character complexity but lack the means through which such complexity may unfold. By the end of the film, in the final shootout scene, Officer Bob Hodges is shot to death by a Latino gang member during a mass arrest. In this moment, it becomes clear that the only character who possesses the most human traits turns out the be the main casualty of the film's plot, speaking directly to the martyrdom of the "good cop" trope that runs pervasive in police film and television since the advent of the War on Drugs.

Colors largely circulates around the belief that real diversity is not necessarily found on the streets of LA, but rather in the minds and actions of the police who patrol the city. Operating as monolithic entities of inner-city suffering and mass violence, the Black and Brown neighborhoods captured in *Colors* point significantly towards community variance to only be allowed for in the presence of either Officer Hodges or McGavin. My reading of the film is more than just a matter of rendering the successes and/or failures of racialized/gendered representations through *Colors,* but rather provides an analysis of the film that destabilizes mainstream discourses of policing *as* order. Stemming from this, I contend that viewers' interactions with the film's Black

[191] Ibid.

and Brown characters, however developed they are, are fully entwined and made legible primarily through their interactions with police; officers Hodges and McGavin create meaning for these characters in varied, yet concrete ways. In similar and distinct ways, the film's Black and Brown characters are essentially "made human" through police encounter, shaped primarily through explicit forms of violence and harassment and in the form of community policing, to which both communities experience an inherent and tragic demise.

For instance, in one particular scene, both Hodges and McGavin pursue a group of young Black men in an alley. Following a foot chase, McGavin grabs hold of High Top, an 18-year old crack dealer and member of the Bloods, who was selling to a group of Crips. While McGavin grabs hold of High Top, Hodges had already proceeded with a roundup of the young men, calmly ordering them to place their hands at the back of their heads while he takes down their information. Hodges questions one of the young boys, who turns out to be a 14-year-old boy, walks up to him and placing his hand on his chest. After asking the young boy if he wants to "turn out like the rest of these boys," to which he replies "no," Hodges walks over, places his hand over the boy's chest and asks "what's your heart beatin' for?" The boy replies, "I'm scared, man," and Hodges jokingly replies, "I thought you were running a marathon." Hodges then proceeds to question and search High Top, informing him that "I got you on my file now, and if I catch you around here again I'll shove this up your ass. How do you think that will feel?" After insisting that he would shove the crack rock "up your ass," Hodges prompts McGavin to uncuff High Top, to which McGavin shows outward reluctance and deep frustration towards Hodges. Once uncuffed, Hodges informs High Top of who he is, telling him to "ask around who I am, all right?" After a quick word exchange between Hodges and High Top, Hodges informs him that "you owe me one," and then prompts the group to leave immediately. Hodges continues, "this alley is hot. It's no longer yours. It's

mine," and vows that the next time he saw them in that alley would lead to an arrest. "Be straight with me. I'll be straight with you."

Figure 3.1: Officer Bob Hodges places his hand over the young boy's chest to feel his heart race after asking if he wants to turn out like the rest of the boys.

This particular scene outlines one of the key moments in the film that forcefully highlights Hodges' presumed humanity. Occurring towards the beginning of the film, this scene ultimately sets the stage through which "human-centered" forms of anti-gang policing would be juxtaposed to conventional modes of police harassment, as best exemplified through Officer McGavin's character. In constant contention lies both the Hollywood struggle to discern between "good" policing and "bad" policing as well as situating the assumed role of whiteness occupied by police to always be placed in contradistinction to racialized and sexualized "others" of the film – many of whom largely go nameless and limited in character dialogue.[192] Hodges is forged as the film's

[192] Nikhil P. Singh. "The Whiteness of Police" (American Quarterly: Johns Hopkins University Press) *vol. 66 no. 4*. December 2014, pp. 1091-1099. I build from Singh's definition of whiteness as an extension of the conversation of whiteness as cited from Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Minor Compositions: 2013) as such: "a status of conferring distinct – yet conjoined – social, political, and economic freedoms across a veritiginously unequal property order…It emerges from the governance of property and its interests in relationship to those who have no property and thus no calculable interests, and who are therefore imagined to harbor a potentially criminal disregard for propertied order." Ideations of whiteness and policing extend the centrality of capitalist renderings of what Singh calls "an unequal ordering of property relations," which speaks to the era of proliferated and targeted criminal policing of gang members and drug sellers/abusers as depicted not only in *Colors* and gangsta rap critique, but figuratively situated through the interaction seen here between Hodges and the young boy.

savior, a perfect and necessary bridge point between categorical and mainstream understandings of "bad" police officers who possess the possibilities of reformation amidst the (un)reformable qualities inherent to street youth. Popular discourses allow viewers to assume that the Black male youth in the scene inescapably occupy deviancy. However, what is important to note is that Hodges' experience on the force, throughout the implementation of anti-gang CRASH discourse layered throughout the film, coupled with the growing anticipation of McGavin's likely reformation (or coming of age) is the necessary and contingent terrain through which Black male deviancy operates. In other words, the racial and gendered encounter of Hodges, McGavin, High Top and others in this scene operates as a signifier through which Hodges and McGavin's characters begin to experience variance and growth on both individual and collaborative levels.

By then, Hodges prompting to High Top that he "owes him one" signals a kind of deviant form of policing from the more traditionally accepted rough housing approach favored by McGavin. Deviance operates in each of these different encounters (Hodges to McGavin, McGavin to High Top, High Top to McGavin); however, they still operate in coordination to legitimize the social necessity of police encounter as a primary entity through which gang violence could be righteously prevented and curtailed. To this end, Hodges embodies a kind of veteran "officer friendly," whose attentiveness to urban politics and youth engagement presents a likely ticket out of the ghetto for the young Black and Brown males of the film. More so than McGavin's character, Hodges is more of an era-specific mainstream response to Los Angeles' so-called gang crisis, one whose actions demonstrate the steady need and ongoing relevance of police to occupy urban spaces alongside the potentially criminalized youth who inhabit those communities. In other words, these encounters suggest that in the hands of the "right" kind of police officer (i.e. white, male, veteran status), young men of color are far more likely to reformed. This logic negates the lasting impact

of structural violence and its impact in constructing that various apparatuses of state violence that can only be enabled (rather than dismantled) by either Officers Hodges or McGavin. Rather, Black and Brown criminality is no longer placed within the realm of susceptibility to urban renewal, economic restructuring, and decades of failing education, health, and recreational services that inner city communities rely so heavily on. Instead, youth of color criminality is made to be a product of individualized renderings of poor choices and misguidance, only to be steered by the hands of the state and violently mitigated by police.

As much as *Colors* speaks to the literal 'colors' war between rival Crips and Bloods gangs, it is difficult to overlook the interracial relations that underwrite the racial and ethnic composition of Los Angeles. Additionally, what also exists and is worth mentioning is the inter-ethnic/intra-racial tensions which the varying members of the film's Black and Brown communities occupy. This means that the film also operates on the basis of racial encounter as much as it operates on a basis that signifies the relevance and overall dangers of Los Angeles' gang crisis; this is done in a manner that fortifies the protagonists' assumed roles of whiteness. While the films opens and largely circulates around Hodges' and McGavin's violent confrontations with Black youth, they are also largely validated through their interactions with the film's Latina/o characters – signified primarily through Hodges' frequent collaboration with Frog and McGavin's romantic endeavors with Louisa.

Frog, played by Trinidad Silva, serves as the film's main representative of Los Angeles' Latino street organization culture, the "OG" (original gangster) of his barrio (21st Street) to whom many owe both their respect and allegiance. A certified "machismo," one who calls the shots of every young "vato" in his barrio, Frog's relationship with Hodges spans the trajectory of the film, serving as a kind of medium between the assumed holistic and human-centered approach to

policing embodied through Hodges' presence and the barrio. In relation to my reading of the many instances of white-on-Black police encounter throughout the film, police surveillance becomes embodied largely through Hodges' oft-used assertion that he has his "eyes on you" and to "keep the homeboys in line" as indicative of a kind of community policing that socially necessitates policing one's own community – essentially doing the work of the LAPD in Brown or Black face.[193] In the case of McGavin, rather than allying with a local OG such as Frog, his association with East LA is largely shaped through his romantic relationship with Louisa Gomez (played by Maria Conchita Alonso), a fast-food worker and local resident. McGavin's pursuit of Louisa is inescapably sexual, rendering her hardly as a love interest and more as an object through which McGavin's aggression towards Latinos may be consoled and pacified. Their romance is significant, but only partial to a larger understanding of anti-police sentiments from the Latino community. For example, in one scene, both McGavin and Hodges catch a young boy (named Felipe) tagging a wall, crossing out the names of alleged rivals. Once Hodges reprimands him and lets him off with a warning, McGavin, holding the same spray can picked up from Felipe, briefly interrogates him and begins spraying him in the face. After a few seconds, Hodges commands "enough of that shit!" while forcefully pushing McGavin away, urging Felipe to flee the scene. Louisa learns of the incident, confronts McGavin revealing that she is Felipe's cousin, and warns McGavin of how much "they hate you." McGavin continues to rationalize spraying Felipe's face with the spray can, further claiming that he "maybe saved the kid's life that way" by preventing a possible murder, suggesting that the events leading to and that would subsequently follow the spray-painting incident was far more dangerous compared to his allegedly benign act of spraying

[193] For "community policing" see, Stuart Hall et. al. *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law & Order* Second Edition(Palgrave Macmillan Education: 1978, 2013); Kristian Williams, Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007), pp. 218-222.

Felipe's face. Louisa closes by reminding McGavin, "I'm with them Danny. I'm a home girl. It's not them who threaten me. It's you."

Figure 3.2: Officer Hodges reunites with Frog in the alley roundup scene after a young Felipe throws a rock at the unmarked police car.

Frog and Louisa's characters, however intentionally or not, serve as legitimizing agents though which both Hodges and McGavin weigh their own subjectivities between their careers and street life. In essence, both serve as a bridge between the embodied whiteness of Hodges and McGavin, creating multiple modes through which their police authenticity becomes a main point of contestation. In relation to the Latin community and Hodges alike, Frog presents a kind of authoritative figure that embodies the East LA gangster trope, who, between him and Larry (a Black affiliate of Frog's barrio) can be read as a signifier of Brown-Black relations made legible through street organization contact with police. Additionally, Frog and Larry can loosely be situated as a Black and Brown street iteration of the kind of masculinist authority that connotes Hodges' character, hence the assumed elongated process through which Hodges and Frog garner relative respect for one another and how it is maintained throughout the film through a series of credit transactions: "you owe me one, and I owe you one." On the other hand, Louisa's persona both troubles and complements an assumed "femme fatale" position which largely underwrites the

presumed possibility of McGavin somehow becoming Hodges one day, a narrative that arc the film from beginning to end. In doing so, by the film's end Louisa becomes far more of a figure of betrayal rather than promise, causing viewers to envision her as a one who enables the deviancies of the men in her life rather than one who enables McGavin's own personal growth. As the events of the film increasingly demonstrate Louisa's "downness," or loyalty to her barrio, it becomes more difficult to imagine McGavin achieving veteran status without her remaining McGavin's key sexual pursuit.

Figure 3.3: Officer McGavin and Louisa end their first and only date.

Weighing the overall reach of the film, its reception, and its lasting permanence within the genre of police film (or Blockbuster films writ large), *Colors* succeeds in a way that advances and verifies the need for police as a key solution to America's drug war and its overlap with a more localized "war on gangs." Additionally, with the film's deliberate and lofty placement of Black street organizations as key antagonists not only in the film, but in the greater Los Angeles community, the Black characters in *Colors* remain one-sided, whose complexities are largely only brought to the surface in the funeral and town hall scenes. In this case, the violence of the streets only serves to highlight the complexities of police, in an attempt to make them appear multi-

dimensional and closely relatable – rendering the inherent brutality of police (embodied through McGavin) as an anomaly and not a characteristic of *all* police. At best, the film does briefly address the varying ideologies that highlight Black Los Angeles' sentiments towards urban violence, housed primarily through the church (the funeral scene) and the LAPD townhall on Black responses (led and moderated by Black police officers and Ron Delaney – a reformed member of a Los Angeles street organization turned mentor). In these smaller, yet significant, moments of the film what is revealed are the effects of state sponsored anxieties on Black and Latino communities. Indeed, the political economy of the post-Civil Rights era provide a useful lens in understanding the variegated responses to the drug war and its coexistence alongside street violence. As historian Donna Murch writes, Black Los Angeles was not only seen as the "largest retail market for cocaine" consumption during the 1980s, but also was home to "the largest intraracial income gap nationally, and economic disparity shaped how different state understood the war on drugs."[194] The significance of these important observations remains that African American elected officials often stood as primary voices of Black suffering. In addition, the political terrain of Tom Bradley's election as mayor of Los Angeles further stratified African-American class tension, which was largely shaped and impacted through contrasting views on the role of carceral methods of control amidst the growing threat of intracommunal drug circulation. For example, city councilman David Cunningham responded to Chief Darryl Gates' proto-military decisions following the initial usage of the battering ram in an infamous 1985 South Central drug raid by saying "Go right ahead, chief. You do whatever you can to get rid of these crack houses. They're going to destroy the Black community if you don't." Cunningham's response to the LAPD's implementation of the battering ram signified a larger political and ideological revelation, aided by the near-unanimous support for

[194] Donna Murch, "Crack in Los Angeles: Crisis, Militarization, and Black Response to the Late Twentieth-Century War on Drugs" in *Journal of American History*, Volume 102, Issue 1, June 2015, p. 163.

Ronald Reagan's 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act by Black elected officials. Co-sponsored by 15 other members of the Congressional Black Caucus, the bill resulted in the 100:1 punishment disparity regarding crack versus powder cocaine offenses, a highly integral measure that points us directly toward the racial disparity between African-American drug offenders and their white counterparts. Competing ideologies on responding to the crack crisis reveals just how divisive the War on Drugs proved to be among Black and Latino communities. These tensions were revealed primarily along the lines of age, faith, and class and often resulted in a deepened core belief that carceral solutions were the best response to ongoing violence and drug trafficking.[195] With organizations such as the Southern California Organizing Committee (SCOC) and the United Neighborhoods Organization (UNO), Murch writes that Black and Latino reformist organizations such as these operated on a crisis-driven rationale, one that enabled welfare retrenchment and militarized law enforcement that continued to point the blame towards "gangs" and "traffickers" in local high crime areas. These organizations often collaborated with local police, churches, social welfare programs, and youth corrections in order to sponsor anti-crime initiatives, one that ultimately led to increased measures to fund the police in an effort to increase police presence in Black and Latino communities. The growing relevance of these conservative grassroots organizations pushed forth a cultural 'politics of personal responsibility' that was really perfected by the Reagan administration, one that placed the blame on Black and Brown youth as arbiters of their own oppression. Even amidst the cultural conservatism of Black elites and their support for the wars on drugs and gangs, including the intracommunal tensions that had been given face by the likes of the Reagan and Bradley administrations, the wide array of responses to the wars on drugs and gangs still remains a largely understudied realm of Los Angeles' history.

[195] Ibid, 171.

Hodges' death at the end of the film is the result of a final police roundup "gone wrong." After the climax buildup leading into the East LA clique seeking revenge on the Crips, they pursue a house that is known to be Rocket's (played by Don Cheadle) current hideout. As the two scenes (the strategy meeting of police and the meetings of opposing gangs) juxtapose, the result leads to both Rocket and Larry being killed. Rocket and Larry's deaths at the hands of one another is significant because they are both primary figureheads of each opposing gang, with Larry serving as a Black affiliate of the East LA gang led by Frog. The scene underscores how their deaths are inevitable and expected. As a genre, the deaths and incarceration of the film's key Black characters, as well as the relative demise of prominent Latino characters by the ending shootout, *Colors* underwrites and legitimizes the cultural consensus of Black and Brown youth deviancy is more of a threat to public order than previously imagined, far more of a national issue than the drug problem, with the death of Hodges being the final seal of authenticity to the larger consensus of Los Angeles being a perpetual warzone, whose death is worthy of mourning as opposed to the deaths of Rocket and Larry. With its widespread reception, popular and cultural appeal, and all-star cast, *Colors* serves as a model police film, an era and geographically-specific film that localizes both police necessity and impunity while simultaneously serving as a modality through which Los Angeles' economic restructuring of the 1980s can best be addressed and overturned once Black and Brown street activity is fully and wantonly liquidated.

Conclusion

Los Angeles' postindustrial landscape made for the perfect climate that would best explain the events leading up to police film becoming a burgeoning genre of the region. It would also greatly explain the necessary means through which gangsta rap not only rose in popularity, but

made shockwaves across the nation for its scathing critique of targeted forms of criminalization, surveillance, and incarceration, all of which are dominant themes of gangsta rap music and culture.[196] Unlike its contemporaries to East Coast Hip Hop (such as Public Enemy, Boogie Down Productions, the Juice Crew, A Tribe Called Quest, MC Shan, Roxanne Shante, Marley Marl, to name a few), which was equally politically charged and urgent, Los Angeles-based gangsta rap provided an avenue through which working-class Black life would be given new face, thoughtfully blending boogie and funk genres of the late 1970s and early 1980s into a sonic critique of Los Angeles' continued reputation of a post-racial land of promise as depicted through inhabitants of its most dangerous postindustrial trenches. The cohabitation of both police films such as *Colors* and gangsta culture both reveal similar yet distinct entities of hegemonic, moral-panic induced media and policy put forth by the War on Drugs. Music, here represented through gangsta rap, then presents itself as a rather unmediated cultural form that centers African-American masculine voices at the forefront of capitalist critique, anti-police sentiment, and sexual violence and exploitation. The omnipresence of LAPD's Operation HAMMER produced an arena through which more Black youth were arrested than at any given moment during the Watts Rebellion of 1965. Sensationalized images of Black youth as urban guerilla warriors in films like *Colors* have continued to dominate mainstream media and culture, positing Black youth as primal targets of police abuse that ought to be neutralized to reduce the risk of them outnumbering police. Asserted as a "gang scare," the moral panic around youth street organizations came around full circle and was inescapably linked as public enemy number one, akin to crack cocaine of War on Drugs discourse, even as a product of the racialization of crack sale and consumption. The "Vietnamization" of Los Angeles relied heavily on policing as the solution to street violence, one

[196] Robin Kelley, "Kickin' Reality Kickin' Ballistics: Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles" in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working-Class* (Free Press, 1994), 208.

that placed into context the notion of a foreign enemy to be assigned to racially and gendered bodies marked as "other" to be the full recipient of police assault. For example, the Gang Related Active Trafficking Suppression Program (GRATS) specialized in targeting "drug neighborhoods" and to legitimize the stopping, interrogation, and rounding up of anyone suspected of being in a street organization, based solely on physical experience. Active police roundups of these alleged "drug neighborhoods" were a paramount feature of anti-drug and anti-gang policing, one the signified not only a growth in police personnel, weapons, and tactics, but a coinciding growth in local jail and state prison warehousing.

Indeed, the warfare bloc as it is deployed through a film like *Colors* reveals not just the inner workings of the technologies, logics, and outcomes of the various entities that comprise Los Angeles' carceral atmosphere but does the work of inciting a level of awareness that continues to put forth notions of a domestic enemy that collapses Black and Brown street crime with the drug crisis. Not only do the actors of the film serve as racialized and gendered stand-ins of the warfare bloc's composition, but rather do the work of assigning white maleness as the inherent arbiters of the policing class, a dominant force that overrides popular discourses of law and order at both the institutional and interpersonal level. Therefore, if it is true that the plantation bloc of the South led to the overthrow of Reconstruction in the years following the end of the Civil War, then it can be said that the warfare bloc (as seen through Los Angeles Police) can be responsible for the deployment of targeted forms of racialized and gendered punishment and carceral expansion as a result of war on drugs and gangs policy and discourse – signaling key features of the liberal and conservative efforts to overthrow civil rights efforts of the decades prior. Consequently, African-American cinema posits a likely and necessary terrain of objection to the realities set forth by the warfare bloc as described through Hollywood blockbuster police film, as the previous chapter

touches on in engaging Haile Gerima's *Bush Mama* (1977). However, I would add that the blues bloc equivalent may not just be limited to Third cinema, but can be pointed more sufficiently to Los Angeles gangsta rap primarily because of mass popular appeal, marketing, and overall reach.[197] Equally regionally specific and biting in terms of social and political critique, gangsta rap's predominance in the Black urban art landscape since the mid-1980s pointed directly to heightened street violence that seemingly coincided with continued economic downturn. As the violence of 1980s Los Angeles spilled into white districts of the city (i.e. Westwood, Hollywood, Venice Beach), the city's war on Black and Latino youth categorized Los Angeles as an infamously dangerous global city, with the centrality of "policing and the drug war making violence a dominant cultural theme. It can also be said, according to historian Daniel Widener, that "the widespread fear of gang violence prompted a section of the Black political establishment, acting on the wishes of a segment of its constituency, to take police violence as the lesser of two evils. [198] Relating back to my earlier engagement with Donna Murch's examination of Los Angeles, police violence, when committed against homicidal Black youth, is seen to be not only enabled but necessary, especially when active voices in the community to support widespread policing efforts were cosigned by several Black and Latino faith-based and community organizations. The question now is where this takes us, and how a reading of *Colors* may allow for a greater understanding of Hollywood's function as an apparatus of state power? Additionally, how might gangsta rap either continue to gain or lose its significance 20 to 30 years after *Colors*, especially as the 1990s brings about another decade of ongoing Hollywood releases of police film in the form of action, comedy, and drama?

[197] Clyde Woods, "The Challenges of Blues and Hip Hop Historiography." *Kalfou* 1 (2010), pp. 33-34
[198] Daniel Widener, "How to Survive in South Central: Black Film as Class Critique" in Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 275.

The answer, in turn, may be to read *Colors* as a condensation of war on drugs and gangs policy and enactment gone wrong in the sense that "good" cops are the ones whose lives are most at risk and that these "good" policing is possible even amidst crisis. Rhetorically speaking, this also raises the question of how the state of Black urban expression in the form of gangsta rap might present a necessary sonic archive of the era's precarity, a window through which the violence of urban Los Angeles is best relived through the genre's most prominent voices. Cultural historians on Los Angeles may largely point to these conditions leading to the inevitable Rodney King beating and the Los Angeles Uprisings of 1992. These events may also point towards how cultural devices of the 1980s paints an even more vivid prediction of the multifaceted crisis that becomes enabled through President Bill Clinton's ascendancy, the 1994 Crime Bill, and California's notorious Three Strikes rule; key moments that mark the U.S. prison population surpassing one million people behind cages.

EPILOGUE
The 90s and Beyond

> "Internationalizing" United States history is not about telling the story of foreign policy or foreign relations but about how tenuous boundaries, identities, and allegiances really are. Moreover, the particular transnational, global perspective developed by African American intellectuals does not grow from the vine of smart scholarship, and it is certainly not limited to the academy – let alone history departments. Social movements for freedom, justice, and self-determination produced this global vision; it was a product of a state refusing to grant black people citizenship, an enslaved people whose first response was to find a way home, and a political refusal on the part of many black intellectuals to prop up American nationalism and its national myths. After all, their very lives expose the country's fundamental national myths – that this is a country founded on freedom, democracy, and equality.
>
> - Robin D.G. Kelley, "But a Local Phase of a World Problem" (1999)

As if the 1980s were not tumultuous enough, Los Angeles during the 1990s would mark another unprecedented era in the city's history. On March 3, 1991, unarmed Black motorist Rodney King led police on a pursuit down the 210 freeway. Pulled over on the suspicion of driving under the influence, four white LAPD officers brutalized King at the intersection of Foothill Boulevard and Osborne Street in Lake View Terrace. Waking up to the sound of police helicopters circling his apartment complex, local resident George Holliday took out his brand new Sony camcorder and recorded the beating from his apartment balcony. The four officers proceeded to repeatedly strike King with batons and tasers, taking turns kicking and punching his motionless body in the middle of the street. The recording sent shockwaves across the nation and became a paramount example of citizen journalism. For the very first time, police violence was seen as something that would be difficult if not impossible to justify among the masses, with the recording serving as proof of what African-American and Latino communities had been saying for several decades prior.

Less than two weeks later 15-year old Latasha Harlins is murdered in South Central Los Angeles. On March 16, 1991, Latasha Harlins entered Empire Liquor Market where she was accused of stealing a bottle of orange juice. The store owner, Soon Ja Du, confronted Harlins in the store, and after a quick physical scuffle which prompted Harlins to walk towards the exit, Du reached for her pistol from behind the counter and shot Harlins in the back of the head, killing her instantly. Du's husband reported to 911 an attempted robbery while Du would go on to claim self-defense. Du was given the sentence of ten years of a suspended imprisonment consisting of five years of probation, 400 hours of community service, and a $500 fine. The incident sent shock waves across the local community and agitated racial tensions between African-Americans and Korean-Americans across the city.

These two events culminated in the largest and most dangerous urban uprising in U.S. history. Between the acquittal of the four officers responsible for beating Rodney King and Soon Ja Du's mild sentencing, April 29, 1992 marked the beginning of the notorious Los Angeles Riots. Within three hours of the King verdict, South Central Los Angeles erupted in flames as stores, restaurants, and other properties were destroyed. Within two days, close to 5,000 Army and Marine Corps troops took to the streets to combat the increasing unrest, with former President George H. W. Bush implementing the Insurrection Act, the last time it would be used until the George Floyd protests of 2020.[199] According to *The Washington Post*, military troops were brought in statewide, from Monterey to San Diego, with the deployment of an additional 1,000 federal troops trained in urban policing including the FBI, the SWAT team, the National Guard, and county sheriffs. The scale of military deployment onto the streets of Los Angeles were reported to be as if "they were responding to an international crisis in Panama or the Middle East." To Bush, the riots were not

[199] Alicia Victoria Lozano "The Insurrection Act was last used in the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Invoking it again could undo years of police reform, some warn" *NBC News*, June 4, 2020.

"about civil rights," but rather about the "brutality of a mob, pure and simple" that would ultimately require him to implement "what force necessary" to restore order.[200] Over the course of five days, more than 12,000 citizens were arrested, over 2,000 injured, 64 deaths, and $1 billion in damage. As with other urban uprisings that have occurred on American soil, particularly Watts 1965, the 1992 uprisings demonstrated a revolt against the commodity.[201] With unemployment reaching up to 50% among Los Angeles residents alongside an increase in poverty due to federal cuts to housing, health care and education, inner city poverty was a key feature in the everyday lives of the city's Black and Latino communities.[202] These factors, in relation to the hyper militarization of police as a result of the wars on drugs and gangs during the 1980s, meant that the Rodney King and Latasha Harlins incidents were symptoms of an inevitable insurrection. The crisis at hand, between Los Angeles' political economic decline and increasing social unrest, paved the way for California to embark in the largest prison building project in history, holding the largest incarcerated population in the nation. The culmination of these factors created the necessary grounds for how to read Los Angeles in late-20th century racial and class politics and its impact on the rest of the United States in terms of changing how urban politics, criminalization, and carcerality would be understood into the new millennium.

Between the video evidence of both Rodney King's beating and Latasha Harlins' murder, the circulation and consumption of anti-Black violence on camera would also change course. Although it is beyond the scope of my original project, these recordings speak to how Los Angeles would be portrayed on camera, how it would be read and consumed across national and

[200] Paul Taylor and Carlos Sanchez "Bush Orders Troops Into Los Angeles" *The Washington Post,* May 2, 1992.
[201] Guy Debord "The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy" in *Internationale Situationniste #10,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, March 1966, https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/decline.html
[202] See Mike Davis, "The Embers of April 1992," *Los Angeles Review of Books,* April 30, 2012, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-embers-of-april-1992/ and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Globalization and US prison growth: from military Keynesianism to post-Keynesian militarism," *Institute of Race Relations* 40, Issue 2-3, March 1, 1999).

international audiences, and what culture may serve in the act of theorizing the spectacular nature of anti-Black violence in Los Angeles. According to Kimberlé Crenshaw and Gary Peller, the "significance of the video was not that it proved to masses of Blacks and others that the L.A. police are brutally racist, but rather that it was projected as what would satisfy 'the law' that brutality against Blacks occurred."[203] Aside from the 1992 rebellion being among one of the most studied, written about, critiqued, and engaged events in Los Angeles history, it would also serve as a lucrative site through which urban uprisings would be studied and depicted in decades to come.[204] For cultural historians who focus primarily on Los Angeles during the 1990s, the rising relevance of "hood flicks" becomes a unique continuation of the social realism that was achieved by prior decades of L.A. film history (the focus of both chapters 2 and 3). Films such as John Singleton's *Boyz N The Hood* (1991), Stephen Anderson's *South Central* (1992), and Allen and Albert Hughes' *Menace II Society* (1993) all serve as prime examples of ghetto coming of age stories with gangsta rap soundtracks with plotlines that are more deeply saturated with tragedy than triumph. These films continue to rise in social and cultural relevance alongside the continued proliferation of the police film genre that *Colors* dominated in the decade prior. My inclination gears towards drawing the connection between police film and gangsta rap during the 1980s both forewarning of the violence of 1992 while situating the grounds for the increasing popularity and consumption of both throughout the 1990s. For example, as I argue in chapter 3, both gangsta rap and police films were birthed out of a collective imagining of a post-Watts/post-Vietnam era, a city wreaked in the devastation of a violent drug war and its direct translation into a war against Black and Latino youth. Although each chapter's content is microscopic in relation to larger

[203] Kimberlé Crenshaw and Gary Peller "Reel Time/Real Justice" in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* ed. Robert Gooding-Williams (New York: Routledge, 1993), 65.
[204] For more critical commentary on race, gender, and class politics in post-1992 Los Angeles, see Robert Gooding-Williams, ed. *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

inquiries about Black Los Angeles, specifically from both a cultural studies and carceral studies approach, it is my intention that each chapter presents one of many theories of warfare that have circumnavigated Black life throughout the 20th century and its relative depictions through cultural production. The films, novels, and music mentioned within these chapters have long been consumed, debated, well-received, and detested by audiences outside of the realm of academic study. The chapters contained within this study attempt to do the work of forging conversation between how Black working-class life has been studied and will continue to be studied within the realm of social and political crises.

Dry Beginnings

It would be remiss for me to say that *Dreams Eclipsed* did not have its own set of influences stemming from my own personal upbringing. Having grown up 60 miles north of Los Angeles in Palmdale, CA, a city known for its massive development during the 1980s and 1990s, I was among the first generation of youth to have been raised in the aftermath of the 1992 uprisings. To this day, a place like Palmdale owes its exponential growth to being a direct feeder city to Los Angeles. A kind of "best kept secret" of Los Angeles county, Palmdale is one of the first places that many working-class families from Los Angeles would first be able to own property, akin to neighboring cities like Lancaster (the homeland of the flat earth society movement), Littlerock (the rural South of the county) and Quartz Hill (both the "Beverly Hills" of the desert as well as the county's Confederate hub) to the north and the cities that comprise the San Bernardino and Riverside counties (the Inland Empire) to the east. As desert oases that presented opportunities to forego the city life while having commuter access to Los Angeles, Palmdale's primary political economic base derived from Edwards Air Force Base (the location where Chuck Yeager first broke the sound

barrier) and Plant 42 (a major aircraft manufacturing facility), both places providing civilian jobs that stemmed from Cold War era demands for heightened weapons and aircraft research and manufacturing. Between the increase in affordable housing and lucrative jobs in the aerospace industry, Palmdale during the 1980s and 1990s was kind of its own city of promises that was distinct from the falsified promises that I have argued for throughout the scope of my study. Attending grade school to the sounds of military jets flying above our playgrounds, stepping outside the house to watch the space shuttles land, and military recruiters, FBI agents, and police officers being the main "career day" participants among grade schoolers, my youth was entirely shaped not only by the warfare state, but also by the great possibility of being employed by it in the future.

By the late 1990s, the eastside of Palmdale (where I grew up) more closely resembled Compton, Inglewood, and Gardena than the more affluent westside of town, as migration into Palmdale was generally comprised of residents who previously resided in those cities. With Palmdale's proud military atmosphere and continued population growth that dominated the 1990s, making it among the United States' fastest developing cities by the new millennium, Palmdale was also home to several race riots that occurred at the local high schools, parks, and other public centers, as well as the construction of the Lancaster state prison, heightened street youth organization activity and drug trafficking, and a domineering county sheriff presence. Taking these factors into account, Palmdale quickly began to serve as a desert microcosm of Los Angeles' warfare composition, a reputation that dominates the city's spatial layout and political economic base to this day.

Fast forward to 2020. Most of *Dreams Eclipsed*'s content began and took shape during the global COVID-19 pandemic, the violent murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George

Floyd, and the hanging death of 22-year-old Robert Fuller in front of Palmdale's city hall building. Much of the writing process occurred while grappling with the realities of captivity in Southern California, and how being a current resident of San Diego, California poses its own dangers and circumstances that take root in a critical study and engagement with warfare. Throughout the process of writing *Dreams Eclipsed*, the culmination of these events and realities only made the global iterations of anti-Black violence and suffering more apparent. More than ever, it was inescapable and impossible to ignore. Between living the life of an adjunct instructor, writing a dissertation, and scraping funds to make rent payments, writing *Dreams Eclipsed* in San Diego was more than a struggle. San Diego, like Palmdale, is a special place on its own particularly in the study of Black and Brown life and struggle, the political economy of race and class in Southern California and the U.S.-Mexico border, and being the most militarized city in the country.[205] Anti-Black and anti-immigrant sentiment quite literally constructs San Diego both on material and ideological bases. Both Palmdale and San Diego have deeply shaped my framing and ongoing development in the study of global warfare. And after being long-time residents of both cities, I have come to understand that warfare is not only a foundational terrain that constructs the present but rather has permanent stature in the impeding future of the entire Southern California region.

The primary task of *Dreams Eclipsed* locates the role of Black working-class cultural production as a key site in generating a theory of both warfare and captivity in Los Angeles during the 20th century. Moreover, *Dreams Eclipsed* modifies the meanings of Black working-class life and struggle as part of a larger arena of global anticolonial struggle. Although *Dreams Eclipsed* is specific to Los Angeles, or Southern California more broadly, it builds on the rich intellectual

[205] For enriched studies on San Diego, see Mychal Matsemela-Ali Odom "From Southern California to Southern Africa: Translocal Black Internationalism in Los Angeles and San Diego from Civil Rights to Antiapartheid, 1960 to 1994 (PhD Dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2017) and Mike Davis, Kelly Mayhew, and Jim Miller *Under the Perfect Sun: The San Diego Tourists Never See* (New York: The New Press, 2003).

tradition that articulates the possibilities for Black life rather than survival, and how global Black struggle has long sought to articulate the interconnections between histories of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism and how they reside at the center of European expansion and the growth of capitalism.[206]

Beginning in 1945 with the publication of Chester Himes' novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, *Dreams Eclipsed* begins a journey through Los Angeles through the vantage of protagonist Bob Jones. As a fictionalized embodiment of Himes, the novel charts four days of absolute terror experienced in the form of racial and sexual violence and the psychological torment of living in wartime Los Angeles as a working-class Black man. Many scholars of Los Angeles history point to the novel's role in forging the tensions that arise in how Los Angeles is studied, imagined, and endured by racialized/sexualized subjects. I begin with wartime Los Angeles not to make the gesture that theories of carceral warfare begin here, but to chart how the novel demonstrates a contradiction to the social and political impulses that influenced Los Angeles' steady population growth as a result of wartime demand. For many, *If He Hollers* was the first of its kind, a novel that was as unsanitized as it was theoretically rich and substantial and brough Los Angeles to the arena of studies on the racial, class, and gendered politics of migration and labor. Many historians of African-American life during the Second World War often point to participation in combat across seas, labor and manufacturing at home, and the tensions undergone in the efforts to materialize the realities of the Double "V" campaign. My reading of Himes points not only to

[206] See W.E.B. Du Bois Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880 (New York: Free Press, 1998); W.E.B. Du Bois *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the part which Africa has played in world history* (New York: International Publishers, 1965); Cedric Robinson *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Manning Marable *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015); Walter Rodney *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972); Penny M. Von Eschen *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

these important components in articulating Black life and struggle during the war but aims to situate Himes on a broader stage of anticolonial literature that bridges the Black condition in Los Angeles to the colonial condition of Black communities across the Third World. The Cold War routes us through McCarthyism and the integral years that led to the formation of the Civil Rights movement and its relative impact in helping shape the movements led by women, queer folks, students, Chicanos, Asian Americans, and indigenous folks during the 1960s.

My engagement with Third Cinema helps us to imagine what Los Angeles may look like when depicted as an internal colony of the United States on camera. *Bush Mama* is one of several films that comprise the L.A. Rebellion catalogue, and its creator, Ethiopian-born Haile Gerima, among a larger cohort of self-identified "Third World filmmakers" who, as an African-born artist, credits his time in Los Angeles as crucial to his own process of radicalization – a process we see through the main characters of the film. Counterinsurgency, the U.S. war in Vietnam, and the war against Black radicals have shaped Gerima's Los Angeles. In this instance, the material and ideological realities of warfare quite literally constructed every scene of the film, and arguably served as a central tenet in the works of many other Black guerilla artists in Los Angeles since the 1970s. From here, the reversal of Civil Rights reform made way for the wars on poverty, crime, and subsequently the notorious War on Drugs. These wars have always meant that the Black working-class was a primal target among other targeted populations, especially Latinos and to a lesser extent Asian Americans, indigenous people, and poor whites. Routing through the late-1970s, the 1980s reached a fully catalyzed war on Black youth, with economic restructuring, deindustrialization, and the militarization of LAPD placing Black Los Angeles in categorically worse shape than it had been in 1965. The advent of the genres of police film and gangsta rap speak directly to these conditions and occupy a sizeable portion of how Los Angeles continued to

move further away from its glowing reputation as a city of Angels and more saturated as a contradictory landscape of violence, exclusion, and social/physical death.

The 1990s is often the most exciting era for many people to study, struggle with, and reminisce about. As I have made the case, Black culture continues to be a promising arena through which Los Angeles' past and futures may seek reconcile and understanding. In their own unique ways, artists such as Nipsey Hussle, Kendrick Lamar, Anna Deveare Smith, Paul Beatty, Octavia Butler, and Amanda Gorman are a few among many who have rightfully taken to task of keeping 20th and 21st century Black Los Angeles on the tongues and minds of cultural producers across the globe. As part of the Black radical tradition, these cultural ambassadors of Los Angeles are among many who speak to a larger historical tradition of Black America's global vision for freedom and self-determination. Through them, as well as the current residents of Black Los Angeles who continue to live and struggle every day, new questions are asked, answered, and sought out to imagine the depth that working-class intellectual life may have in constructing a world that may seek an end to an endless war.

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