On Jubilee: The Performance of Black Leadership in the Afterlife of Slavery

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Performance Studies

and the Designated Emphasis

in

New Media

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Spring 2014

Abstract

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Using film, television, archival materials, and new media art, this dissertation asks how politically enforced constraints on Black being—especially the origination of racial blackness in slavery and the ongoing availability of Black bodies to gratuitous and structural violence—work through subsequent Black performances of leadership. The philosophical breadth of the concept of "new media" and of the constituent elements of slavery as elaborated by Orlando Patterson invites close study of the ways that human beings can serve as new media. The impulse to create an all-new form of being known as the "Black" allowed a new human labor technology for western Europeans to mediate their libidinal desire and political demands. This dissertation engages the ways this technological paradigm extends into the present.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

> If the best of the American Negroes receive by outer pressure a leader whom they had not recognized before, manifestly there is here a certain palpable gain. Yet there is also irreparable loss,—a loss of that peculiarly valuable education which a group receives when by search and criticism it finds and commissions its own leaders… Nearly all the former ones had become leaders by the silent suffrage of their fellows, had sought to lead their own people alone, and were usually, save Douglass, little known outside their race. But Booker T. Washington arose as essentially the leader not of one race but of two….
> —W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" (Du Bois) 49)

> The slave was the ultimate human tool, as imprintable and as disposable as the master wished. And this is true, at least in theory, of all slaves, no matter how elevated. Paul Rycaut's classic description of the Janissaries as men whom their master, the sultan, 'can raise without Envy and destroy without Danger' holds true for all slaves in all times.
> —Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Patterson) 7)

> We declare our right on this earth to be a man, to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being, in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary.
> --Malcolm X (X and Breitman) 116)

If we are not looking in the same direction, we won't see it coming. And if we don't love each other, we won't care.

Of Tied Hands

Toward the beginning of the brief dance with "post-racialism" in U.S. political culture, a Black man was called on to make a speech about U.S. national unity. "There's not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America," intoned then-U.S. senate candidate Barack Obama at the 2004 Democratic National Convention (Obama). "There's the United States of America." Long before Barack Obama stepped to the podium to tell the "Black America" that formed him as a political subject that we don't exist (at least when he's speaking in front of white people), Black people had a critical interest in Black leadership as a unique mode of performance in itself, distinct from the performance of other forms of leadership. And so, Black people in the United States were broadly supportive of the speech because they were able to read it, with the above-quoted Du Boisian double consciousness, as "leader[ship] not of one race but of two." Obama's

attempt to iterate a post-racial United States was simultaneously the performance of two modes of leadership: Black leadership and "post-racial" (that is, white) leadership.

In the years since, the fate Barack Obama has endured has made it clear for those who didn't know that he made this speech under a certain disavowal, if not, indeed, under a kind of desperation or even duress. As articulated among white people, "post-racial" America is and always was a fantasy to be post-Black—to be rid of Black people— one that many non-Black people in the United States still hold onto and that Barack Obama is still expected to labor under and advocate, even if he, like most Black people in the United States, cannot personally attest that it is possible without the type of acceleration of its orchestrated genocide that the United States does not presently appear to be ready to perform against its Black population. Nonetheless, white people who voted for him are now beginning to express a readiness for his administration to end so that they can stop having to see how racist they are. The post-racialism that once propelled him into office in part so that white people would see themselves as not racist now cannot stand him as a leader.

On the other hand, of course, the Black desperation for a *truly* post-racial United States that never came to fruition was an articulation of something that is not merely a hope of many Black people but actually central to the structure of Black subjectivity, sociality, and political ethics: the drive toward the actualization of a non-racist social order. The fact that "Black America" is very much real, and the line being used to distinguish it from all the other Americas in the United States has rarely been brighter, is no longer up for dispute, if it even was in 2004, because the group, or better yet, the position that has consciously or unconsciously articulated this drive to abolish the racist social order remains. Even as Black people in the United States desperately want to make the world a less destructive place for us, and realize how powerless, ineffective, and even unwilling the Obama administration is to address the problem of racism in anything like a permanent way, our support for Barack Obama as president has wavered very little, likely because he is of "Black America" and Black people in the United States identify with what he has been put through.

Defining leadership in relation to Black folks is difficult precisely because of this problematic of audience. Who is Black leadership for? It is caught up in a web of affective considerations, even as social scientists attempt to circumscribe it with rigorous definitions. We—and when I say "we," I mean Black people— know it when we see it, and it's there until it isn't. In general, Black people must be the ones performing it. But simply being Black and occupying a position of leadership is not enough. It must be in some latent or manifest relation to other Black people who are affected by its performance, even if the one performing it hides from, fears, or despises Black people.

There is so much commentary on the definition of Black leadership— and far more has been said about how it is done— that it is difficult to even define Black leadership as a field of study, especially in the academy. Indeed, it is generally approached as something

that is carried out, or performed, under particular historical, political, social, and economic conditions that must be compromised with.

So, a candidate like Barack Obama, hailing from South Side Chicago, can affirm the existence of "Black America" by speaking in Black churches while at the same time affirming the desire of non-Black people to see the United States as a place that is, by and large, not racist. Few if any Black people in the United States believed Barack Obama's statement that "there's not a Black America" to be true when he said it, and, while such hope for a "color-blind" United States where Black people could just be accepted as "people" animates many tendencies within Black politics, no one seriously thought that Barack Obama put that statement in there *for* Black people. Most Black people in the United States can look around and see "Black America" as far as the eye can see. Barack Obama skillfully put "Black America" first in that statement denying its existence, and he did so as a performance *for* white people. But, importantly, many Black people overlooked this omission and even cheered Senate candidate Obama's convention speech, likely because they recognized that, in U.S. political culture of 2004, any reference to "Black America" that did not deny its existence would be read not only as divisive and out of sync with the Democratic Party's strategy for defeating the divisive George W. Bush, but, even more, as a foregrounding of Black interests over the interests of (white) United States.

If one could have dug past the euphoria many Black people in the United States felt around Barack Obama's obvious erudition and skill as a speaker and excavated the psychic hydraulics behind the support the speech enjoyed among many Black people in the United States— a speech that disavowed the existence of the very "Black America" where, as he spoke, Black male unemployment in some places was as much as 50 percent (J. Scott)— one would likely have found this sentiment: *Barack Obama's hands are tied.* Of course, no one would argue that it was Black political interests that tied his hands. Black people very much needed him to use his hands. Just months before he said "there's not a Black America," police in his neighborhood of south side Chicago had shot and killed an unarmed paraplegic Black motorist named Cornelius Ware, allegedly for not raising his hands when the officer demanded (Roe, Heinzmann and Mills). Obama was not able to speak that day on behalf of those whose hands incriminate them whether used or not, those who needed and desperately wanted him to use his words and his hands. But his hands were tied by white interest in his embodiment of a kind of discourse that would serve their interests: a pretend language of "post-raciality."

His hands are tied. In subsequent years, we have heard this sentiment repeatedly raised in discussions defending Barack Obama and his apparent lack of ability to address the fact that, for instance, police and security forces kill a Black woman, man, or child every 28 hours (Malcolm X Grassroots Movement). If the hands of the "most powerful man in the world" are tied when it comes to discussing the rampant physical, economic, and institutional violence inflicted among Black people, the group he comes from, there is clearly more that needs to be examined and theorized about Black existence and the

performance of leadership. The considerations involved in such an assessment of the ethics of Barack Obama's performance of leadership cannot be compared to the considerations involved in other assessing the ethics of other performances of leadership. It is necessary to unpack the relationship between the performative aspects of Black leadership and the conditions within or in relationship to which it is performed.

Leadership is supposedly that thing that Black youths no longer have as something to model themselves after. It is supposedly a charismatic quality that is gendered as masculine and heteronormative (Edwards) xiii). There is said to be a "crisis" among Black intellectual leaders of certain kinds (Cruse) 402), which has apparently betrayed Black people (Baker) xii), particularly as Black leadership in general has proven quite susceptible to the fluctuations of global capital (Spillers) 431). Some even argue that Black people "have no leaders" (Smith) xvi).

The traditional and organic intellectuals who have provoked these discussions and spoken in these terms have, in general, read, witnessed, and understood a lot about the ways Black leadership has been performed. The overall thrust of their meditations inspires several questions. What are the dangers of thinking of ourselves as having "no leaders" or thinking of Black leadership as something presently (as opposed to inherently) "in crisis"? Don't Black people consciously or unconsciously show who our leaders are by whom we follow or the extent to which we trust them? By Black leadership, can we understand a performance that is limited in its efficacy by the same forces that limit performances of blackness in general, specifically a society and culture that are antiblack at the core? How can Black people *create subjects*—or in Du Bois' words, "find and commission"— who can perform the Black leadership we need at this stage in history? This dissertation attempts to address, if not answer, some of these questions in the following pages. I hope to augment Black thought on Black leadership by thinking beyond definitions of Black leadership that focus *either* on institutions *or* individuals. Instead, I will meditate on the ways in which structure, particularly a networked structure that I will call *antiblackness*, operates simultaneously at the scales of the psyche, the interpersonal, the institutional, and the global, to create, condition, and bind performances of Black leadership.

In this dissertation, I argue that the performance of conventional notions of leadership enables all new modes through which Black people are rendered as new slaves. These forms of leadership mediate the libidinal and political desires and demands of white/antiblack interests while seeming to represent a break from slavery. Redefining leadership itself, outside of this paradigm, is essential to effectively opposing structural antiblackness and social death in a way that can lead to emancipation.

In Chapter One, I show how conventional representations of Black leadership can be best viewed as New Media for a structurally antiblack society. Most definitions of leadership assume the performance of directorship that is done self consciously, i.e., that a leader knows she is leading. This takes on special significance when Black people are still slaves. I theorize how racial slavery is a way of mediating the world and that Black leaders are regularly positioned as nodes in an antiblack structure. The dissertation does not aim

to discourage performances of Black leadership, but to call for a higher standard of leadership that allows for the nonrecuperable negativity or double bind of blackness.

Chapter Two thinks through the ways that Black meditations on naming reveal that it is a function of violence and requires violence. Naming is a responsibility of Black leadership but not a paradigmatic function of most forms of Black leadership. I read *Corregidora* by Gayl Jones and show how the novel remains our best explication of the position of the Motherfucker. I also examine freedmen's aid association documents to show the long history of this position and examine how the ideals of Black gender role performances—and the notions of leadership modeled in them—index Black powerlessness at the level of the Symbolic Order.

Chapter 3 argues that Stanislavskian acting theory at once fails to account for and also reveals an impasse to empathy/relationality that not only impedes but actually disciplines and shapes the Black body. Although relationality and truthfulness are not identical, the foundational text for producing actors as effective knowledge producers continues to act as though they are. Stanislavskian acting theory acts as if structural position is not one of the registers of subjectivity and one that can enable or foreclose relationality. Meanwhile an increasing body of evidence suggests that even the supposed successes at building relationality by Black actors of previous generations are of questionable efficacy.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I argue that New Media art mobilized to assist in antiblack gentrification use Black bodies to seem inclusive, but those bodies often reveal an awareness of structural antiblackness that exposes the ruse of this project. Gentrification in San Francisco's Tenderloin is being aestheticized, using art to romanticize the very bodies it will be removing. I also look at how James Baldwin performs an afro-alienation act in the break of his role as documentary host in a documentary about San Francisco, revealing the structural limitations of Black mentorship.

Chapter 1: Jubilee and Jouissance: Why Black Leadership is a Problem of New Media

Toward a Structural Theory of Black Leadership

In this chapter, I posit the need for a study of ethical performances of Black leadership that can, at the very least, lead Black leaders to reflect on their own positions within what Frank Wilderson in *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* calls the structural antagonism of antiblackness (Wilderson) 26). Wilderson understands Black, White, and Native as *political ontological* positions—positions that seem to be metaphysically fixed although actually enforced by overwhelming relations of political violence— that are situated in antagonism to each other. Wilderson makes a distinction between an antagonism and a conflict. A conflict can be resolved without fundamentally altering the social order. This doesn't mean that it is any less serious or deadly. Wilderson quotes Fanon's statement about the Jewish Holocaust in Europe as "little family quarrels " (Wilderson) 36) in comparison to what Europeans did to Black and Native peoples. Jews existed in *conflictual* relation to Germans, and, even though the Holocaust was a terrible event of violence by one group of humans on another, it began and ended within the bounded temporality of war and did not create Jewishness or Germanness as such. Even the bloodiest conflicts between Europeans do not rise to the level of antagonisms because they are discrete events located in moments of diachronic time. They are not necessary to the functioning of the global social order.

The structural antagonism of antiblackness is different, however. The modern world is characterized, or *structured*, by a unique antagonism toward Black people. Wilderson is not the only one who has observed this, and increasing numbers of commentators have pointed out that an antagonism toward Black people is not unique to the United States but exists in places like Latin America (Hernandez) and elsewhere. An antagonism structures the modern world and cannot be resolved without the destruction of the modern world, the end of the racist social order. The structure created Black people in order to destroy us again and again. That creation was and remains one characterized by what Wilderson calls *gratuitous violence*, violence beyond any limit and that, unlike *contingent violence*, requires no justification (Wilderson))16-17). Subjecting African bodies to gratuitous violence made them into Blacks. Blacks *as blacks* did not exist before the violence of the Arab slave trade and Middle Passage rent Africans from their relational world and re-created them as slaves. Wilderson, critiquing the belated nature of Giorgio Agamben's claim that the death camps of the *Shoah* were an altogether new prism through which political subjectivity might be thought, says, "Jews went into Auschwitz and came out as Jews. Africans went into the ships and came out as blacks. The former is a Human holocaust; the latter is a Human *and* a metaphysical holocaust" ((Wilderson)) 35-36). The modern world relies on racial blackness as a position that can be subjected to such gratuitous violence. It leans on Africa as a boundless source of exploitable resources and a haven of illicit desires, much in the same way it needs the prison to warehouse Black

bodies and the ghetto, from which it extracts the Black cultural performances that it enjoys.

That structural antagonism has a name. It can be called the United States, the Americas, or global Modernity. Here, I will call it antiblackness, a network of forces that work together to associate blackness with "slaveness." This includes social forces, media, psychological oppression, and many, many modes. In an antiblack system, Black people are defined as unfree (slaves) so that others can know themselves to be free, and Black people are defined as anti-Human so that others can know themselves to be Human. This oppositional definition is the hallmark of stability in the modern world. Antiblackness is not about hating Black people. You can "love" Black people in an antiblack way. Consider the ways fans "love" professional athletes and entertainers. People can love you in a way that makes a fetish or object of you. In other words, antiblackness cannot be overcome by "love" (although a revolution against an antiblack social order would have to be based on what some might call "revolutionary love") (Martinez) 119).

Whatever one calls it, this structural antagonism is a networked structure within which we all live. Wilderson says that blackness is one position, characterized by *fungibility* (or exchangeability like commodities or chattels), within the antiblack structural antagonism. There is no Black person who was not in part created by the structural antagonism of antiblackness. That antagonism is what created racial blackness as such and continues to underwrite its performance. It also created nonblackness, which can be called alternately whiteness or "Human-ness." There is an antagonism between "Humans" and Black people because "Humans" can only experience the world as coherent when they see a world in which Black people are non-"Humans," foreclosed from relationality with "Humans." "Humans" understand themselves as "Human" *to the extent that they exclude, subjugate, or destroy racial blackness and Black people*. It's not just that Humans have a thing against Black people that can be cleared up once it is seen as a misunderstanding or "false consciousness" skillfully cultivated by the elites; the world would not recognize itself as the world if Black spoke and were heard or if Blacks could not be killed and captured with impunity and without remorse. For Wilderson, that's what constitutes the world as a network of relations. And if that world of "Humans" (whites and non-Blacks) is unethical in its need for Black death, that gives all the more context to Fanon's claim that we must strive for "the end of the world" (Fanon) 76).

Understanding that the structural antagonism of antiblackness creates Black people as such (at the same time as it creates "Humans" as such) and that the antagonism is an unethical one ("where there are slaves it is unethical to be free" (Wilderson) 49) clarifies the ethical problems of performing Black leadership. Even if we think of Black leadership as performative, in the sense that it is embodied or in the sense that it is a repeatable act that can, through repetition, make itself true, *can* Black leadership be performative without also being fundamentally structural? In other words, what structures are implicated in any performance of Black leadership? To call antiblackness structural is not the same thing as saying it is institutional (like institutional racism) because institutions are only one type of

structure. The psyche— the mostly unconscious cognitive and affective processes and formations that comprise the individual subject— is also a structure, one that is very much linked to and articulated out of the structural conditions of the larger social world and its political and economic formations. So, can Black leadership be *unconsciously* performed, for example? When Black leadership is performative, what frames the performance, what shapes the performance, what does the performance want, and who is the performance truly for? And, if that structure is an unethical one, what would an ethical Black leadership performance look like or entail?

I join those who believe there is a danger that those who are called "Black leaders" can be used against Black people. In my view, however, these performances are created, conditioned, and bounded in their efficacy by antiblack structural forces, forces that not only don't mind if Black leaders don't understand (and are not inclined to address) the problems the majority of Black folks face but that actually *intend* to create Black leaders who will further Black destruction, advance non-Black interests *against* Black people, or, at least, act without any regard for the survival, health, and wellbeing of Black people other than themselves. Perversely, there might even be Black leaders who are created as such to do damage to Black people, who are essentially taught to despise Black people as part of their creation as Black leaders and whose leadership either consciously or unconsciously evinces a deeply felt hostility toward Black people.

In other words, we cannot define leadership in the same way for Black people as we can for other groups of people because of the structural antagonism of antiblackness. Indeed, it is more imperative than ever that we not do so. From the time of the Middle Passage, the founding moment of blackness in western modernity, Black leaders have been tools for our enslavement as much as our liberation. Black performances of conventional notions of leadership—stewardship of an organization or group of people, representation of that group within a broader context of representatives of other groups, a vanguard group that shepherds an oppressed group toward some definable end goal (*telos*) or ethical horizon, whether through didactic instruction or through implied role modeling—often ignore the particularities of Black existence and can even enable all new modes through which Black people are rendered as slaves. These modes of performance of something called leadership can be, and have been readily available to be, used to mediate the libidinal and political desires and demands of antiblack interests while seeming to signify prosperity or a break from slavery.

Certain recurrent behaviors of Black leaders enslaving Black people—African leaders supplying the insatiable European desire for enslaved Africans, Black community leaders supporting harsher punishments for crack cocaine than for powder cocaine (Washington Post)— can be thought of as a function of a kind of programming. At the level of the aggregate, these behaviors seem to occur on "autopilot," divorced from individual intentions of the participants. The individuals performing leadership can, somewhat myopically, believe themselves to be looking out for the wellbeing of their groups, while simultaneously, and probably unconsciously, feeding the system that ties

their hands and will eventually destroy their groups along with all other Black people. Well-intentioned Black leaders like Barack Obama perform destructive modes of Black leadership, even if they don't mean to. If a totalizing, or nearly totalizing, genocidally antiblack structure creates those who perform a role that is called Black leadership, how can we expect Black leadership to lead Black people toward something other than destruction, something that in the Black vernacular we have called *jubilee*, or freedom? What would it mean to create a mode or performance of Black leadership that was not beholden to, or capable of being co-opted by, an antiblack structure, whether at the level of the individual unconscious or across a broad collective of people?

The perspective of Black performance studies will prove useful to analysts of Black leadership who start from the basic ethical assumption of Black thought—that Black people want to be free *by any means necessary*. Many modes of leadership can be defined, like performance, as iterations that are or are not uptaken (Austin) 117-118) in some way. Like performance, leadership requires other people. Performance, including many aspects of leadership, requires an audience and is done for that audience. The presence of others is built into the performance.

It is equally true that essential aspects of leadership are not performative. Some aspects can be performed outside of the immediate, embodied presence of others, like a policymaker designing health care policy so that, for instance, an insurance company covers a medication but not the means with which to take that medication. This leads or orients people who depend on this policy to make choices around the provisions of the policy whether they like it or not. And, obviously, some modes of leadership are based solely in force, the capacity to do violence, and do not require that others uptake an iteration. Consider, for example, the warden of a prison camp, whose declarations have the force of law within the camp, with or without the uptake of the inmates. In other words, it makes no sense to speak of leadership as performative when those who would follow it exist under extreme technologies of force that do not afford them the choice to refuse performance.

The Afterlife of Slavery and the Ultimate Slave

More importantly, though, leadership itself can exist under conditions of force. Slaves can be forced to lead. *Those who lead can be the same as those whose hands are tied.* This is something that many studies of modern Black leadership, so intent on blaming individual performances of Black leadership, have not fully appreciated because they labored under the untenable assumption that Black people, once enslaved people, are now a free people who have agency, and are individually blameworthy for their failures. That is not only untenable as an argumentative assumption—confounded as it is by the lack of convincing proof—but is not even true.

The structure that fixes blackness in equivalence with slavery can accommodate a broad definition of slavery. According to *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Orlando Patterson's comprehensive historical study of societies with slavery, "slavery is

the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons" (Patterson) 13). The study is significant because of its definition of slavery. For Patterson, slavery is defined by three "constituent elements": *absolute powerlessness*, the master's physical use or threat of naked might so she or he can dominate the slave completely and violently (2); *natal alienation*, "the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations" (7) so that slaves are denied the ability to integrate their ancestors' experiences into their lives, and their ability to preserve relationships has no binding force because forcible separation is always possible; and *general dishonor*, a social status of disrepute that is not specific to the individual but that, for instance, follows Black people as such (10).

This is not usually how we think of slavery. Significantly, according to Patterson's observations about how slavery has actually occurred in the world, labor and involuntary servitude are *not* constituent elements of slavery. Slaves are therefore not necessarily laborers, and within a slave society, the "appropriate" uses of slaves include non-economically productive uses like torture or sexual enjoyment. A worker is a person who labors on commodities only to have the surplus value of that labor extracted; a slave *is* a commodity.

Students of antiblackness understand that blackness is created out of an historical moment—shorthanded as the Middle Passage and the East African slave trade—in which blackness was a placeholder for slaves. They also understand that, from that placeholder, blackness came to signify the index of absolute otherness, emptiness of living human substance, a dark continent, something that can be ignored one moment, loved the next, feared the next, fucked later that night, stepped on all the next day, and cried over, only to be ignored again moments later. *Black is that thing that nobody wants to be, and that nobody who matters is*. This is what it looks like to be socially dead.

Slavery, absolute powerlessness, is how blackness was introduced to Modernity. There was no group calling itself "the Blacks" prior to the violent moment in which Kongo and Yoruba, Malinka and Mende, were smashed together in barracoons and cargo holds. Moreover, Modernity, the paradigm in which we live today, would not know itself without "the Black," that thing that Modernity can always use, even for uses that torture, injure, traumatize, or kill it. The antiblackness of Modernity moves power across networks in ways that will create Black people again and again only to destroy us or render us available for destruction and captivity. Slavery, understood paradigmatically as blackness, is actually beyond destruction, because what it destroyed is not just today's quantity but even the very quality of time, past and future. *Blacks can be destroyed infinitely*. This is because there is "endless war" against what we signify at some deep level (Marriott *Haunted Life : Visual Culture and Black Modernity*) 4). And we are enjoyable for that reason. This is why a specific event of genocide is not what Black people fear. Genocide is built into blackness because racial slavery is built into blackness: As slavery is the substitution of the individual's physical death with social death, a substitution that can be

revoked at any time, so too racial slavery is the substitution of the murder of a race with the social death of the race, a substitution that can likewise be revoked at any time.

Social death is not the totality of Black life; it's not all that blackness is. There is social life within social death. But, for Wilderson and others called *afropessimists*, social death is its truth—a politically constructed truth and essence, i.e., a *political ontology*, that makes it so for vast portions of our lives and the lives of our communities, a structure has been able to name us and group us together based solely on the darkness of our skin, the size of our lips, the texture of our hair, the dimensions of our bodies, and anything we might produce, partake of, or otherwise be associated with. There is a structure that has power to name us in ways that we might not have named ourselves.

We need to understand the network of forces that render us as socially dead so we can bring into focus what we must fight against. Until Black people understand the ways that the modern world is antiblack, we, and the allies who are truly willing to listen to and work with us, will not know what our revolutions should be against and how protracted they will have to be: This summarizes my idea of what in academic discourses is called afropessimism. It is important to understand that this revolution is not about reforming or ameliorating our conditions but will have to overturn a world—a global order—that defines itself as "Human" *because, and to the extent that,* it is not Black. If afropessimism therefore sets up a very high ethical standard, it is because it is attempting to clarify the level of force needed for Black freedom struggle to be successful. This ethical standard, therefore, must have profound implications for Black leadership.

But, what is more, the structural antagonism of antiblackness that creates Black people as slaves can prove adaptable enough to actually elevate Black leaders to do its dirty work of destroying and enslaving Black people. This makes Black leadership look free or seem to be pursuing a Black freedom project while actually further tying its hands, confining its actions to feeding the antiblack structure. In general, although Patterson's historico-sociological analysis keeps discussions about slavery in the past, it also features a a host of similarities between these constituent elements and Black life today that invite the observation that Black slavery in the United States has shifted in form but never actually ended. Indeed, new modes of slavery have come about since the end of the Civil War in 1865 to replace or update older modes. Prison slavery, for example, is coded into the 13th Amendment, the U.S. constitutional amendment that supposedly ended slavery. And multiple regimes or "peculiar institutions" have succeeded the original one to "define, confine, and control" Black life in the United States (Wacquant).

Patterson's observation is therefore more dynamic than we might think in that it documents that, historically speaking, many slaves have had a lot of administrative, economic, and even military power at their disposal. The power was not theirs but derived from their influence on their masters and could involve a great deal of discretion on their part. Patterson devotes an entire chapter of his study to these "ultimate slaves" or elite slaves, "persons who were at once slaves and figures of high political and administrative importance" ((Patterson)p. 299).

Such elite slaves have not always been enjoyed for purely productive purposes involving extractable surplus value. For example, Patterson cites a caliph (religious-political leader) in the Abbasid Muslim dynasty explaining the advantages of having a slave who shares his class status:

> When I sit in public audience, I may call a mawla [freedman] and raise him and seat him by my side, so that his knee will rub my knee. As soon, however, as the audience is over, I may order him to groom my riding animal and he will be content with this and will not take offence. (Patterson) 310-311)

Even when one is a "freedman," and even when one are prosperous, Patterson notes, one is still a slave. This is significant in our meditations on Black leaders today. The existence of a Black U.S. president is not, in itself, proof that Black "emancipation" changed the structural position of blackness. But even more to the point, there are actually reasons why a master might want a slave who shared his or her class status. An influential slave might prove incredibly useful to masters, such as those oligarchic interests that are presently engaged in replacing entitlement societies with neoliberal consumer societies.

The signifying power of the powerless Black body has been documented and theorized in a lot of ways. Black bodies in general signify in special ways that other bodies do not, especially when exceptional Black bodies are called upon to praise the freedom western modernity supposedly affords *at the same time as most Black bodies are still enslaved by it*. Black leaders who perform dedicated service to white European and American national interests and projects carry a specific kind of emotional aura that does not accrue to other bodies. The material powerlessness of Black people affects the ways in which we can be utilized in semiotic or *libidinal* (emotional or affective) ways.

Toni Morrison wrote in *Playing in the Dark* about how the powerlessness of Black bodies enabled a society-wide Black presence in the formative years of U.S. literature that catalyzed white authors' meditations on freedom, humanity, justice, and other themes. Black ("Africanist") bodies could show up as useful ("serviceable") figures in the meditations of authors as central to U.S. white American identity as Herman Melville, Ernest Hemingway, and Willa Cather precisely because those white authors could imagine Black bodies in any way they wanted to and project them as affectively powerful and the Black bodies themselves were not powerful enough to push back and say, "Hey, I'm more than that" or "That's not true" and have it matter, that is in performative ways, ways that had the power to make themselves true. Black fantasies, of ourselves and of others, have no "objective value" (Marriott *On Black Men*) 11).

Hollywood films have special semiotic uses for Black bodies, Black music, and Black styles in particular ways at particular times, as, for example, when the millennium change saw a spate of "magical negro" films—*Ghost* (1990), *The Hudsucker Proxy* (1994), *What Dreams May Come* (1998), *Dogma* (1999), *The Green Mile* (1999), *Bedazzled* (2000), *The Family Man* (2000), *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000), *Bruce Almighty* (2003), to name a few of the most popular around that time— in which a white protagonist was serviced by a Black figure who generally appeared (in some magical or

miraculous way) out of nowhere—seemingly with no familial context, which is to say, natally alienated as far as the film's plotline is concerned—and who seems to exist only to serve some extraordinary demand of the white protagonist (Gabbard) 156). White imagination can project its desires onto Black bodies in such a way that, even when it empowers Black bodies—say, by casting a Black man as god, Jesus, or an angel—it shores up white power by existing only to serve it. Black resistance to that projection does not have to matter to the broader society and is generally written off as Black anger rather than what it is—a recurring pattern in how white libidinal fantasies utilize Black bodies or signifiers of Black presence.

Indeed, the more that the modern social order causes most Black people to suffer, the more emotionally affecting the exceptional Black people are who sing the praises of the modern social order. Next time you have a chance, observe the ways that Ray Charles' rendition of "America the Beautiful" shows up in the playlists of white men who otherwise have very little to do with Black people. Wilderson framed it in this way when speaking of the Black-directed *Antwone Fisher*'s appeal to a white enjoyment of Black people smiling:

> Much like the prison industrial complex, cinema is an institution called upon to pull its weight as an apparatus for the accumulation and exchange of Slaves. But the libidinal economy of cinema has resources which the political economy of prisons doesn't have: it can make an offering of Black flesh for the psychic accumulation of civil society in a way that not only hides the dimension of gratuitous violence and force necessary to bring about this offering but, like those spectacles of lynching in which a Black penis is cut off and then the victim is not only forced to eat it but must tell his murderers how good it tastes (Marriott 6), cinema can give civil society the pleasure of seeing Blacks maimed as well as the pleasure of Blacks taking pleasure in the process.
> Fanon quotes Bernard Wolfe on this score: "It pleases us to portray the Negro showing us all his teeth in a smile made for us. And his smile as we see it—*as we make it*—always means a *gift*" (*Black Skin, White Mask* 49, emphasis mine). Blacks are so comprehensively fungible that cinema can make them die and smile at the same time. (115, citation in original)

In the heyday of modern European theory, structuralist theorist Roland Barthes famously performed a reading of a Black youth in uniform saluting with an upturned gaze on the cover of the popular *Paris Match* magazine (Barthes) 125). It seems that the very appearance of Black bodies in a posture of salute to a national flag of France— or the United States— presents what many people think is a poignant affective argument against claims of imperialism and racism that might otherwise undermine the ethical authority of U.S. and western imperial powers to do whatever they want to do. And if white imperialism and antiblackness have no "moral authority" with which to cloak their brute force, all they really have is brute force, something that can more effectively be mobilized

against by a truly antiracist political or military opposition than even the simplest ruse that white power operates within any rules except its own.

It is clear, then, that Black bodies are fungible, serviceable signifiers that can be readily deployed in service of a wide variety of white supremacist and antiblack interests, but in the case of Barack Obama, it's even more powerful. His image has been hailed not only as a way of "rebranding" the United States' image as a friendly and "open-minded" imperial power after the unilateral and racist foreign policy of the George W. Bush years, but also as a way to neutralize the dissent of Black people in the United States and globally in the face of disaster capitalism (Kristof). And this usage has been effective in silencing even some of the more strident voices among radicals on the Black left and revealing their investment in the system they were supposed to be critiquing and smashing.

If Black people in the United States are still slaves, even after our supposed emancipation, and even after slaves have been elevated to positions of leadership, how do our leaders know that they are acting on behalf of Black people's interests? The intentionality of Black leaders in relation to the structure becomes important to any understanding of the ethics of performing Black leadership. Yet intentions are often themselves obscured by the shadow of the unconscious. So, it might be difficult for a Black leader like Barack Obama to know whether his motivations for seeking the presidency were really about what he could do for Black people's collective freedom or for his own advancement and personal freedom. We have to look at performance to understand what the structure is capable of doing to our conscious and our unconscious.

"By Any Means Necessary": On Jubilee and Jouissance

Leadership has elements that are both structural and performative, neither of which can be teased apart from the other. I think the tendency to examine the performance of leadership as a thing in itself, apart from the structure within, for, or against which it is performed, is a mistake in commentary on leadership.

But this is especially true is relation to the leader who is Black within an antiblack structure, and this is because blackness is an exceptional circumstance. Where most leaders have a responsibility to preserve the thing that creates their position, Black leadership exacts a rigorous ethical standard of "by any means necessary," such that it is the responsibility of any Black leader to oppose the structural antiblackness that creates blackness and Black people as "human objects" to be destroyed again and again. So if blackness is indeed created as the placeholder for those human objects that are available to gratuitous violence, the Black leader who would truly fight for Black freedom must be prepared to take it all the way—or, as soul singer James Brown and rapper Busta Rhymes would say, "do it to death"— even if the risk is the end of the entire social order— structural antiblackness—which would mean the end of blackness (and nonblackness) itself. This does not—I repeat *not*—mean that that Black leaders must have a suicidal desire to see all Black people exterminated, however. But what would it take for a

president like Barack Obama or Nelson Mandela to seek Black freedom so strongly that they risked the end of that which gave them their elevated slave status? This is where the ethics that drives the project of Black leadership must be interrogated.

Malcolm X spoke the Black yearning for freedom in a way that was and remains completely unflinching. This willingness to resort to "any means necessary" to attain freedom linked Malcolm's politics to the Black tradition of the insistent demand, the unwillingness to compromise with an order premised on Black slavery for the sake of some temporary gains. Whenever Black bodies speak of a willingness to go to or beyond the limits of what society, moral custom, or the law will allow—or what will allow the nation to keep existing—the accusations leveled at them range from "that's selfish" to "that's extreme," which is really just a way of saying "you're crazy." Malcolm's clarity, plain talk, and composure confound those who would accuse him of being crazy. Nonetheless, the militancy of Black demands, and even Black political imagination, is something the structure of antiblackness is particularly keen to repress or foreclose.

Of course, if we think of Malcolm's statement with the study of subjectivity, it makes perfect sense. Thinkers in the tradition of Jacques Lacan speak of this willingness to go beyond the limit as part of a healthy subjectivity (Lacan). Having something that you pursue wholeheartedly even if you will never get it is absolutely essential to being a normal subject. The same should be true of Black collective political subjectivity.

To understand this, we have to think of a drive separately from a desire. A desire goes after, or cathects to, a particular object, called the *objet petit a* ((Lee)(144). This "little a" object is the object that a subject desires when, in childhood, access to the mother's breast is prohibited and the subject has to learn to use language and to desire other things besides the mother's breast. If you were an analyst in Jacques Lacan's tradition, you would track your patient's (your *analysand's*) *objets petit a*—her desires for specific things, like lemon pound cake, a red Ferrari, or lovers who look and act like Gladys Knight—as a clue to understanding her relationship to the things she desires. But you would have to help her understand that the pleasure she derived from getting the object of her desire wouldn't last for long, because as soon as she got the red Ferrari, something else would look better or she would realize that the red Ferrari wasn't all that she hoped it would be.

As an analyst, you would understand that the difference between you and other therapists or religious counselors was your good faith attempt to nonjudgmentally help the analysand uncover those desires while helping her lead herself toward the understanding that nothing that satisfies her desires will satisfy the drive underneath those desires. Neurotic symptoms, partly caused by the repressive judgment of desire fostered within entities like family, school, and church, can be partly resolved by understanding at some deep level that you will never get what you want but are doomed to keep seeking after it—and making one's peace with that paradox of being in the world. That making peace is the goal of psychoanalysis, and it requires that the analysand dig through her desires to get to her drives. And, after all, you might just get it (Lacan) 195).

A drive is the thing that gives rise to desires. A drive animates us as subjects, binding together our separate and conflicting desires, and generating ever more desires until we die. A drive is different from a desire because it cannot be satisfied without undoing the subject, a condition of extreme pleasure and extreme pain referred to as *jouissance*, said to be most similar to the "little death" (*petit mort*) of the orgasm—except *permanent*. Unlike pleasure, which comes from the satisfaction of a desire for something specific like lemon pound cake, *jouissance* is the satisfaction of a *drive* (209). If one reached (if that's the right word) the state of *jouissance*, it would not necessary be a good thing or a bad thing. It would be an extremely ambivalent condition, characterized as much by profound pleasure as by horrific pain. Since the drive is the thing that binds the subject together, *jouissance* would constitute the undoing of the subject. Unravel the bind and the subject no longer has anything to desire, and nothing holds her together. And yet, trying to do something to the point of *jouissance*—that is, beyond the point where it is pleasurable, "beyond the pleasure principle"— is unavoidable in the life of a healthy (neurotic) subject. We all have this drive. It's not a mental illness *per se*. It's an indication that at some level we desire something more than we desire pleasure or even life itself ((Zupancic) (4). It is a sign that we are capable of acting according to an ethics ((Kesel and Jottkandt) (51). And it is a sign that we can, individually—or *collectively*—pursue a drive even beyond the limits of what civil and political society will allow. In short, not only can we be criminals against the social order; we can be revolutionaries.

This drive, probably linked to the above-mentioned Black desperation for post-raciality, is absolutely essential to understanding Black freedom struggle and the potential of an ethical Black leadership that would orient it. It is, indeed, absolutely essential to Black subjectivity itself. The leaders to whom we cathect are those who animate our desires. But our desires need clarification or they can be turned against us, whether by unscrupulous performances of leadership or by the sheer might and breadth of the structure. In an antiblack world, there is a structure that is ever ready to define Black resistance as madness and to uphold performances of Black leadership that undermine Black freedom while seeming to advance it.

The desperate urge for Black freedom is not an illness. The only things that label it an illness are forces in service of the structure. Slaveholders named the Black tendency to escape slavery drapetomania. Likewise, psychiatrist Jonathan Metzl has shown how the psychiatric establishment began in the 1960s to code Black resistance as schizophrenia (Metzl). And Hollywood movies like *The Butler* (2013) depict Black radicals as angry, uncouth, and mean-spirited. We should expect this from the antiblack structure. On the other hand, performance theorist Fred Moten sees this drive for Black emancipation even in Black music:

> What's the revolutionary force of the sensuality that emerges from the sonic event Marx subjunctively produces without sensually discovering? To ask this is to think what's at stake in the music: the universalization or socialization of the surplus, the generative force of a venerable phonic propulsion, the ontological and historical

priority of resistance to power and objection to subjection, the old-new thing, the freedom drive that animates black performances. (Moten) 12)

To call this yearning for freedom a "drive," the same one articulated so directly by Malcolm X and indirectly by those Black folks who wholeheartedly and naively support Barack Obama's presidency, means something very specific because the satisfaction of a drive results in something much bigger than the satisfaction of a desire. Its outcome is not pleasure—at least, not *just* pleasure. Its outcome is complete undoing. The satisfaction of the Black freedom drive would result in and require the undoing of the social order premised on Black slavery. If Black intellectuals were to take up the project of clarifying the Black freedom drive, it would mean making our peace with the satisfaction of that drive as something unimaginable that we must nonetheless engage fully.

I am not as dystopic as Lacan to imagine extreme pain arising from the collective satisfaction of the Black drive for freedom. I am too optimistic. I like to think that the collective satisfaction of the Black freedom drive would be a moment of bliss, followed by something it is hard to imagine because we are so accustomed to thinking of the world as a place where Africa and Black people are at the bottom. What would it mean if darker skin and tightly curled hair and thicker lips and a connection to Africa did *not* mean that you were likely to be forced to starve, to have drastically curtailed life expectancy or a vastly greater likelihood of low-birth-weight babies, if it did *not* mean that nobody wanted to live next to you or go to school with your children and that shooting you and locking you up en masse was *not* the cause of celebration or indifference? It is fun to imagine such a world.

If the structural position of blackness is that which binds blackness to humanness by making the former the paradigmatic slave and the latter the paradigmatic master, would its undoing be the undoing of the world itself? Is this what Frantz Fanon calls "the only thing in the world worth starting: the end of the world" (Cesaire quoted in (Fanon) 76)—a kind of collective *jouissance* of humanity? The structure of antiblackness is formulated to foreclose—and forms subjectivities antagonistic toward—this very unthinkable possibility. To be a revolutionary, then, would have to require an engagement with the possibility of one's undoing and that of the social order that creates one.

Ethics: Rhizomes and Exploits

We are doing much more than just a fun thought experiment or counterfactual hypothesis. In the Lacanian schema we are utilizing here, ethics, including political ethics, is oriented toward *jouissance*, individual or what I am calling *collective* jouissance—the undoing of that which holds together all political subjectivities and the antiblack order from which they arise. Ethics is defined here as normative connections that give us direction about what is favorable or unfavorable. An ethics can be utilitarian or even perverse for various reasons and depending on who perceives it. All leadership has an ethics, that is, a trajectory or horizon toward which it directs performance that is "beyond the pleasure principle." Ethics shapes performance in two ways: It can be transmitted

through performance, like affects, and it can direct a subject toward making certain connections and away from making others. Describing something as "ethical" doesn't just mean that it's a positive thing. That is a *normative* usage of the term "ethics." But in the usage that I generally employ here—the *descriptive* usage— it refers to something that someone acts upon for reasons that go "beyond the pleasure principle." Ethics animates the subject to such a degree that the only moral rule to which a psychoanalyst can subscribe is that the analysand must never give up on her drive. She must keep trying. The goal of analysis is to help her get out of the way of that drive.

This reminds me of an important critique of Black leadership, that most Black leaders push hard at first but can always be bought off by their willingness to compromise before Black freedom is won. Those precious few who would not compromise can then be isolated and killed by the structure and the forces that exist to defend the structure's integrity. Many of the failures of Black leadership that are blamed on the performance of Black leaders are actually rooted in the antiblack structure that constitutes Black people (and non-Black people) as subjects in the first place. The problem is that we have to make sure our analysis of the structure Black leadership should be opposing does not overlook the ways that seemingly individual performances of Black leadership betray Black people. Indeed, a common double-bind accusation against afropessimist thought in the academy is that, on the one hand, it dismisses individual agency while, on the other hand, it dismisses sociality. A similar double bind confronts much of the commentary on Black leadership.

This is a problem that New Media theorists like Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker attempt to address in their interpretation of the rhizomatic theory of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Galloway and Thacker read rhizomatic thought with mathematical graph theory via the model of networks, "the structures that connect organisms and machines" ((Galloway and Thacker) 29). These theorists share an assumption that modernity has seen a transition from an emphasis on overt uses of *power*, the application of violently restrictive technologies of punishment and mechanisms of disciplining, to an emphasis on more subtle uses of *control*, the application of modulated technologies of shaping behavior (35). They suggest that systems of power operate in ways that tend to be either centralized or decentralized. In military strategy, the U.S. empire's military tried to use masses of soldiers and weaponry to overwhelm Vietnamese combatants into submission to U.S. regional political and economic objectives. While Viet Cong guerillas fought back using strategies based centrally around defeating the U.S. invasion of their nation, they were decentralized in their political commitments and strategies, not attempting to outnumber U.S. forces until very late in their war.

In the era of control, power exists and flows in ways that are distributed via networks, grid-like or *rhizomatic* collectives of point-to-point interactions. It works similar to the base-pair complementarity of DNA nucleotides, in which an infinitely variable sequence of adenine-to-thymine and cytosine-to-guanine pairings produces the myriad complexity of all life forms on planet Earth without necessarily producing hierarchies

between those different combinations. There are, to be sure, organisms that are simpler and those that are more complex, based on the intricacy of their combinations. But rhizomes and networks are all about connections between points existing roughly on the same plane where any network could conceivably be connected with or overwhelmed, or transformed by, any other, not in hierarchical formations.

Networks consist of edges, lines creating connections between two points, and nodes, points where two or more lines intersect. These structures cohere according to protocols, "the rules that make sure the connections actually work" (29). Networks are both centralized, in that they can be traced to nodes of power, and decentralized, in that control operates via distribution of protocological control. This enables them to infiltrate, swarm, and stymie centralized power formations, similar to the way biological viruses coordinate to attack cells in the host body and computer viruses and worms coordinate to breach security firewalls.

A network can only be defeated by other networks, and the network that is victorious is the one that finds the weakness, the *exploit*, in the other network. As networks become powerful, they tend toward centralization and ubiquity. They take over everything, as the personal computer (PC) was once ubiquitous. Yet, that very ubiquity rendered all PCs vulnerable to viruses that had not been developed to breach non-PC software. Other networks soon discovered exploits of their own.

Networks and rhizomes are not just apparatuses; they are also ways of thinking about things. As Felicity J. Colman says,

The rhizome is a powerful way of thinking without recourse to analogy or binary constructions. To think in terms of the rhizome is the reveal the multiple ways that you might approach any thought, activity, or a concept—what you always bring with you are the many and various ways of entering any body, of assembling thought and action through the world. [Colman in (Parr) (ed) 233]

Galloway and Thacker cite military theorists John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, pioneers of the concept of netwarfare, to explain how networks enable all new strategies of resistance for which the U.S. military needed to prepare (Arquilla et al.). Especially interesting to Arquilla and Ronfeldt is the strategy of swarming, an amorphous but coordinated assault, similar to the "death by a thousand stings" that a swarm of bees can inflict on a much larger intruder. The swarm is effective because it denies one of the primary necessities of warfare and politics: an enemy with a face. A swarm seems to be everywhere and so cannot be easily or effectively defeated with a massed force, as with the Seminole maroon fighters' victory over a U.S. military contingent more than twice its size on December 25, 1837. The Battle of Lake Okeechobee in the Second Seminole War "became the most decisive U.S. defeat in more than four decades of Florida warfare" when maroon snipers unnerved the numerically superior U.S. army and forced them to retreat (Katz). By denying the enemy a face to attack, a small networked resistance unit can overwhelm a more numerous and better-armed foe.

Of course, the protean structures that comprise Modernity—antiblackness and capitalism—have proven remarkably adaptive at incorporating the networked and distributed strategies and tactics of oppressed peoples, leading Galloway to temper some of the more facile optimism surrounding the revolutionary possibilities of rhizomatics and networks in themselves:

> It is not the case that networks produce a general waning of organization and control. In fact, it is the opposite: distributed networks produce an entirely new system of organization and control that, while perhaps incompatible with pyramidal systems of power, is nevertheless just as effective at keeping things in line. This new system of organization and control, protocol, is adept at regulating flows, coding objects and sculpting life forms. Thus, the problematic of protocol suggests that in recent decades there has been a change in the nature of organization and control, not an 'emancipation' from it…((Galloway) (318)

From a perspective of Black thought, this statement, premised as it is on a diachronic intellectual history of who wrote what before whom in a European language, seems belated. What I have hinted above in regard to the Battle of Lake Okeechobee, Deleuze and Guattari say outright: that nomadic groups form rhizomatic, network-like structures. Significantly, in at least one place, Deleuze and Guattari cited Black Panther field marshal George Jackson about the fighting nature of lines of flight ((Deleuze and Guattari) (204). For Black people, networked structures and ways of thinking are old. Black people's adoption of rhizomatic ways of building and thinking is definitely a function of tactical innovation in response to arborescent modes of power. As commodity-things who were shaped genetically, culturally, and linguistically by flows of international capital, Black people have a great deal of experience with networks. Even in forming resistance, we can think of maroon societies, underground railroads, and extended family structures as networks elastic enough to stretch out under regime of chattel slavery. Black epistemologies exist in networked structures that are self-consciously so, because Black people generally lack more official or sanctioned institutions (institutions the existence, function, and integrity of which are backed by force) in which to do our thinking and knowledge production. Black people build networked connections through which knowledge is exchanged. Networked connections called "ear hustles," relationships, communities, and families are how Black people survive. All of this is fundamentally an effect of power, and it must be read as a tactical innovation in response to the repressive effects of antiblackness and capitalism. Black political networks also operate according to particular protocols that shut down certain connections and open up others, like codes of the streets written about by Elijah Anderson and the Thug Life philosophy developed by Tupac Shakur and his stepfather Mutulu Shakur. These protocols are ethics, and they help Black people in particular geographies, especially the ghetto and the prison, to negotiate relationships with life-or-death stakes attached and to find and commission leaders in environments where education looks more like incarceration and policing looks more like pogrom.

Students of Black leadership often do not consider how the insights of rhizomatic theory and its imbrication with notions of performativity might inform our ability to understand the various ways that leadership is performed, particularly in oppressed communities like Black ghettos, barrios, and prisons. Leadership can occur in small moments in which someone models behavior to another person or directs another person on one little thing. These kinds of performance might be based, for instance, on areas of micro-specialty, as when a 12-year-old child shows her parents how to use their smartphones. J.L. Austin would call these positions of leadership *performative* because a role is created when an iteration (the speech-act of giving normative direction to someone) is uptaken (heeded) ((Austin)117-118). Many structures of leadership among Black folks are not based on pre-existing institutional hierarchies of authority because those institutions have largely been destroyed. Rhizomatic performances of leadership arise in place of destroyed structures of authority. Performances of leadership are rhizomatic in the sense that they are fugitive from hierarchal structures of intramural leadership.

Of course, fugitive does not mean free. These rhizomatic performances derive from the conditions within which Black social life is negotiated, and especially from the ways that technologies of concentrated force have destroyed Black communities and subjectivities. As such, they always bear the mark of the paradigm in some kind of way, and they are usually anticipated by the paradigm, which can almost always incorporate them to its ends. Such models of leadership are especially relevant where intramural institutions have been driven underground and all of the elders are dead, incapacitated as leaders, locked up, or in exile.

Iterative behaviors like leadership are indeed performative. But, for analytic purposes, their performativity must be studied with their ethics. What has been critiqued about Black leadership has been its performance. But leadership is the performance of an ethics. And the ethics of a performance of Black leadership derives from its enactment of the Black freedom drive *against* the genocidal structure of antiblackness. It is not precisely true to say, as Robert Smith says, "we have no leaders." Instead, part of the problem Black and oppressed people in general face is that we have too many and that we are not honest about who our leaders are, where we get our cues on how to get by, who cathects our desire, and how they do it. A truly unflinching analysis of paradigmatic antiblackness must be attentive to the psychoanalytic fact that cathexis happens, the fact that anything to which people can cathect can lead them. It bears repeating in plain speak: Anything people can be turned out on can lead them. This dissertation is therefore as much about followership as it is about leadership.

My understanding of leadership is inspired by the work of performance studies theorists like Judith Butler, network theorists like Samuel Weber, revolutionary theorists like Subcomandante Marcos and Frank Wilderson, and psychoanalytic theorists like Jacques Lacan and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

As Barbara Christian says, Black people theorize differently from the ways western white theorists do it, often through modes of creative practice. Black people are not

generally thought of as producing "theorists." Musicians, dancers, athletes, are supposed to be our bag, but not theorists. Christian shows how this biased definition of "theorist" excludes the ways that many Black people who engage in creative practice are, in fact, theorizing about the world. She also interrogates the very desire to name Black people as "theorists" ((Christian) 68).

As Christian does with theory, I want to gently push back against the thesis that Black people have no leaders while also interrogating the need to apply the name "leader" to those who perform variations of a fundamentally ethical freedom drive. For now, I think we get further by thinking about Black leadership as the performance of ethics. This is true for the same reasons that Christian thought about Black creative practice as one of the ways Black people have been theorizing, reasons articulated out of our responses to a longstanding politico-ontological structure that constantly seeks to anticipate our attempts to break it or break out of it. To the extent that some theorists say Black people "have no leaders," they must ignore the ways we do lead each other and try to fit Black performances of leadership into the definitions of leadership adopted by others. For example, if we think of leadership as the stewarding of an organization, we might find that, from the perspective of Black studies based on Black freedom struggle's recent history, this approach is largely played out. In the wake of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO), nameable organizations led by identifiable leadership structures make for easy targets and it is difficult to make them effective at creating the types of radical change that could potentially satisfy a Black freedom drive. Likewise, above ground knowledge production apparatuses cannot be a part of Black freedom struggle as long as the state seeks to police Black freedom drives. Contributing to archives associated with state power can get one positioned as a snitch or killed, or, as Gerry Adams recently found out, arrested (Simon).

Understanding Black leadership as something that is performed *within and against* a structure seeking to kill Black people is crucial to Black emancipation. We may, indeed, need to redefine leadership itself, outside the paradigm of antiblackness, to effectively "find and commission"— or create— leaders who can oppose structural antiblackness. If thinking outside of the paradigm is not possible, like the impossibility of a hyperbola intersecting the *x*-axis, we can, like the asymptote of the hyperbola, at least have as the aim of our performance an outside of the paradigm.

Leadership is partially performative in this sense of the term as well, where moments of thought are moments of action and moments of action are moments of thought. This means that I will think leadership very broadly, so that we can see it when many people are doing it. While most studies of leadership I have found define leadership as the conscious and intentional occupation of a position intended to direct or guide a group of people, I understand leadership as according to those who might follow. Leadership is any iteration that gives normative direction that might be uptaken by others, collectively or individually, regardless of whether or not the initial iteration was done with the conscious intention of being followed.

Significantly, leadership is also the enactment of an ethics. This means that anyone can be a leader if people follow or are inspired to act by them. And if such a broad definition means that we must be careful who our friends, acquaintances, and colleagues are, so much the better.

This means that Black leadership is a fraught position to even think about, let alone perform. While many people judge Black leadership based on how its performance relates to various indicators of the well-being of people defined as Black—for example, "Did Black unemployment in relation to white unemployment go up, down, or stay constant during the Obama administration," or, at the least, "Did Obama even attempt to address the disparity?"— this ignores the structural antagonism of blackness of which Wilderson writes and the implied ethical imperative to undo the structure that rests on that antagonism—one that would lead one to ask, "Did Obama attempt to destroy the structural antagonism that holds the U.S.A. together as a set of relations?". The latter is a wholly different question, at once attentive to performance not in itself but in relation to the ethics of the structure within which the performance is articulated.

I do not sustain the distinction between revolutionary and accommodationist leadership here. This is because to make such a distinction, we would have to understand what an action was before we could know if it were revolutionary. The theory of action underwriting such normative assessments of Black leadership tends to assume a bounded temporality derived from a diachronic approach to time. Rather, I think of leadership performances that have been prepared for and "breaks," those that have not been prepared for. Of the latter (breaks), there are performances that directly or indirectly pose threats to the structure of antiblack society because they are untimely in their approaches to the destruction of what Jacques Lacan called the Symbolic order and what I call the (white) Symbolic order. What they need is coordinated force of the type required to undo the Symbolic Order.

If blackness is shaped by these networks of forces, how can Black leadership work for Black people? My basic thesis is that Black leadership is shaped in a complex interaction with a structure that renders Black life as vulnerable to gratuitous death and captivity at any time. Black people who would lead other Black folks—and all of us can lead—need to be aware of the ways blackness can be used against itself. This means that it is never enough to just say, as so many have, that there are no Black leaders or that there is a crisis of Black leadership now that hasn't existed before. If we are really going to understand the so-called crisis of Black leadership, we have to look at the types of "leaders" created by the structure that creates blackness—the structure of antiblackness—and attempt to create the types of leaders we need, ones who can undo that structure and enable the emergence of what Fanon calls "a new humanism" that is not defined in opposition to Africa and the darker skinned among humankind.

Desire and leadership are linked because leaders are articulations of desire and leadership is performed as an articulation of desire. Listening to what Black people lack—and, by extension, to what we desire—is ostensibly what those who are called Black

leaders do. In this dissertation, I do not argue that most Black leaders do not attend to the needs of Black people. Rather, I argue that the structure of Black desire as such often goes unattended because many of us fear the violence of the police. The only exception is when Black desire manifests in moments of widespread unrest and mass movements articulated out of Black people's desires, at which time it becomes mostly a concern of "law and order" or "national security." One would be justified in concluding that the only way Black people will ever get anything is by a mass movement that starts "the only thing worth starting: the end of the world" (Cesaire quoted in (Fanon)76). In the absence of a willingness to "end the world," what are the ethics of Black political desire? What, in other words, does Black leadership aim to do? What is its ethical horizon? Assuming for the moment that listening to Black collective desire—across classes, genders, sexualities, and nationalities—is both possible and an absolutely indispensible part of being a Black leader and yet much of what is called Black leadership fails in this task or doesn't even try at it, then to whom are Black leaders listening, whom do they serve, to whom are they accountable?

On the other hand, is there such a thing as a Black collective that could articulate a common set of desires shared across an enormous variety of divisions, across the vast array of diversity that exists among Black people? Moreover, is it not essentializing Black people to suggest that there is something, anything, that all Black people share among ourselves and that is not shared among non-Black people? Even if there exists something culturally shared by Black people, is there something that Black desires, various and contradictory as they are, articulate around? What, in other words, are the desires of Black political ethics?

This dissertation examines the contours of a structure that makes these questions necessary. It is not a definitive attempt to answer them. It is an analysis of a structure that exists at every scale, from the psyche up to the geopolitical. This is a structure that can only be dismantled collectively, not via singular performances, a problem that has singular implications for the performance of Black leadership as we know it.

Conclusion

A fundamental problem Black leaders must face, then, is how to address a structure that sees them as genealogical isolates, socially dead, "never meant to survive" (Lorde). A further problem Black leaders face is how to find cracks and fissures in that structure where Black people can escape the worst aspects of the genocidal structure of Modernity. Many people who are called Black leaders aim to do this at their best. My concern is that the effects of centuries of policing and the presence of a policing apparatus that has announced its ruthlessness under the aegis of names like COINTELPRO, PATRIOT, RICO, and many other un-acronymed practices (such as Edward Snowden has revealed (Goodman and Gonzalez)) might have permanent effects on how Black people specifically "find and commission" certain performances of Black leaderships. If we are scared of the police, we won't cultivate each other into the kinds of leaders we need, the

kinds of leaders we can be if we embrace the freedom drive, an ethical drive that aims beyond the structure that is premised on our destruction as people. Black leadership is, and must be, the performance of that which has not been prepared for.

Chapter 2: Black Ur: The Political Ontology of Black Naming

The year is 1969, and Ursa Corregidora, a 47-year-old Black American woman, is on a set break from her job singing at the club Spider's, located in a Black area. A 58-year-old man, a lifelong singer who was only recently hired to sing at the Drake Hotel where Ursa used to sing, is telling Ursa that, after a lifetime of singing, he has only recently been recognized as a singer. The one-sided portion of the conversation the reader sees is a powerful commentary on who has the power to name and who does not:

> You know how long Thelonius Monk was playing in that place all that long time before they discovered him. You know, I don't like to use that word 'discovered,' cause it's already there, ain't it?"
>
> I nodded.
>
> "Yes, indeedy, it's already there, but don't seem like they can see it. I don't know how many years daddy Monk was playing funk before they seen him, I call him daddy Monk because I wrote a song about it. I like to write my own songs, you know. I sing some of the others too, but I like to write my own. And I'm fifty-eight years old. You know, I don't like that word 'discovery.' Ray Charles is a genius, you know that? But let me tell you something and I don't have to spell it out for you cause you know what I'm talking about. Sinatra was the first one to call Ray Charles a genius, he spoke of 'the genius of Ray Charles.' And after that everybody called him a genius. They didn't call him a genius before that though. He was a genius but they didn't call him that. You know what I'm tying to tell you? ((Jones) 169)

The man is articulating a concept that is endemic within Black life: There is no *power* of naming for blacks. We name ourselves and the things and people with which we interact, but the wider society does not recognize our capacity to name. The phallus of control over discursive regimes accrues to whites as whites, and is foreclosed to blacks as blacks—available to neither Ursa nor the man.

> If a white man hadn't told them, they wouldn't't've seen it. If I come and told them they wouldn't't've seen it. Do you know what I m talking about? I could've told 'em. You could've told'em. Like, you know, they say Columbo discovered America, he didn't discover America. You hear that song where Aretha say she discovered Ray Charles. Now tha's awright." He laughed.
>
> I laughed too.
>
> "I could tell them about you, but they wouldn't listen. And you could come over there and tell them about me, but they wouldn't listen." (169-170)

That the scene in this passage takes place at the height of the black freedom struggle in the United States—the moment when radical networks, like the Black Liberation Army and Weather Underground, were showing up on the news, very visibly attempting to seize the means of naming within political economy—is significant. Also of significance is the fact that the man speaking tells Ursa the story of how Ray Charles got

named a "genius." That naming clearly occurred in the past, well before the moment of the man's articulating it as such, but the man makes the broader point to say that his own impotence *is in the present*. It is not an isolated incident or event that the man points out; it is because he is not "a white man," because he is Black. The power to name is out of his hands, as it was out of the hands of Ray Charles, and for much the same reason.

Significantly, the period in which Jones wrote this was an extended moment of some radical interventions, when Black feminist intellectuals working within literary or academic culture— like Jones, Barbara Christian, Toni Morrison, Sylvia Wynter, and especially Hortense Spillers, to name just a few—were very interested in Black capacities for culture making, the ways that the violence of slavery had fundamentally shaped things like academic culture (Christian, Wynter, and Spillers), Black family formations (Jones, Morrison, Spillers), and other areas of Black performance of culture. In the wake of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 assertion that impoverished Black families had become a "tangle of pathologies" due to slavery and that the federal government should seek to address this by empowering Black men to be heads of families. Many people have observed problems with this, but in my view, the most notable thing is what Hortense Spillers noted.

> Actually claiming the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to "name"), which her culture imposes in blindness, "Sapphire" might rewrite after all a radically different text for a female empowerment. ((Spillers))229)

Moynihan was able to name Black families a "tangle of pathology" because he was a white man who, with the authority of a Harvard pedigree *(in the Name of Harvard)*, was able to define policy around what shapes Black families would be allowed and encouraged to assume, and all with the force of his position in the federal Labor department *(in the Name of the President of the United States of America)*. *His application of a name had the power to make itself true.* Du Bois and Frazier had for decades prior identified Black family formation as a function of slavery. But the debate goes down in history as the debate around the Moynihan Report. Normative standards attempted to incorporate Black people into inclusion in a vision of gender performance *because* that vision of gender was associated with whiteness. As with the problem of white amanuenses being necessary to confirm the Black authorship of slave narratives, the means of Black naming requires a white name.

This is a quality that defines blackness in places other than the US context. Lewis Gordon, for instance, remarks about Martinique, the home of Frantz Fanon:

> What many Martinicans, and other Caribbean peoples, try desperately to shed, however, is their African lineage, a lineage whose retentions structure property, for instance, matrilineally. The result, often is that the household, and even homeownership, are to be female-centered. If the colonial values weren't imposed as "real" values over the African and (in other regions) indigenous ones, this situation would simply be one of living two sets of values. A matrilineal household would not be a "defect." (Gordon) 7

To count as "real," a value—or a cultural performance—must be white. In an antiblack world, cultural performances get their ultimate rightness from their nonblackness because blackness is an ontological status of Absence rendered by relations of power. Blackness can be performed, but its essence is not performative. Black culture is the performance that emerges out of being "fixed" as the index of absolute otherness—of being understood to be life that does not count. But Black culture is not blackness. Blackness is something prior to Black culture. If there is no performance of blackness that can make it *right* or *"true*," it is because—*for whatever reasons*—blackness and Black people, Africa and the African diaspora, have been *collectively* chosen, at a deeply unconscious level, as the stand-in for all that the modern world sees as inherently wrong, dirty, corrupt, contaminating, ugly, evil, false, stupid, empty, void, fungible, and available for use or enjoyment of any kind—insensate yet wildly emotional and irrational, empty of ontological content yet everpresent, not to be taken seriously yet always threatening, and to policed for what it is, not for what it does. Gordon sums up this radically important reading of Frantz Fanon: "There are two principles that emerge in an antiblack society. They are 'be white!' and 'avoid blackness!'" (11).

What is the power of naming in relation to the abjection that produces a Black subject? What function does naming play in the abjection of blacks? What does the incapacity to produce names that have sticking power imply about one's subjectivity? How does the naming of blackness continue to fix the capacity of Black people as such to name? What can we imagine might be entailed in renaming Black people as people with the capacity to name themselves?

The previous chapter outlined how something like a Black performance studies elaborated out of Black thought is and could be a proper field of research on the topic of Black ethics and leadership. It also identified some of the questions and concerns that this research raises about the legitimacy of the academy in the research of Black leadership. There is an implicit question that I cannot address here but that is nonetheless pertinent: How is Black performance studies possible? How, in other words, can a field that studies the capacity of performance *in itself* distinguish performance—particularly Black performance—from the ontology of the performer? If, as we saw in the previous chapter, the performance of Black intellectual leadership (in the case of Gates and Du Bois) is inseparable from the Black person who performs it, how are both the Black performance studies scholar and the field of Black performance studies themselves implicated and invested in the object of study? What are the ontological prerequisites of Black performance studies? Have we put the cart of Black performance before the horse of the structural framework of Black non-ontology? There are significant political stakes implicated in the question of how performance studies is even possible because blackness itself has implications for how Black performance can even be an object of study.

This chapter considers the significant political stakes that ground the semiotic structure central to performance studies—the iteration in the signifying chain— and

considers the tracings of an antiblack Symbolic Order in both the terminal point of that chain and in the very units (performances) that it circulates.

In this chapter, I begin to explicate the radical originality of Hortense Spillers' understanding of naming and the Name of the Father in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" and to underscore its devastating impact on a central tenet of Black performance studies: that Black performance matters paradigmatically, independently of its material impact on the network of relations of power constitutive of *the paradigm*, or what I will shorthand here as *the structure*, of antiblackness. In this chapter, I will use Spillers' radically imaginative unpacking of the concept of natal alienation (a concept she derives from Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*) in her notion of the Black body "ungendered" to engage Black leadership as a site of *surrogacy*, a concept elaborated by Joe Roach, and try to determine how it might advance our understanding of the problems that Black people face.

I will study this violence by examining two sets of sources: Northern freedmen's aid organizations' primer texts for teaching reading to Black freedmen in areas that had been liberated by the Union Army, and the Gayl Jones novel *Corregidora*.

First, Northern freedmen's aid workers brought primers— literal grammar books— which the aid workers apparently believed were to introduce the mass of Black people to the basic meanings of their American citizenship on the eve of Reconstruction. Prior to citizenship, however, the freed people would need to be inculcated with proper senses of manhood and womanhood. These texts were the new media by which that project of gendering would take place. Built into the gendering of African American freed families by white northerners was the structural position by which these white northerners had the power to be mothers and fathers of what one called a "new-born race." These primers and newspaper articles provide an important case study because their intentionality was fairly blatant and extensive. They were to be used to teach literacy, home economics, gender and family relations, work ethic, and biblical comprehension. The calibration of these sources is revealing about the extent to which gender can be understood as an ontological-structural as opposed to an ontical-performative formation when it is underwritten by the position of racial blackness.

Although these sources, and the efforts of which they were a part, have been analyzed in the diachronic study of history—by historians such as James Anderson (Anderson), Willie Lee Rose (Rose), and Ronald Butchart (Butchart *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction : Freedmen's Education, 1862-1875*) and (Butchart *Schooling the Freed People : Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876*)— the present analysis reads the texts synchronically as points of a networked discursive framework—the Symbolic order— that extends into the present, not just as the legacies or resonances of an originating violence, but, as Spillers says, as the "American grammar" or more broadly "the sociopolitical order of the new world."

My analysis will point out the ways that these sources reveal their authors' awareness of a structural position of Black folks that was similar to the natally alienated

slave. The ethical horizons the authors of these primers and newspapers imagined, *and had the sociopolitical power to allow themselves to keep imagining*, were that white people could shape Black people to be like them rather than just their slaves. Specifically, the performance of gender was so important that some organizations required their members to make home visits to Black freed families to ensure the adequate performance of gender.

And how would adequacy be defined? I suggest that the power difference that allowed the freedmen's aid workers to imagine themselves as "parents" of a "new-born race" indexed the depth to which the violence done to Black people under chattel slavery continued to impinge on Black families' capacities to shape themselves, to name themselves, after slavery ended. This imperative presaged a long and ongoing ethical horizon for Black gender performance, one that came to include the project Spillers sees at work in Daniel Patrick Moynihan's infamous report (Moynihan): to fix Black gender performances, while at the same time compromising them to the economic urgencies of capitalism. These primers reveal their authors' desire to ensure that Black family structures were still the fungible, useful things that whites (in the South, but also throughout the United States) had used for their own purposes under slavery. The performances with which the aid workers imagined themselves inculcating Black families were ones in which the master was displaced as the one with the power to formulate gender roles, leaving the white "friend" in his place. More specifically, northern white aid workers were able to imagine themselves as "parents" of a "new-born race" because the Black southern families they approached had been "ungendered." On examining the texts that were to introduce Black freed families to citizenship, manhood, and womanhood, one gets no sense that these aid workers felt the need to negotiate the terms of gender formation with the freed families themselves.

Similar to what Gordon points out about the Caribbean above, there is no reason why the freed families should not have been allowed to take the lead in their own gendering, why the economy of the South demanded that Black women continue working in the fields alongside Black men while also being expected to be proper women "like white folks." The freed families were told to stay in their places until whites could put them where they belonged, performing in the ways they ought to perform. To fail in this, it was taught, would render them "not of the right spirit" and "unworthy" of their gender. Examining the texts, the reader notices a people being taught the appropriate performances to which they were to aspire, not a people who were being invited to be co-founding members of a wholly new social order that could have emerged in the wake of the cataclysm of war. Blacks were assumed to have nothing to offer in shaping the fundaments of the order, yet their labor was still needed to preserve that order. The texts reveal whites gendering and naming Blacks as Blacks and unable to recognize the ways Blacks name ourselves.

The other text I examine here, partly spotlighted above, is Gayl Jones' 1975 novel *Corregidora*. I read several moments of the text that help situate it partly as what Dennis

Childs has called a "narrative of neo-slavery" ((Childs)275), an attempt to articulate the position of the slave in an ongoing contemporary text milieu. Jones references the violence of slavery that is indexed at the site of the modality of naming throughout, and the semiotics of naming that render blackness as a site of absolute ontological otherness. This novel is, at least in part, an extended meditation on the violence that is that *a priori* of black names—the absolute powerlessness and relations of force that were chattel slavery. In Jones' extended meditation on the Name of the Father, blackness shows up as a site that "outrages" not only gender but also the very semiotic system or Symbolic order that affixes names and recognizes the possibility of naming subjects.

The stakes of naming have always been high for Black people. In *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, Herbert Gutman revised the Daniel Patrick Moynihan thesis that Black families were matriarchal during and after the Civil War by tracing the continuation of patrilineal practices of naming among Black families. The representational practices working in service of the political— from the 19th-century abolitionist Sojourner Truth's speech "Ain't I a Woman?" to the "I am a Man" placards at the March On Washington in 1963— have attempted to situate the Black body as the site of its own naming. In a different way, so did more performative assertions of humanity like Lovelle Mixon's intervention on four Oakland police officers on March 21, 2009. Bill Cosby's infamous "pound cake" speech (Cosby) on the anniversary of *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* (in which he joked about an incident of a Black youth getting arrested for stealing a piece of pound cake, an incident that sounds eerily similar to the shooting of 14-year-old Latasha Harlins by store owner Soon Ja Du— negatively referenced naming practices taken up by Black folks, especially poor Black folks. It is clear that the question of Black naming has been posed, and is being responded to, in the realm of the politics underwriting the performance of culture. These activities, speeches and freedom marches, are performative, but, when performed by blacks, there are always problems that get in the way of their shifting discursive terms or posing a hegemonic challenge within discourse. Hegemony, many people forget, is force plus consent. But blackness is always already underwritten by economies of force.

Consider the case of slave narratives, the quintessential instance of blacks naming themselves as beings or, as Henry Louis Gates said, "writing themselves into being" (*(Judy (Dis)Forming the American Canon : African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular)*, 26). Ronald Judy points out that the performative use of signs—graphemes, written characters—were privileged *because* they were in European languages. Hence, they were not associated with Black people, and few Black people ordinarily had access to them. If, as Ronald Judy says, the Negro is a function of an economy of forced work, then even attempts to rename may simply reify the same antiblack paradigm that names blacks in the first place.

By linking together the sets of concerns showing up as a grammar of Black life as it is rendered by a number of sources across disparate diachronic time periods, I hope to show that the singularity of the imposed lack, or grammar, is its capacity to effectuate one

of the most important of the three constituent elements of slavery that Orlando Patterson explained make slaves slaves, namely, that of natal alienation, the permanent severing of a body's connections to generations both ascending and descending. In other words, when we read Hortense Spillers' notion of grammar alongside Patterson's concept of natal alienation, the problem becomes clearer. Black people are fucked, even at the level of the Symbolic order, because the kind of violence we have experienced not only goes beyond representation but severs our very capacity to mean and to pass on the capacity to mean.

The Semiotic Force of the Name

The purpose of this chapter is to theorize paradigmatic violence as distinct from, yet inclusive of, performative violence. Specifically, it will identify a kind of infra-representational violence necessary to the formation of subjects of desire. A basic aspect of the problem of leadership, especially in how it orders its priorities in a network of meanings structured by a special kind of violence, is the power to designate a name and have that name stick. Designating a problem to be solved is an act of leadership and an act of naming. A named problem can be addressed. The problem of Black leadership is that blackness indexes a "severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire." What does it mean to engage in one of the quintessential acts of leading—naming—when one must struggle simply to name oneself?

Psychoanalyst Fethi Benslama addresses naming as an adequate description of subjectivity. Benslama analyzes narratives of the Shoah, specifically Primo Levi and others' naming of the figure who appears to have submitted to living death as "*Muselmann*" or "muslim." Benslama disputes what he sees as Giorgio Agamben's reading of Levi's named figure of the Muselmann, as premised on an assumptive claim that "what took place in the camps [was] a *foreclosing of the human in man*." Benslama refutes the semiotic nature of this foreclosing.

> Now, when one says that a man is a man just as A is A, a third term intervenes: is. As Émile Benvéniste has shown, even when there is no verb ["]to be["] in a language, its function is marked by a copula, be it a pause, i.e., a spacing, an interval, a lack or lacuna, which is at once identity and difference, one within the other. He called this a process of 'dialectical coexistence.' (Benslama) 6)

The camps, says Benslama, could not have foreclosed "the human in man" because the act of genocide required more than just ontology—the two terms of identity (German) and difference (Jew). There had to be an act to explain the relation between the two terms. There had to be a *copula*, a "third term":

> The third term, in which the relation of identity to difference within a man and to the humanity of other men is anchored, is the most intimate part of each of us, and constitutes the subject as such. Now, this anchoring escapes capture by either self or other, since it is neither simply imaginary, nor real, but a relation between these registers that exceeds the grasp of the symbolic. The function of the proper name shows this very well, since the indexation of a man to language labels him, of

course, but not as a 'Here is Man' (Ecce homo) that delivers him over the crucifixion; it erases him and subtracts him from the real. ((Benslama)6)

By "foreclosing," Benslama seems to understand a kind of violence that has been done in the act of naming—by Levi. The proper name, Benslama says, cannot foreclose this "most intimate part of each of us, [that] constitutes the subject as such" because that part is built into semiotics itself. The foreclosing requires an action. It requires the oppressive structure to perform, to designate a subject foreclosed. This thesis comports with a central thesis of performance studies that is also favorably treated within Black performance studies, although I maintain it should be questioned within it, if not anathema to it. Naming, Benslama seems to imply, is not ontological. It must be performed.

For Black studies theorist Ronald A.T. Judy, "Names do more than designate things; they indicate an orientation in life, not in some abstract sense, but in the sense of a grammar that emerges out of a set of human practices in life, that work in the creation of the world (Judy in Spillers "Airing Dirty Laundry: African-American Critique and Natal Community"). Again, "grammar" here indicates a set of protocols that are not only linguistic but more deeply social, semiotic, and structural. Although that "grammar…emerges out of a set of human practices"—hence, is performative—those practices are fundamentally formative ("work in the creation of the world") and "indicate an orientation in life." The performance of resistance to such naming—renaming—must perform against something. The performativity of naming is important, because it raises the possibility of resisting it and renaming ourselves. But there is also structural power built into naming things in ways that have the power to stick. It takes a certain level of power to name in ways that fix or "indicate an orientation in life." Black performance studies would need to incorporate a study of the kinds of capacity needed for naming before it could understand the nature of the problem Black folks face and craft a worthy project of how we resolve that problem. Facing that problem would require us to understand this grammar broadly enough to observe its contours, including the ways the grammar fundamentally shapes, or nullifies, our capacity to name ourselves. This would be necessary to any attempt to rename ourselves as Black people.

Problems of Performing Naming

It is essential at this point to address the Symbolic order, the register of subjectivity in which naming most fundamentally takes place. Although names are signifiers that slide and slip meaning, names can also carry an indexical force that exceeds representation. That probably sounds really fancy, but it is really just to say that names index the power of the namer to fix meanings, and it is what Slavoj Zizek calls "the radical contingency of naming" (Žižek and Laclau) 107). They leave the haunting presence of the original Namer as such, because they indicate a structural relation that tends to fix the thing named. Names are therefore forever haunted by their arbitrariness, their belonging in a network of

associated signifiers or traumas, such as Sigmund Freud delineated in "The Forgetting of Proper Names."

Names always "want"—the word "want" here meaning both "to lack," in the sense that they never fully encapsulate the thing named, and "to desire," in the sense that they often carry something of the trajectory or "orientation" of the original naming, a trajectory that might remain affirmed within the overall structural framework surrounding the name. The objects that names attempt to fix outstrip their power to fix, a clear indication that names, despite acting as if definitive, are in very many ways available to alteration and obliteration. Indeed, they cannot avoid alteration, irrelevance, and obsolescence.

Benslama takes what Žižek calls the "radical contingency of naming" further. For Benslama, a subject is part subjective experience, part objective experience, but the most intimate part of the subject is "the third term," the dynamic "copula" that relates the two parts in every moment. The necessity for a verb "to be" means that we cannot be reduced to the figures of others' imaginaries, means that we are constantly copulating, constantly becoming.

It is important to relate this insight to performance of self. The performative chain is often conceptualized as fugitive, and performance studies scholars repeatedly emphasize the slippage while ignoring or downplaying the aspects of a performative act that index a certain fixity that grounds and bounds any performative chain. We in performance studies have tended to understate the ways that being bounds becoming.

In relation to Black folks, however, performance studies would have to change its framing radically to address some questions directly before such a framing could be said to be complete. Can a people named as slaves unname themselves as such and rename themselves, using what might be conceptualized as performative interventions? Is that the right framework for the problem of the slave who is named as such not by a performative iteration but by the massive, epochal shift of the Middle Passage? If the *copula* Benslama describes is still operative after what Spillers referred to as "the initiative strike," the diachronic moment of the Middle Passage and into the still-ongoing synchronic moment of what Saidiya V. Hartman has called "the afterlife of slavery," what would be the possibility of Black people unnaming ourselves as human objects? without losing the aspects of blackness that we desire to keep?

What's Black Family Got to Do With It?

The politics of Black gender performance and family formation have long been central to questions of naming, although theorists like Lacan and philosophers Zizek have ignored its specificity. Of course, naming has a lot to do with families and family formations, not just because families, like names, are signifiers, but also because families are privileged sites in subject formation. Black families have been the site of the most contested battles over naming. The most obvious reason for this association is that family is the site of initial naming. It also shapes the ways meaning is created and foreclosed. If naming is a capacity of leaders, the family is the leader of future leaders. It shapes the

ways that people divide up the universe into comprehensible and defined objects. It also models the leadership to which people will cathect, or emotionally invest, whether favorably or antagonistically.

The connection of the family with the realm of the semiotic is not an intuitive one for scholars studying the history of the family. This connection is nonetheless common within the Continental philosophical practice, particularly with the influence of psychoanalytic thinkers in the Lacanian tradition who borrowed from Claude Levi-Strauss' anthropological studies of the relation of semiotics and the exchange of women. This connection is central to our understanding of what has happened to Black families in slavery and the afterlife of slavery.

Part of the problem evoked by Black folks' capacity to name is blackness itself. Our blackness itself renders Black bodies *un*-surrogable, to coin a neologism, because Black movement within the field of signification is foreclosed within the Symbolic order of Modernity. This is to say that a Black subjectivity does not register—does not exist in the universe of possibility for the US state and civil society. The normative US subjectivity is structured around a violently antiblack Real.

"Mama's Baby" attempts to describe this. The essay is often approached as an enigmatic way of saying that gender is constructed differently among Black people than among white people. But this dominant interpretation of the essay as a thesis of the "differential construction of gender" is an understatement of the extremity in Spillers' description of the mode of violence done to Black people. Spillers calls the violence done to Black people at the initiating moment of Modernity nothing less than "high crimes against the flesh," so powerful as to "ungender" females *and* males, and that it perhaps "transfers" across diachronic time and constitutes the synchronic time of "the sociopolitical order of the New World."

European psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan's concept of the Name of the Father—also called the Symbolic Father— was a structural position in the normative bourgeois European family structure that centered much of his thinking about a variety of things. "The-Name-of-the-Father," says one translator, is "a key signifier that 'anchors' or 'quilts' signifier and signified" (Grigg 54). The Symbolic Father is the position—usually filled by a parent, although not necessarily, and not necessarily a male-- that introduces the subject to the Symbolic order, which is to say, to the world of others, the realm of laws and language, broadly conceived, rescuing, in a sense, the child from a sole reliance on the imaginary bond with the (M)other.

Importantly, Lacan's Symbolic Father as a position serves several functions: It *prohibits* and it *protects*. It imposes prohibition (the "no" of the father) to regulate the child's access to the mother and the mother's access to the child. It also protects in the sense that it serves as the guarantor of meanings, the endpoint in the chain of signification, where no finally means no. It is the Law, the final word, at the scale of the family. (At the scale of the socius, it is the *point de capiton*.) Subjects who are inculcated with the Name of the Father, imbued with this super-egoic sense of prohibition, understand at a

fundamental level that things have meaning (that this means this, ultimately, because someone who has some power over me says so) and enter the Symbolic order, the realm of semiotics or signification, the realm of Law. This prohibition directs their desire into this Symbolic order, where they become subjects by subjecting themselves to Language. Language, in this sense, means a whole network of interactions, exchanges, rules, prohibitions, laws, mores, protocols—in a word, signifiers into which human subjects displace their desire from its original object—unity with the mother—onto one object after another (a new toy, a car, an attractive romantic partner) that they suppose will get them back in touch with the lost object of unity with the mother. In reality, Lacan says, the subjection is complete once subjects become subjects of Language. They are severed from the Real and will never again have access to what they ultimately want.

Importantly, to revisit our concept of *jouissance*, every desire is an articulation of a drive toward something for which a subject would literally die, something she or he would pursue beyond the pleasure principle. This does not mean that subjects desire objects (like a new car) more than life; it means that the desire (for whatever object) is an articulation of that drive for the ultimate object, *das Ding*. Lacan believed that although subjects will never get what they want, they must keep trying to get it until they expire. The goal of analysis should just be to bring the subject to terms with this severing. Indeed, Lacan says, the only "sin" of the psychoanalytic subject is to "give up on one's desire." Desires are articulations of drives, and drives begin when one lacks. The thing human subjects all lack—the Ding, in Lacanian parlance—is unity with the mother. This lack is what makes human subjects human subjects.

The stakes of this for Black people are tremendous, but not in the ways academics might think. There has been a mistaken investment in analogizing Black "subjects" to subjects in the Lacanian sense. This is incorrect for several reasons, perhaps the simplest of which is that Lacan was wrong. Not all subjects are created by the same lack. Lacan's sense of lack, after all, includes within it a theory of structural positionality—a theory called the Oedipal triangle of subject-Mother-Father. But, prior even to the very possibility of that particular schema of structural positions, another framework of structural positions has already seen to it that some people lack subjectivity itself because they are created collectively as non-subjects *as such*, slaves— prior to their creation as individual subjects—by the violence that placed them in the collectives where they are in the world in the ways that it did. And, of course, this means that it concomitantly created other subjects collectively as those who are *not* positioned by the violence of slavery.

Psychiatrist and revolutionary Frantz Fanon's critique of Lacan is that Black Antilleans generally cannot be said to have an Oedipal complex. He was notoriously reticent about his meaning, confining it to an extended footnote. But at its most basic, this is a radical thing to say. It would mean that the fundamental mechanism for creating subjectivity as such was not just undercut but absent for the subjects he observed, Black subjects. The paradox for Black people would then be that subjectivity is premised on a lack that is temporally and ontologically prior to the lack to which Lacan points. In other

words, if lack creates human subjects, what do we call human beings whose lack is subjectivity itself? How does knowing that this lack was imposed— i.e., a *copula*— matter when the moment in which this *copula* is performed is the synchronic moment of Modernity? How long, after all, does a performance last? When did the iteration begin? Twelve seconds ago? Five hundred years ago? Thirteen hundred years ago?

In the Name of the Motherfucker

What, then, does naming of Black people look like in the Symbolic order of Modernity? Spillers begins her essay by listing a host of names applied to her and suggests that the order that connects these names is a "misnaming" that she will attempt to undo She immediately moves to one of the most prominent and important examples of Black (mis)naming: Daniel Patrick Moynihan's declaration that "the 'Negro Family' has no Father to speak of—his Name, his Law, his Symbolic function mark the impressive missing agencies in the essential life of the black community…and it is, surprisingly, the fault of the Daughter, or the female line" ((Spillers) 204). For Spillers, Moynihan is engaged in a "stunning reversal of the castration thematic, displacing the Name and the Law of the Father to the territory of the Mother and Daughter" (204).

Moynihan, Spillers says, is executing one of the practices of a time-honored paradigm that do two things: "1) inscribe 'ethnicity' as a scene of negation… and 2) confirm the human body as a metonymic figure for an entire repertoire of human and social arrangements." First, then, Moynihan makes the ascription of "ethnicity" in order to create binary opposition between things frozen in a long duration of time—seemingly synchronic. The "ethnicity" of Black people shows up in Moynihan's report as "a signifier that has no movement in the field of signification." Second, because a metonym, in Levi-Strauss's understanding, was the lateral relationship of part to whole or whole to part— Moynihan makes "black family" the dysfunctional opposite of white family, thereby marking Black bodies as signifiers of a pathology—the pathology of matriarchy. Regardless of its truth or falsity, Moynihan's naming and framing of a figurative Black family and community as a "tangle of pathology" has the power to make itself true. It is no longer a well-intentioned white liberal's attempt to resolve one of the social problems of his time. His report becomes part of the overall problem: an antiblack network of signifiers, a "paradigm" that echoes synchronically, not just diachronically. Moynihan's naming of Black families (and the gendered relations that comprise them) is part of a long history of whites pathologizing and then trying to fix Blacks.

Under the regime of such power, Black fathers and daughters "make doubles, unstable in their respective identities," share a similar problem that destabilizes their otherwise gendered identities. This problem is that "in the historic outline of dominance, the respective subject-positions of 'female' and 'male' adhere to no symbolic integrity." "Female" and "male" are names of genders that Africans of various ethnicities gave to themselves—along with their proper names, like Afua or Kofi— before they were forced onto the ships and routed along the networks of exchange. Those networks, shorthanded

as "the Middle Passage," cemented their bodies with the signifier "Black" or "slave." The names that the Africans brought with them to the ships, and the gender configurations of which those names were metonymic, had no sticking power once the Africans boarded the ship and began to be turned into Blacks, slaves. "Under these conditions"—the violence of the Middle passage—"we lose at least *gender* difference *in the outcome* and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific" (204). Indeed, notice how many times Spillers mentions female and male and women and men together, as opposed to how many times she talks about women in isolation. She mentions these two genders together often, an indication at the level of the syntactical structure of the essay itself, to show how domination at an important moment in time demolished distinctions between Black men and women. If we hope to understand how her naming as a Black woman is different from other women's naming, we need to understand the ways that gender is established in the Symbolic order.

There is something I have left unsaid that follows from the previous paragraphs: There is no Black Name of the Father in Modernity. "[E]xternally imposed meanings and uses"— the exigencies of the order of the New World— "disrupt" the captive's existence as a Human, with "biological, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic, ritualistic, and psychological" details, from maintaining any kind of coherence, as the following paradigm of violence emerges:

> 1) the captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; 2) …reduces to a thing, becoming being for the captor; 3) in this absence from a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of 'otherness'; 4) as a category of 'otherness', the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping…slides into a more general 'powerlessness,' resonating through various centers of human and social meaning"

Once this categorization as a human object sticks, the markers of the captive's body come to signify powerlessness in general and in many specific ways. In other words, it has moved from a signifier that might be located in what Lacan would call "the imaginary" register of subjectivity. It becomes a crucial component of the violently antiblack Real—"the socio-political order of the New World." Moreover,

> the African female subject, under these historic conditions, is not only the target of rape—in one sense an interiorized violation of body and mind—but also the topic of specifically externalized acts of torture and prostration that we imagine as the peculiar province of male brutality and torture inflicted by other males. (204)

Spillers, along with a number of other scholars, was addressing white feminism while at the same time addressing an assault disguised as aid from scholars. (This was a concern for other contemporary essayists, including Sylvia Wynter and, more broadly, Kimberle Williams Crenshaw.)

What Spillers really contributes, therefore, is a theory of violence. "Mama's Baby" tells the story of a special type of violence, violence with the capacity to obliterate gender

among Black people and eliminate our capacity to surrogate meanings—to one another, but also in the sense of a general powerlessness. The violence of the Middle Passage cut down to our very capacity to name. What's more, this violence wasn't just a discrete, diachronic event of violence. This violence is a grammar, underwriting not merely the sociopolitical but also the Symbolic order of the New World. For Spillers, in other words, the extent of violence of the Middle Passage is not to be measured in terms of the sheer physical and social impacts of slavery but in its depth and staying power at the level of naming. Spillers reminds us that the violence penetrates beyond the body, community, and culture, even to the very deep level of semiotics, the rebar of the Symbolic order and the location where the very meanings of things like the body, the family, and gender are negotiated and contested.

The violence, in other words, is paradigmatic. But because it is paradigmatic, it also includes and intervenes into the syntagmatic, the metonymic function scaled up to the level of the social, and "'transfers' from one generation to another, finding its various symbolic substitutions in an efficacy of meanings that repeat the initiating moments" (204). This theoretical insight has not been taken up as it bears on the performance studies concepts of performativity and surrogation and the ways we use those concepts to read Black performance. I am asking, what is an ethical critique of Black performance?

The violence that creates blackness is "vestibular" to the house of culture. The Black is kept forever in the waiting room through which nonblacks pass freely. Blackness shows up with especial force because it indexes the violence that it takes to (un)make a Name of the Father. It is important to identify the violent impact that antiblackness has on the order of naming, and the ways in which that unique mode of violence forms the base of civil and political society. Just as Spillers makes her case by exposing a structural homology between Moynihan's report and several texts, separated by 100 years, that were concerned with blackness and genealogy, or its absence, my work here locates such a homology between Jones' *Corregidora* and freedmen's primers brought to aid southern Blacks early in Reconstruction advanced normative ideas about Black family structure at an important psychoanalytic moment in the history of Black people.

The Name of the Father as the capacity of naming has been destroyed for others. Consider, for example, the productive thesis of a feminist literary theorist, Juliet Flower MacCannell (MacCannell) 5). Studying literary texts, MacCannell claims that the Symbolic structural position of the Name of the Father was displaced in the 20th century by what she calls the Regime of the Brother. MacCannell shows that the "Father" is not merely one who dominates mercilessly, but also one who protects. Again, the Symbolic Father implies both power and responsibility. The power of fixing meaning also implies the power of protecting meaning and bodies. But, for MacCannell, the "Brother" has now displaced the "Father." Previously, the figure of the brother had lurked in the shadow of the father and mother in European psychoanalytic insights about the modern world, appearing in Lacan's theories of imagos and the relation of sibling imagos to aggressivity and Freud's mythic account in *Moses and Monotheism* of how Moses was murdered by his sons. The Father

was, ostensibly, a steward of not only the family but, scaling upward, of the community and the Symbolic Order itself. It's not that the position of the Symbolic Father was occupied by sagely prophets; those performing the roles elaborated from that structural position regularly abused their power and made irresponsible decisions. But those were what we might call *irresponsible* fathers. What they did was called *abuse*. Their actions were transgressive of, rather than exemplary of, the role performed by the Father. With brothers, it's just what you expect. The Symbolic Brother, what emerges in the wake of patriarchy, is another variety of male dominance in which the leaders have all the power of the Symbolic Father but none of his responsibility. The reckless stockbroker might exemplify the Brother today. Feeling no ethical imperative to protect, and prohibiting only insofar as it serves his own interests, the Brother's greedy use of his power causes him to ruin the world economy—but he's got his.

The problem the Brother concept raises for the Name of the Father is devastating. The Symbolic Father within Lacan is not simply a position of power, but also one of responsibility. The Father stabilizes the concepts of meaning—and hence naming—and enables them to be performative iterations within the Symbolic order. The type of social order that is anchored in the Symbolic Brother's performance of his role lacks stability.

But this same thing becomes a problem for MacCannell's historicizing of the displacing of the Name of the Father with the Regime of the Brother. In short, her stunning and underappreciated thesis is belated in its accounting of things to which Black thought has long had access. Black folks have a psychoanalytic framework that emerges from our vernacular traditions. Historicizing this displacement to the 20th century assumes that the "Father" hasn't already been the "Brother." But the white has never been the "Name of the Father" in relation to Black people because she or he has never fulfilled the responsibilities of either the protector of meanings (the semiotic function or guaranteeing meaning) or bodies (the familial function).

Nor does "brother" get at the unaccountable figure, say, of the drunken Union soldier in Morrison's *Song of Solomon* who gives the main character his family name: Dead. This is different from saying that the master narrative was always a myth. It is saying that the Master, as a subject position, was never the Name of the Father to Black people. Even those who performed the Name of the Father well for everyone else, Black people always saw that a different side could emerge at any time. Even if it never did, it could, and there would be no consequence because it would rarely be considered anything but a legitimate use of property. Thomas Jefferson, the quintessential Founding Father, was a rapist and torturer to the Black people around him. The Master, Father, and Brother were always already something else in relation to Black people.

That is why Gayl Jones makes this capacity to name such an important part of the world of Corregidora's Black people. Under the paradigmatic auspices of slavery and its afterlife, the one who names has the power to do anything at all and no concomitant responsibility to protect the Black body. He or she is literally capable of anything in relation to Black people. Revisiting the trauma of her grandfather, the white slave master

who is also her great-grandfather, she dreams the following phrase: "Those who have fucked their daughters would not hesitate to fuck their own mothers" (77). The Motherfucker is the father who hands down a name of dispossession, a legacy of rout, and provides no protection to the daughter or son who inherits it.

This different cultural text actually reconfigures, in historically ordained discourse, certain representational potentialities for African-Americans: 1) motherhood as female blood-rite is outraged, is denied, at the very same time that it becomes the founding term of a human and social enactment; 2) a dual fatherhood is set in motion, comprised of the African father's banished name and body and the captor father's mocking presence. In this play of paradox, only the female stands in the flesh, both mother and mother-dispossessed. This problematizing of gender places her, in my view, out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject

Oedipus is important to the discussion of leadership, and that is one way that I will discuss leadership. The name of the father in Black thought is an always already outraged thing because Black subjects are not fundamentally created as subjects—not introduced to the Symbolic order-- as interlocutors for the attention of the mother. The Black mother is not even the Mother. She, like the Black father, is the fucked one. Spillers points us to the absence of the Symbolic Father among Black people. The Master is the closest thing to the Father in the Lacanian sense, and so is the Missus: Together, they are the (white) Father.

But only in relation to white people. In relation to Black people, they are not the Fathers in the Symbolic sense. This is because, in relation to Black people, the (white) Father possesses all of the power but none of the responsibility of the (white) Symbolic Father in relation to the white subject. In relation to the Black, the one whom Lacan calls the Symbolic Father sits on the same ground as the Mother and, in relation to Black people, is the Symbolic Motherfucker. He/she fucks the mother.

(Note: Just as Lacan is not particularly concerned about the gender of she or he who can occupy the position of the Symbolic Father, nor are there gender distinctions on who can occupy the position of the Motherfucker. Spillers, indeed, points to Linda Brent's missus as a figure who has the power to invade the dreamspace of Brent, the bedroom. Although there may be internecine "battles between the (white) sexes" as to who gets to fuck the Black more or when they get to do it, there are no gender limits on who may fuck. Nor does the "Mother" in Motherfucker mean that Black women are the only ones getting fucked, or even the ones always and everywhere getting most fucked. In the subject formation of Black people, all are vulnerable to getting fucked because Black people themselves are fucked at the level of the Symbolic order.)

The Motherfucker is not a new figure on the psychoanalytic landscape—only on the white psychoanalytic landscape. Like Eldridge Cleaver's concept of "the Hypermasculine Menial," the Motherfucker resides in the nuances of both Fanonian and Spillerian writing, but it is central to Black subject formation that its occurrence in the Black vernacular—among folks who do not know and might never need to know the work

of Freud—because, as Spillers says, Black gender roles are "outraged" under the brutal and pervasive violence of slavery. And although the term "motherfucker" did not originate in Black discourse, its usage has largely become accountable to Black people. The prevalence of its usage among Black people suggests that a kind of psychoanalytic discourse, necessary to surviving slavery and the ravages of Black life in an antiblack world, preceded Freud's concept of Oedipus.

Paradigmatically speaking, white people are the Name of the Father/Motherfuckers in relation to Black people. The Motherfucker is the elusive, "mocking" (Spillers), yet powerful presence among Black people.

As we shall see, Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* posits a theory of what this violence is, helping us to understand what kind of violence it takes to create a paradigm through the incestuous position of the Father-as-Brother. This paradigm has an ethical performativity. Not only does it have the power to make itself *true*, but it also has the power to make itself *right*. And there was no reason to expect that the white father wasn't also the grandfather or brother concurrently with being the father. In relation to Black people, the paradigmatic figure of whites, both male and female, comes to be known in the vernacular of Black people in the United States as the *Motherfucker*. If the world as human subjects experience it is a world structured by the Symbolic order of the Father, the world as Black subjects experience it is one in which the incest taboos that protect white children are nonexistent for Black children. In the world as human subjects experience it, forcible sex is rape, a crime or at least a violent and tragic transgression; in the world as Black subjects experience it, forcible sex is another variety of the legitimate use of property, another technology to be used for any purpose, or none at all. Subjects' lives are mourned when lost. Black lives are not considered lives. Black subjectivity is structured around this possibility that we are available to anything at any time.

Slavery, in other words, didn't destroy the Black family so much as render it available to any usage whatever, like the Black body itself. Symbolic violence is usually considered a lesser kind of violence, so I will not use that term here. But I want to highlight Spillers' insight that the violence occurs and impacts at the level of the Symbolic order. Once you can do absolute violence to a body as such, the grammar is set. It structures the semiotic field of the Symbolic order. You don't even need to make clear the basis on which that violence exists: antiblack violence is gratuitous. From that base, you can make a world. The individual speech-acts themselves do not really matter. Everything you do stays within that paradigm. And you don't need to feel accountable to the people you use.

Freedmen's Primers and the Name of the Father

During the Civil War and in its immediate aftermath, northern freedman's aid organizations and workers (forerunners of social work NGOs and nonprofits) attempted to inculcate Black freed families with normatively white notions of gender performance. They introduced this normativity in many ways, including working with Union regional

commands and later Freedman's Bureau supervisors to craft contracts between planters and freed workers, regulating working conditions (especially modes of discipline and rates of pay), and adjudicating disputes between planters and freed workers. Outside of their roles as teachers and aid distributors, however, freedman's aid workers were charged with shaping performances of gender among freed families. "One of the more important extracurricular activities of the missionary teachers," wrote historian Willie Lee Rose in *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment*, "was the effort to regularize Negro family life, to make it conform to the accepted pattern" (Rose). Naming certain gender performances and family formations as legitimate and others as illegitimate was a primary task the freedman's aid organizations took on themselves in relation to this "new-born race"—freed Black people.

Gender imagoes are often subtle signifiers of racial position. This is no exception in the work of freedmen's aid groups charged with the establishment and regulation of gender roles among Black people in the early days of Emancipation. Scholars often fail to mention that some groups, considered more racially liberal by modern scholars, often shared similar views about gender with other, less racially liberal groups. Furthermore, even racially liberal, secular organizations believed that only northern, bourgeois Whites' ideas of family would preserve the freed people in their attempts to gain full freedom and self-sufficiency. The groups hoped that thorough inculcating freed families with these performances, they would make obedient people out of southern African Americans. There is a deeply gendered meaning to the "romantic racialism" that is reflected in the texts these freedmen's aid groups used. These texts called for whites to shape Black gender roles, repairing the damage slavery had done. In this view, white men and women—or Blacks well-versed in the subjects and values northern freedmen's aid workers were to teach-- were to tell Black men and women how to carry out their gendered divisions of labor.

An examination of several months of the papers from 1864 to 1866 as well as several books of instruction written for the freedmen shows the Victorian family performance the freedmen's aid workers held about legal marriage, female and male roles, adultery, and family authority, family practice of religion, family stability. Because the freedmen were frequently illiterate, the authors often tended to convey ideas in illustrations as well as written words, with the occasional insertion of an ungrammatical phrase intended to approximate Black English (e.g., "My friend, you was once a slave."[2]). The illustrations and choice of language were intended to connect the freedmen with the moral content of the authors. But the authors recognized that their audience held different cultural values, and even spoke a different dialect of English. They believed that they could bridge these cultural differences, and tried to convey throughout the text a genuine, if highly paternalistic, sense of friendship and familiarity. The American Tract Society's Isaac Brinckerhoff, for example, described himself as talking "as plainly as though you were my own brother."

A picture in Brinckerhoff's 1864 *Advice to Freedmen* shows the expanded role the father was expected to play in the free Black family. This illustration concerns the Black father's role as provider. But it also sends the message that the Black father was not just one of several significant adults in the Black family, but the most important individual in the Black family. This, in the minds of the editors, was seen as a departure from their previous family organization under slavery in which the provider was the master and the adults of the household were his dependent workers, the father having no special rights or responsibilities. The Black father is represented as *the* central figure by his size in the illustration and position in the foreground, while other people are made to appear more peripheral, an elderly grandfather holding a baby on his lap, and a woman who seems to be the wife, standing opposite the threshold to the family cabin with a kerchief on her head. This drawing is quite similar to Victorian ones which show fathers returning home at the end of the day. In this drawing, the father is holding the hand of a younger daughter, and an older daughter is walking alongside. The provider role is signified by the fact that he is heading towards the house carrying nine ears of corn on his shoulder, certainly enough corn so that every member of the family will have enough to eat. This shoeless father is portrayed as poor but happy, and his shoeless older daughter looks excitedly up at the father.**[3]**

Isaac Brinckerhoff's *Advice to Freedmen* contains a section with the simple heading "Provide for your Family." A more detailed reading of his three paragraphs of advice, taken in the context of the military occupation of the South at the time this was published (1864), suggests that he believed that in the short run, Black families actually needed to rely on the labor of women and children. Though not ideal, this was preferable to dependence on charity. He wrote: "The father, mother, and children together have toiled the livelong day. At present this cannot be changed."[4] Brinckerhoff believed that the continued labor of Black women and children was necessary only in the short-term. This was possibly because of the military expediency of maintaining the southern economy, and putting it to work for the Union, but he also feared that without such labor, Black families would have been dependent upon charity and rations. Brinckerhoff believed that to rely on the support of government and private charity while having "the opportunity to raise your own crops, or to earn your own bread," was immoral, proving "that you are not of the right spirit."[5]

The gender division of labor could, however, be immediately implemented through education. An illustration from *The Freedman* showed that the proper home instruction in reading required a strict gender division of labor, with the father as the head of the household. The illustration seems to suggest that educating his family is a proper role of the father, especially educating his older sons. This was the banner headline of *The Freedman* throughout its existence. It reveals the editors' attitudes toward the proper position of paternal authority in the Black family and toward the father's role in educating his wife and children. It shows two children, one older boy, seated at a table, and a younger child, holding onto the mother's dress, while she sews. The table has a tablecloth.

The father is shown sitting upright, with upright posture, reading what appears to be the Bible to his wife and older son. The older son is looking intently at the father, sitting close to him, and listening to the father as he reads. The illustration shows that the father is not merely the breadwinner in the black family, but also the main instructor of children, especially his sons. The wife, by contrast, is not shown reading, because she is occupied with sewing, and with care of the younger child. The father is wearing formal dress, indicating that even at the family table, he is observing social rules. Similarly, the mother is wearing a long dress, and one which many Victorian White women might have worn. To the left of the family in this banner one sees the sun rising on an open Bible, which is resting on an American flag. Underneath the Bible is a statement, "The Truth shall make you free."

In Helen Brown's fictional account of freed families' ascent from slavery to freedom,[6] John Freeman, the father of a small freed family, is the most knowledgeable of all the people in his family, and, indeed, of all the Black people in his town. It is clear that Brown's depiction of him as an ideal Black man turns on his reasonableness and wisdom, partly a result of his own intelligence and partly a result of his willingness to listen to the advice of northern Whites.

The truth of the male role was being the breadwinner. There was more to it than simply being a provider, but that was its central component. From the provider role came all that made the family function properly as an organic, loving unit of support, spiritual guidance, and economic production. It is difficult to tell which of these family functions was generally held to be more important by the freedmen's aid workers. But, clearly, it was the role of the husband/father that would make all of them possible, not just in the short-term, but thenceforth.

An article in the *Freedmen's Journal* entitled "A Father's Care" further drives home the centrality of the ideal father. He made money so that it would be possible to live in a home, instructed the mother on what to buy, and was a kind companion to the children. The article dramatized the lengths to which the father should go in carrying out his duties, especially the work he must do "while the cold, rain, and sleet beat upon his face."[7] Still another article urged fathers to save money by appealing to their positions as "heads of families. The authors attempt to remind Black fathers that their power carries great responsibility, for "We have families to rear, educate, and start in life; and we may be infirm in our declining years." But it also appears undesirable to be dependent in old age ("a burthen to others"). The article concluded by revealing a connection made in the minds of the authors: a dutiful father is a dutiful citizen ("good fathers and good citizens").[8] Here, then, are three themes found commonly in the writings: freedom is power (for men) and responsibility; dependency is undesirable; and, in fulfilling one's family role, one is discharging some of the duties of citizenship.

To be dependent was to be "unmanly," for freedom, once it was obtained, was maintained only by hard work. It was acceptable to take charity for a short time to help oneself and one's family while all family members found gainful employment, but then it

was time to get on with the work of being a man, providing for one's family, and standing as a moral model and authority. On many occasions, the ATS writers chastised Black fathers against the sin of dependency. This is an important and recurring message primarily because it fit their long-term gender performance for men but also because it made things easier for the aid organizations in the short-term. If they could encourage people not to lean on them for help by associating positive gender performances with independence, they could save themselves some effort. In the first issue of the *Freedmen's Journal*, for example, the editors encouraged freedmen to buy the paper for their families (instead of accepting it gratis) by saying that they "honor that manly independence" which would make not paying for a subscription unconscionable.[9] Again, in listing reasons why it is good to work, the editors say, in reason number 5: "Because without labor, we must either sta[r]ve or beg, or be dependent on others for our support; and it is unmanly to do either, when able to take care of ourselves."[10] Brinckerhoff's *Advice* also discouraged ignorance and illiteracy because they would keep the freedman dependent on others, some of whom would be "dishonest people."[11] Much of Brinckerhoff's advice, especially, seems rooted in the expedience that the situation of freed families in the postwar South would demand. Thus, clearly, attempting to teach an aversion to charity also served the aid organizations' desire to be cost-efficient, though the records reviewed here do not suggest that expedience was the sole or primary motivation for teaching this.

The freedmen's aid workers taught that charity was temporary until the freedmen learned what it took to take care of a family and carry out the duties of manhood. Men were the ones who especially, the aid workers believed, had to internalize this performance and hold their families to it. And it was thus to the men that this message was most fully conveyed. If a leader had to be designated who would ease the work of creating a "new-born" race, it would be to the Black man that the power of leading was granted.

Upon receiving these performances from White northerners, Black men were then to make sure that their wives and children obeyed it. This continually recurring theme is what we may call the downward flow of patriarchy, and it was an important part of the overall message that the Black father/husband was to learn. The ATS writers tried to make it clear to Black fathers/husbands that their teachings were for the good of the freed people and in the name of Jesus. The father would take their word from there, enforcing it within his domain of the family by educating them, allowing them to be educated by Whites, providing for them, and directing them in their duties. He was to be master of his own household, of all the people in it, and of himself, while accepting the tutelage of Whites on how to be a man (in their perception). A good example of this performance is John Freeman, in Helen Brown's fiction book, who chastises his wife, Clarissa, "with a grave fatherly manner" for not having more faith that God will see to it that they have food on their table. And, in other places in the book, anytime Clarissa reprimands her children or her peers, her authority to do so seemingly derives either from her reference to "the way of white folks" or to her husband, John. [12]

Again, there was not just gender performance, but also, and more fundamentally, a kind of structural expediency at work here. The freedmen's aid workers framed their messages of proper behavior in terms of power and manhood in particular because they were also attempting to shape freedmen to be workers, soldiers, and moral models by linking these things to an intangible goal that had been impossible for them to aspire to under slavery. This would make for a group of good citizens who were "patient," "sober," "industrious," and content with all of the power they had within their domain of property. Indeed, a "blessing of freedom," and a reason they should continue to strive to have property was that property was an element of their manhood, something in this world that would give them a domain over which to rule.[13] Waterbury drove this point home in saying, with his typical minimalism of expectations, "Get a house, then, as soon as you can; no matter how small or how poor it is." It is "where [a freedman] can have his family to himself and train his children to good morals and religion." "Move your family into it, and begin to live as one who is responsible to God, and who is determined to show that slavery has not robbed him of all his manhood."[14]

The proximity of this model for family relations to the model for government-citizen relations was apparently intentional, and on several occasions, the editors of the *Freedmen's Journal* explicitly made the analogy, in explaining the functions of government to the freedmen, of family as the man's kingdom. A man tells his son that he will flog him if the boy tells a lie; "In such a case, the father makes a law," acting as the legislature. To hear accusations, evidence, and determine whether or not the son has lied ("to judge the case"), the father acts as the judiciary. "Finally, the father gets a stick and punishes the liar; that is, he executes the law."[15] A similar analogy also applied when the editors explained the concept of state government. "When a boy goes to school, he obeys his teacher; that is being under the teacher's laws. When he is at home, he obeys his father; that is being under his father's set of laws."[16]

While acknowledging that Black men had come a long way from slavery, the editors suggested that they could yet be taken further as Whites came to understand and be sympathetic to the causes of their inferiority. In a *Freedmen's Journal* article entitled "True Men," Rev. H. M. Dexter stated that Blacks had proven themselves to be men on the field of battle, even if "humble in culture, in most cases (what should we be if our grandfathers had been Bushmen in Ethiopia, and we had been through their slave experience?) and it may be, with a low average of some manly qualities." He concluded by saying that not only should Black men be trusted, but also "trained to take care of themselves."[17]

That the National Freedmen's Relief Association encouraged Black men's service in the military and sought to acquire land for them also reveals the organization's activist orientation. Still the NFRA held to the same kind of "romantic racialist" notions of Black men as did the ATS. Piquette spoke of the "undue deference" absent from freedmen's behavior since their education by the freedmen's aid workers, but this should not be taken to mean that the NFRA workers did not want any racial deference in their short-term

dealings with African American southerners. Indeed, there is a constant undertone of Blacks as ignorant and in desperate need of the guidance of Whites. An Edisto, SC, correspondent argued,

> The Northern [White] freeman is more intelligent, and consequently knows better how to take the advantage to make his work easier, and to husband his strength. But is the colored freeman, who labors just as hard, to be condemned for his ignorance?… The negro… has shown an honest and fixed purpose to acquire knowledge and improve…**[18]**

The ideal short-term relationship was analogized to the parent-child relationship. The aid workers saw their duty to be leading freed people to a "higher social life," which would be closer to that of the White performance.[19] A poem illustrated the sentiment of the freedman who said "I am Black, but oh my soul is white."[20] One NFRA worker, Esther Hill Hawkes, referred to the freed people she taught as "*four months old* (for it is scarcely that time since they were born into freedom."[21] A British correspondent sees the freedmen as "the infant" that might prevent "a divorce" between the British and Americans. "[T]he great Anglo-Saxon family may yet be united by mutual effort for the new-born race crying for help."[22] Whites saw themselves as nurturers of this "new-born race"; they favorably quoted the "undue deference" which Blacks paid them because they wanted to encourage support for their cause by showing that all of the "Auntie Ann"s and "Uncle Lyle"s were most grateful for the efforts being made to "advance" them "socially, educationally, and politically."[23]. Teacher Mary E. Jones quoted with pride a prayer that her deferential students said for her, commenting,

> Such thanksgivings rendered for prayers heard and answered, and blessings implored upon the teachers "who have come all de way from de far Norf to teach us poor ignorant creatures," and upon "all de good men of de Norf who have took pity on us." Help is sought in the preparation of their lessons: "For thou knowest most righteous Master, our heads so thick we can' learn less thou help us."… We can but feel encouraged and greatly strengthened by these assurances.**[24]**

Also, as quoted above, even the message of uplift and self-sufficiency communicated some amount of demand for racial deference. NFRA resolutions supported giving Blacks land under the supervision of "white emigrants from the North." The S.C. superintendent wanted the NFRA to train more Black teachers, but saw them best being positioned subordinate to Whites. Blacks (men and women) should be teachers, as long as Whites were the superintendents. (As with the ATS writings, there are also often the references to Black adults as "auntie" and "uncle.") In another sense, the military could be seen as a way of molding Black men into the image of men most suited to the White northerners' long-term plans for the South. Black self-sufficiency was thus the long-term goal. In the short-run, it would require them to defer authority to the White aid workers. Only in doing so could they get the things which would make them men.

The image of boys becoming men also served as the model that governed the guidance of White men towards Black men. As was the case with ATS writings addressed

to Black boys, Black men were given ideal models of manhood in the form of White males and told that in following their examples, Black men could grow towards "the highest style of manhood." Indeed, ATS writers often referred to Blacks as children who were growing into the adulthood of freedom, an adulthood which, for Black men, was signified by White manhood. "We have set you free from the slavery which kept you from becoming a man," the message went, "and now you must follow our lead" in order to develop, as Brinckerhoff put it, the "God-given manhood within," in order "to make you happy, prosperous, and useful." He continued, "I hope, with God's blessing, to aid you in this development of your manhood."[25]

The racial deference message demanded that the Black man's development of manhood should not lead him to eschew the ostensibly superior advice and guidance of his White mentors. The Black man was also supposed to recognize his position ("station") in a world full of masters, and to exercise due deference to his "social betters." This included anyone who was from the North for the purposes of guiding the freedmen, people of a superior culture. They were in their (higher) "stations" for the purposes of helping him learn to fulfill his manly duties. This was true especially for the short-term for it was understood that Black men did not know how to fulfill these duties and thus needed to be taught. But, like boys under the tutelage of men, they could not be taught if they were not humble.

There was, for instance, Lieutenant Hall who was John Freeman's guide, a model of northern manhood, and a dutiful son. The lieutenant first appears as the man who gives John his name, after John rejects the slave name Lenox.[26] John's moments alone are often spent thinking about nothing more than how to be more "like white folks," the lieutenant probably being one of his best guides.[27] Lieutenant Hall later is the one who advises John to begin evening prayers with his family. The lieutenant later encourages some young men to quit smoking and commends one of them for marrying and saving up money at the prompting of Miss Horton, the home-visiting schoolteacher. And his talk to Prince, John's son-in-law, is supposed to have shown "him into a better way," and "saved him from falling into snares and temptations which were already spread for him."[28] Author Helen Brown gives a brief biography of her Lieutenant Hall. A redeemed sinner, he promised his mother on her deathbed that he would become a Christian and commence "preaching the gospel to the benighted Africans." His "kind, yet firm" paternal presence is a linchpin in the "prosperity" of the freed people, in "preserving order, instructing, counseling, and cheering the freedmen," old and young alike "for [their] own good." He admonishes those who complain to be aware "that those who get along the best are those who obey rules and try to do right."[29] His example is to be noted because it was a figure that Brown made crucial to her ideal of freed people's progress. Without Lieutenant Hall's presence (we learn his first name, Henry, only when his mother addresses him), John's family would not share the evening prayer, John's daughter would have left her husband for another man, Prince would have eventually (it is explicitly suggested) committed some crime that would have gotten him imprisoned, and John (and therefore

his family too) would have no last name. From Lieutenant Hall, all of these things are possible, particularly because John is humble enough to accept the wisdom of his role model.

Even good long-term role models for honesty, piety, and the provider/protector role were also used to convey the short-term lessons of obedience, patience, humility, and, above all, industrious labor. Abraham Lincoln was a useful model of a father, learned, "pious," and "temperance" man, and wise and honest leader, and he certainly could have been presented as the ultimate example of the long-term performance of upward mobility. Yet, instead, by similar yet slightly more manipulative logic, the editors chose to emphasize his acceptance of being of working class origins. "His father was a poor man," Lincoln always "had to work hard for a living," "was never ashamed to work," and "did not give up working when he came to be a man." The editors' purpose was to "Let the freedmen think of these things, and imitate his example." The Great Emancipator's favorite poem, it was taught, started out "Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?" [30] Knowing how highly African Americans held Lincoln, the editors turned his memory into an icon of manhood, work ethic, and respect for being a laborer. In an engraving of Lincoln, he sits with a book, perhaps the Bible, in his lap while his son "Tad" stands next to him reading. The necessity of education to being a good father was thus another example to take from Lincoln, and an important one at that. But every message is always related in some way back to work. Of all the messages the ATS writers could have gleaned from Abraham Lincoln, they preferred to the ones that highlight him as a worker contented with his position. His rise to the presidency seems more of an afterthought. They did not dare imply that a Black man could become president, of course, but they did not even emphasize the possibility of a rise beyond working class existence.

Even when conveying messages about self-respect or when giving news about Black men's struggles for the franchise, ATS writers loaded their examples for Black men with a reinforcement of the message of humility to White authority. "A Manly Petition" from a convention of Virginia men is quoted to emphasize a demand for rights made in a manner respectful of and not threatening to White authority. These Black men were protesting the fact that they couldn't vote. Yet were courteously reminding their superiors that they were "disposed to cultivate friendly relations," and had no intentions of leaving the state, saying that "The 'land of the South, the clime of the sun' is the appropriate home of our race."[31] A letter to President Andrew Johnson from men of North Carolina assures Johnson that their "humbly"-made demand for the vote is made because "we have become freemen, and have been permitted the honor of being soldiers," and thus "begin to feel that we are men." Indeed, the message is more repetitive of reassurances that "in all future time we and our sons will be ready to defend it [liberty] by our blood" than of any demand for rights.[32] Yet, they are elsewhere reminded "Be patient," to "Remember that it is Godlike to suffer meekly."[33]

The reminder also came when superiors referred to them, as with Justice Salmon Chase's reminder to "Show that you will be honest, temperate, industrious, and faithful in

your employments; that you are ready to do honest work for honest wages," or Horace Greeley's reminder to "Be hopeful... patient… peaceful… diligent… Respect yourselves…[and] Stay where you belong."[34] To not heed this admonishment was "prideful." Even "Self-respect," a "part of true manliness," "is not pride," for "Pride is thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think."

Thus, implicit to the message about manhood was a message about where one's patriarchal authority stopped and who one's social "betters" were. Black men were to strive to be men, but not in a way that would threaten White authorities—not through violence, and not by migrating north. An important aspect of manhood was Christianity ("The highest style of man is a true Christian"[35]), and, in accordance with the ATS writers' reading of the Bible, to be Christian it was important to be humble to those above one's station. Another article is addressed to all freed people to take care of their elder parents, but later goes on to talk about "how happy the world would be" if all people observed their due order of deference to authority. "Indeed," it continues, "respect for those who are older, or superior to us in the relations of life, is enjoined," in the Bible, "whether they are our parents or not." This front-page article emphasizes the point, seemingly even for freed men, holding up the hope that if "those of us who are older practised [sic] due submission to those who are our superiors in worth, in station, in authority; if we all loved and followed the teachings of those who are set over us in the Lord, so far as their instructions agree with his Holy Word,-- this earth would be an Eden, and God in very deed would dwell with men."[36] Thus, even a man, if he is a self-respecting Christian man, recognizes his place in the social chain of command-- above his wife and children, equal to his fellow men, and under the temporary tutelage and control of northern aid workers and officers. And even "with all this..."—all of these attributes of manhood which freedom bestows upon him—"...he is humble."[37]

The man's humility before White authority was to influence the way in which Black families were formed or confirmed in marriage as well. Men were expected immediately to see the advantages of having their marriages recognized by the state and regulated under its laws in humble and subordinate obedience to the counsels of their White northern "friends" and superiors. The aid workers wanted to show that the root cause of the freed people's "abnormal" sexual habits lay in slavery's encouragement of sex outside of marriage, not any inherent immorality. Writing about women's transition from slave to free marriage, historian Leslie Schwalm provides several explanations of the reasons missionaries had for attempting to shape the values of the African American family in this era. They saw stable marriage as essential to an organized society and viewed traditional slave marriages as invitations to immorality. Stability depended on maintaining a certain gender hierarchy enforced by law and religion. They were concerned that the illegitimacy, cohabitation, and infidelity, encouraged during slavery, would create a disorderly South. Schwalm notes, "Civil marriage regulated female sexuality and ordered the family in ways that many Northern middle-class and elite whites considered to be essential to social stability and civilization itself."[38]

An example can be seen in Brown's John Freeman who asks Clarissa to marry him, after conferring with another freedman, as part of his overall desire to be like Whites and to follow the "superior" example they set for him. Says Brown, in part of the "Marriage" chapter which leads up to his betrothal to Clarissa,

John was happy, too, in his conscious integrity. A purpose to do right as far as he knew how animated him daily, and the eager desire to rise above the degraded sphere in which he had always existed, to live and think, learn and do "like white folks," was never for a moment abated, Straight on he looked and walked, forward and upward to perfect freedom. Every good custom of the white people, which came to his knowledge, inspired within him the ambition to go and do likewise; and while he was humble and respectful as a subordinate, he was eager to be and do all that would make him a true man. He certainly had the right idea of manhood and liberty.[39]

An illustration in the *Freedmen's Journal* of a freed couple being married by a White minister conveys much more than simply the belief that freed men and women should legally marry. The White minister is standing in front of the couple. There are only three people in the drawing--no other family or community members are present. The bride is not wearing a white dress, and the couple appears to be humble, even poor. Even the text indicates that there should be witnesses at a marriage. So why does this illustration not show them present? It is emphasizing the couple and not the community. The prior illustration I have mentioned reduced the extended families' importance by reducing their size; in this illustration, they are invisible. The text talks about a minister marrying the couple and the illustration shows that it is a White minister. It does not seem to require that Blacks must be married by a White minister. But, again, the recurrence of the White superior and guide leading the way for Black freed people in the formation of normative gender categories is noteworthy.

In many other places, the ATS writers told the freed people that their marriages were to resemble Whites' marriages and were to be contracted according to the law instead of slave custom. M. French in the *Freedmen's Journal* wrote, "The marriage relation among you must be as sacred as among the whites."[40] The male's position as provider is repeatedly emphasized in ATS writings about marriage. Helen Brown, author of the "A Wedding" article, while calling for "a man and his wife to love one another" and to "give up their own will and wishes to please one another" also says that a man must, by law, "support his wife, and children if he have any, to the best of his ability." She holds up the man as one of the moral leaders of the family as well, saying, "let us make each of our families like a little church. Let the father and mother be the priests of the household..."[41] These authors apparently believed that the present practices of freed families did not comport with this performance of monogamy, cooperation, and male providership, and held up the White model as preferable.

Brinckerhoff admonishes Black couples to be married and to "Guard the Family Relation," or risk being considered "not worthy of being freemen."[42] Brown's John Freeman gets legally married not just because he wants to confirm the marriage vow with

his wife of many years, but also because "White folks always gets married with the book and the minister and a heap of ceremony like... Now lets you and I do that way, and begin all over new, like free folks." It is significant to observe that John Freeman learns about the necessity for marriage vow from another freedman, thus indicating that the freedmen's aid workers were aware that they were not the only source of information. It seems logical that the ATS writers hoped that Blacks would share the "ways of White folks" with each other, a theme we see repeated in Brown's writings.[43] Miss Horton, the aid worker who visits the Freeman household, even prepares a cake following their wedding, saying to Mrs. Freeman that "it is our custom always to have a wedding-cake."[44] Though not directly related to the position of men in the marriage, we can still see that the overall imperative was that freed people would adopt many of the White wedding rituals, even if they could not afford nice dresses and suits. From the outset of the marriage, Black families were to come as close to the White performance of marriage as possible. Of special importance to this performance was the man's position in the marriage.

Thus we see that the writings of the ATS suggest that the organization's ideas about the performance of manhood regarded Black men as primary figures in the freed household. Whether serving as soldiers to provide for their families, bringing home the food for the wife/mother to cook, teaching his children to read, or keeping spirits high among family members during times of trouble, the father was the linchpin holding together the family. John Freeman seemed to have a knack for this fatherhood role from the beginning, as Brown shows early in the book that the family is already run by John, even before the intervention and moralizing of White northerners.

Yet, even he was not expected to be able to fulfill this providership/leadership performance immediately. Just as he had to shape the behavior of his wife and children, the northern aid workers had to shape his behavior. He had first to make arrangements for his family name from the lieutenant, and then a job as arranged by the White Union general. He was to be trained by White leadership figures in how to discharge the duties of being a free man, but only if he was humble enough before the White northerners to accept their authority. And, if he worked hard enough, kept his faith, guided his family prudently, listened to his superiors, saved his money, and acquired his own property, he could earn his freedom and his manhood.

Black women, in reality, had been workers as well as homemakers. But after the Civil War, many temporarily reduced their work as field laborers to devote more time to home and children. The importance of the African American family's contract labor in rebuilding the southern economy has been noted by economists Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, in *One Kind of Freedom*, who point out the reduction of the female African American labor force immediately following the Civil War and the impact this had on the southern economy.[45] The federal government recognized that if the southern economy stalled, order would be more difficult to maintain. The main focus of the blame for this drop in production was the African American family, and, in particular, the federal government and the local planters saw the Black woman's removal from the workforce as

a major threat to the economy of the region. The federal government saw its problem as one which could be linked to the control of the African American family. Fathers, husbands, and male children were working in the fields while increasingly the time of mothers, wives, and female children was spent tending to the home life of the African American family. Yet, the absence of half of the family labor force they had known in slavery times was a source of frustration for southern planters and they often appealed to the federal government for help. Georgia planter M.C. Fulton wrote to the Freedmen's Bureau for assistance in coercing the African American family into making its women work in the fields when he wrote:

> Allow me to call your attention to the fact that most of the Freedwomen who have husbands are not at work—never having made any contract at all—Their husbands are at work, while they are as nearly idle as it is possible for them to be, pretending to spin—knit or something that really amounts to nothing for their husbands have to buy them clothing I find from my own hands wishing to buy of me...[46]

Later, Fulton suggested what the Freedmen's Bureau might do about it:

> Now is a very important time in the crop-- & the weather being good & to continue so for the remainder of the year; I think it would be a good thing to put the women to work and all that is necessary to do this in most cases is an order from you directing your agents to require the women to make contracts for the balance of the year...**[47]**

Fulton framed his appeal, as many planters did, in the superegoic language of urgency for economic purposes as well as that of the necessity for order and morality. In places he referred to the fact that these women have families with children who "cannot really be supported honestly," suggesting his impression that they may commit crimes if something was not done.

Thus, economic urgency is the basis of a white demand for performance. The economy was not to be reshaped around the wellbeing and customs of the people who made its very existence possible. Black people had been used for economic gains under one system, and they would be used for economic gains under the new system as well. But they would not be consulted about how to change the game. This kind of demand— that the gender order be reshaped to fit the economy-- can only be made of a people denuded of everything, of those for whom no ontological mooring restricts the kinds of performance that can be demanded. Here we have an illustration of what Spillers might call an "ungendered" subject being gendered at the behest of white demands. Among Black people, there was no ontological resistance against the demands that whites—even northern aid workers, "friends"— had for Black gender formation. After all, the survival and stability of the economy were not determining factors in how southern white women's gendering was to be shaped in the aftermath of such "an event of epic and revolutionary proportions" as the U.S. Civil War. Only Black women were figured as "a toy in the [northern] white man's hands" (Fanon *Black Skin* 140). In some regards, it would seem that the performance of womanhood as espoused by the freedmen's aid workers were at

odds with the policy needs of the military, southern planters, and Freedmen's Bureau. Yet, closer examination reveals that while there were certainly differences between the long-term gender performances expected by the freedmen's aid workers and Black gender performances that accommodated the immediate political economic needs perceived by the planters and the military, the similarities abounded in the short-term: Black women were expected to work alongside their husbands for much, if not all, of the time. The economic needs of the (white) South were sufficient to deny Black women the traits of "true womanhood" just a little longer to stabilize the region, if that day ever came.

Black women, in learning how to be good wives and mothers, had to submit to the same White guidance as men had to. Again, ATS writers illustrated this point with particular characters in their fictional tracts. Two characters in particular of Helen Brown's stand out. Miss Horton in Brown's *John Freeman*, provides Clarissa and other women the guidance necessary to becoming good wives and mothers in the domestic sphere. Her instructions pertained to clean living and proper food preparation. Miss Horton, the Freeman children's teacher, began paying home visits to the family to make sure the children are in school, but, more importantly, came to serve as a moral and domestic guide. She encouraged Clarissa in her attempts to raise the standards of her household, and, in calling her "Mrs. Freeman," endears her for being so "respectful." Miss Horton says that cleanliness is important, and tells her that the way to encourage her children to be clean is by being a little stern, as her mother was.[48]

Why are these women in need of training? The narrator comments that slave habits prevented the women from realizing "the true idea of home," which, we are to presume, is the duty of women.[49] Miss Horton tells another teacher to approach the freed people on very simple terms about being cleaning, cooking, decorating, and washing and folding clothes, as though they were children. Miss Horton works with and teaches these domestic duties to the freed women, saying that obeying her rule of the "right way" of doing things will also make God happy.[50] Clarissa, of course, is ecstatic about the new knowledge of proper domesticity Miss Horton gives her and, like her husband, concludes in several places in the book that she longs to be "like White folks." And, as the book goes on, we can see Clarissa progressing, incorporating more of what Miss Horton teaches her into her daily life. On her wedding day, Clarissa's "womanly instinct" reveals itself in the beauty of her wedding outfit and adornments.[51]

Brown also suggests that consumer items make house a home. One assumes that some of these items may have been hard for many freed people to afford: tablecloth, clock, and caged bird.[52] But clearly, they were to be more long-term goals which would signify the climb of Black families out of slavery and into genteel life. It was the woman's responsibility to decorate the house with these goods. This responsibility was dependent on the fulfillment of the husband/father's role as provider since, as the "Father's Care" article indicated, women could buy the little extras only as long as their husbands provided the necessities.[53] Thus the long-term message that women and children should

be dependent upon the labor of men was present in the ATS writings, whereas no such messages of dependency, except in the very short term, were present for men.

Whereas the John Freeman book, also partially reprinted in the *Freedmen's Journal*, was intended to illustrate proper roles for both men and women, Helen Brown's *Our Home* reprint in the *Freedmen's Journal* described proper roles mainly for women. Miss Allen, in Brown's *Our Home* articles (based on her book) is also a figure of authority to whom the freed women (especially the wife/mother figure Rosetta) look as their role model of domesticity. In Brown's words, Miss Allen is "the good lady who went about as a missionary among the homes of the freed people in that neighborhood, teaching the women how to keep house, manage children, make clothes, and become 'respectable'" (the meaning of which she does not explain).[54] She fits the model of the freedmen's aid worker who inculcates the freedwomen with performances of northern White domesticity.

From the outset, domesticity had been a prime focus of the NFRA aid workers. Indeed, required home visitation by teachers was a central rule of the NFRA, and teachers were also expected to be social workers who would show Black women the way to the White middle class women's performances of womanhood. In the NFRA's "Rules and Regulations," "with regard to the schools and teachers under its auspices," appears the all-important Rule Number Six:

> All teachers, in addition to their regular work, are expected to interest themselves in the moral, religious, and social improvement of the families of their pupils, to visit them in their homes, to instruct the women and girls in sewing and domestic economy, to encourage and take part in religious meetings and Sunday schools, but to avoid all peculiarly denominational or sectarian controversy.[55]

Like the ATS's Miss Horton and similar fictional characters, the NFRA freedmen's teacher was part of the attempt to cultivate in Black women a northern white performance of domesticity. The concerns of the home were to circumscribe woman's contribution to the household economy. The home visits allowed time for aid workers to assess the needs of the families under their charge, to get to know the people with whom they were working, and to instruct women and girls in their houses.

Brown wanted all the Whites in the story, including not just Miss Allen but even the former slaveholders, to represent the positive role models and figures of authority to the freed people so that they would listen and seek to emulate them. Even the planter Mr. Stanly, for instance, responded to a question about his fairness in dealing with his former slaves as free laborers by saying,

> It is always safe… if we desire to see justice done to begin at home and do right ourselves… You will have trials and injuries; but you have also many friends among the wisest and best men of the nation, who are all the time studying and working for your good. Trust them, and trust God, and you will get at last the ripe fruits of liberty. At present, you must be satisfied with the buds and blossoms.[56]

The message the freed people were to get was to be patient and contented with what they had, and, since they could not change much else, they should strive to change

themselves. Upon this declaration, the freed people "cheerfully" commence a new existence, "and now men and women were doing their best to fit up their several homes in true 'freedom style.'" For the short-term, this meant a gradual transition for women from field to domestic labor. This started out with women working the fields for two-thirds time (and thus receiving two-thirds of what their husbands were paid), and being allowed hours on "Wednesdays and Saturdays for their home-duties." The daughters of the planter offered to teach the freed people, which resulted not just in enthusiasm about education among the freed children, but also in "a manifest improvement in cleanliness, manners, and acquirements." According to Brown, other former planters had only to follow this fair and simple "new system" and "all troubles between races, states, and government, would be speedily ended." We cannot tell whether Brown actually believed this to be true, but we can know that in talking about the benefits of this "system," she was not addressing the planters, telling them of the advantages of treating the freed people fairly. Rather, she wrote to the former slaves themselves, for whom the message was that their former masters would soon see the light of this obviously simple solution, and that, in the meantime, the freed people should settle for as much as they could get until their "friends in the North" worked out a better arrangement for them. Moreover, Brown's "system" was premised on a particular set of gender performances in which women accepted less pay and "cheerfully" discharged household duties—which doubtless took up more than the remaining one-third of the time they missed from field labor and for which they were obviously not paid.[57]

Miss Allen expedites this learning process "by going round as a visitor among the freed families, wherever she might be permitted to do so, to instruct the women in their home-duties, the management of their children, the cutting and making of their simple garments, and all the various arts of domestic economy." Miss Allen's patronizing, maternalistic tone comes across clearly to the modern reader in ways that may have sounded less irksome, perhaps more familiar, to the 1866 freed woman who just learned to read. ("You haven't many white pieces [of clothing] I know; but it is better for you to learn to do a thing in the right way.") All the while, first Rosetta ("'Pears as if you Northers know most every thing.'"[58]), then Millie ("'I never did try before to live like white folks; and if nobody tells me, I sha'n't know whether I'm successful or no.'"[59]) stand amazed at Miss Allen's seemingly boundless knowledge. Again, messages of racial deference and superiority come across right alongside those of gender. They clearly demarcate the Black womanhood from which the freed women were to ascend (undesirable) from the White womanhood to which they were to aspire (desirable). Rosetta and Millie, another freed woman under Miss Allen's tutelage, were to serve as a special example of one who wisely follows the counsel of a superior in knowledge in the ways of womanhood. Slavery, it was believed, had destroyed Black womanhood. There was the possibility that Blacks would never achieve what Whites could ("[W]e're just running a race. The white folks have got a long ways ahead,… our legs are old and stiff, and we can't catch quite up,-- perhaps ever."). It was White women like Miss Allen who would allow women like Millie to

achieve as many as possible of "the refinements of life, which had been until now so utterly denied to her people."

Brown writes,

'I wonder when we shall get to have all the nice ways and the convenient things the Yankees have,' said Rosetta, as she resumed her work, and began sorting her clothes according to Miss Allen's directions. 'Oh! some day,' replied Miss Allen; 'but the world wasn't made in a minute, and it takes time to do great things. Work on; try to improve; and little by little, you will come up to the point you desire.'[60]

This deference to the superiority of White northern ways was not seen as racist. Here was the "romantic racialism" of Frederickson, Schwalm, and Butchart. If women, like men, simply humbled themselves to the advice and guidance of Whites, they would become model citizens and create properly ordered (especially along gender lines), self-sufficient family units. It is unclear whether or not the aid workers believed Blacks could ever achieve parity with the Whites, but it is clear that they believed Black ways to be inferior, the remnants either of an immoral slave past or of an unenlightened savage African heritage. The stories bespeak an ideal not of Black southern families and White northerners negotiating together how the transition from slavery to freedom was to be made. Rather, Whites would hold up the long-term performances and tell Blacks whatever steps they could make in the short-run toward those ends. The questions Black women asked their White guides in these articles and stories had to do with "how" and not "why." The freedmen's aid workers believed they were showing the freed women how to be women.

They believed their work could make or break the moral fiber of the freed Black community. For Brown, the mother's role in child-rearing was so important that it could make a child "wicked" or "good," as illustrated by Sam's mother in the John Freeman story.[61] Sam's mother, Prudence, feels badly about her son's arrest, but is comforted and taught good domestic skills by Clarissa, who has, in turn received these right ways of doing things from the northern Whites who she believes know more. Clarissa spreads their wisdom and hope among her fellow "benighted Africans," while Sam's mother hopes that the punishment of White northern authorities will straighten her son out. Sam's mother, Prudence, recognizes that if she has not changed by the time he is released, he will drift back into his old habits. As the domestic habits spread from Clarissa to Prudence, and eventually Sam is released, he sees his mother's changed ways of living and decides to live a better life himself.[62]

The downward flow of patriarchy becomes apparent in the fact that Black women were expected to humbly accept the "superior" advice of White women from the North in the short-term, until they absorbed enough of the northern White middle class performances of domesticity. Wives were also expected to be aware of the extent to which their roles depended—in the short-run and the long-run—on the roles of their husbands, and were commonly depicted showing husbands the same kind of deference they were expected to show to White northerners.

Brown's story of John and Clarissa Freeman, a recently freed family, illustrates this dual form of deference. John is a wise leader of the freed people on his plantation, and, upon the unexpected flight of the owners of the Hilton Head plantation, he leads the other slaves on the plantation to Union lines where he hopes they will be safe from secessionists. Clarissa offers him virtually unquestioning obedience, as he bids her "Come, Clarissa. . . take some of your hoe-cake and bacon, and tie up your duds, and we'll go" to a place that he knows but doesn't tell her until he tells the rest of the family. He then proceeds to describe to them, amid great rejoicing, the rights and obligations of freedom. John admonishes his family to find work at respectable jobs. Clarissa became a cook. On page 12, when Clarissa expressed slight ambiguity about the providence of God, John corrected his wife with a "fatherly manner."[63] Through such occurrences, the author showed that the family was already run by John, even before the intervention and moralizing of White northerners. But throughout the rest of the book, it is clear that Clarissa's deference to John was something Brown would leave untouched as she built her story toward a reflection of her ideal of the freed Black family. Towards the end of the book, Clarissa helped her daughter through marital troubles. The daughter's husband, Prince, is lazy and idle, and she wants to leave him for another man she believes is better. Clarissa urged her not to leave, telling her that being married meant holding on for better or worse, and "if he's worse, why, then ye's got to hold on, and try to make him better." This is the closest Brown comes to coupling the model of Black womanhood with the northern model of women as morally superior, the moral pillars of their families. Moreover, certainly Brown's disparagement of divorce or abandonment is a message for the "Clarissa's daughters" of the South to remain in marriage at all costs. But, more important to this analysis than either of those messages, is the source from which Clarissa traces her authority. Not just here, but also elsewhere in the book, her reprimand seems to be validated by the fact that she refers to her husband's will and that of Miss Horton. Miss Horton confirms Clarissa's admonishment of her daughter, and asks Lt. Hall to have a talk with Prince.[64]

Once again, in the messages of the ATS writings, gender norms are learned through racial deference.. This does not mean that race was more important than gender. To the contrary, I maintain that both were equally important and mutually reinforcing. As historians of Black women's experiences have repeatedly illustrated, Black women were expected to show to their husbands the same type of deference which they were to show to their White guides. The ATS writers depicted an ideal for Black women in which they were subordinated to White northern women in the short-run and to their husbands in the long-run. They saw in helping Black women to grow into a their new roles in the new Black family an opportunity to recreate their own performances of proper gender divisions within the family, ones with which they were familiar (and, quite ironically, seeking to free themselves from) in the North. And they believed these to be necessary to the maintenance of continued order and prosperity in the South.

The ATS writers, just like the rest of the aid workers, were able to see their work as important and motivate themselves to do it because they found it easy to see themselves as the parents of a new race, raising up Blacks from the childhood of slavery into the adulthood of freedom,

Reforming the role of Black husband-father was a special intention of northern freedman's aid interventions on behalf of the capital formations executing the war efforts prior to Reconstruction. The aid organizations were likewise part of a network of forces demanding that Black women work in the fields next to Black men while no comparable demands on white family structure were made, even in the short term. But the very fact that the role needed to be created was an indication that it was not ontological, not an awakening to the essence of some latent "truth" or even "acceptable"-ness of masculinity but a function of white desire. Black masculinity was, the aid workers were consciously aware, intended as a mediation of an otherwise unmanageable tangle of white desires. These desires were located in the realm of both political economy (the desire to stabilize the southern economy and social order in the middle of sweeping reforms) and libidinal economy. The distinctions between these two economies are substantially confounded in Black experience, of course, because antiblackness works equally effectively in both.

Black Ur: Naming and Ontological Incapacity

As Christina Sharpe has commented, Gayl Jones' novel *Corregidora* registers family names and naming as a site of interest (Sharpe) 29). Names—their indexical force and their designation of objects that slip their grasp—show up with structural force in the world of the Black people of *Corregidora*.

As Benslama is doing with naming in relation to Jews and Muslims, we need to employ naming to radically critique the ways blackness is theorized in many areas of cultural studies. I read *Corregidora* as a theory of naming that confounds the terms of the debate around descriptivist naming. *Corregidora* elaborates a theory of naming from the epistemo-ontological position of the slave of Modernity—the figure of the black.

Ursa Corregidora is a light-skinned black woman blues singer, descended from two generations (great-grandmother and grandmother) of black Brazilian women who have been raped by the same Portuguese slave owner, Corregidora, who owns them. In the beginning of the novel, she is denied her ability to reproduce when she falls down the stairs during a confrontation with her husband, Mutt, over her desire to continue working as a blues singer after her husband has attempted to forbid her from doing so. The novel dwells on the devastating impact of Ursa's losing her womb, and the baby she was carrying, as a result of the fall. For generations, Corregidora women have passed on the story of their rape at the hands of Corregidora as their legacy. This is a legacy of rape, but also of self-preservation and anger. It is also juridical in purpose, at least in a metaphorical sense, because it preserves, via black orality and aurality, the memory of slavery, that which was specifically foreclosed to the enslaved when, following emancipation, the Brazilian authorities destroyed the archives where the legal records of slavery were

preserved. The Corregidora women live in order to preserve this memory, and they have a distinct telos in mind: that one day, they or their descendants will be called upon to bear witness to what slavery was and did to black people.

The novel allows Ursa's voice to give way to the voice of others like her mother and grandmother. The narrative can be considered a progression through various layers of trauma, as the lives of the Corregidora women are rehearsed with little variation as they have been for generations. As with courtroom testimony, precise recall is extremely important. In one moment, Ursa recalls being struck by her grandmother for expressing some doubt about the veracity of the grandmother's claim that she was forced to have sex with both Corregidora—that is, her father—and with Corregidora, his wife, a frail and sickly Portuguese white woman.

> When I'm telling you something don't you ever ask if I'm lying. Because they didn't want to leave no evidence of what they done—so it couldn't be held against them. And I'm leaving evidence. And you got to leave evidence too. And your children got to leave evidence. And when it come time to hold up the evidence, we got to have evidence to hold up. That's why they burned all the papers, so there wouldn't be no evidence to hold up against them. ((Jones)14)

Reliving traumatic moments precisely is, of course, an important component of overcoming the trauma that they induce (D. Scott). Hence, the themes of repetition and trauma are conjoined throughout. Ursa, for example, leaves Mutt for another man named Tadpole. By the end, however, she has rekindled her old romance with Mutt. Also significant is the fact that Ursa is a blues singer and that, at moments in the text, she speaks in a kind of blues meter, which emphasizes repetition of a theme with revision, similarly to what I suspect performance theorist Joseph Roach might refer to as surrogation (defined as repetition with revision) (Roach) 29).

Like a synonymous term "revisionist history," the political theory underwriting concept of surrogation depends on the signifying content of what is repeated, a content that can be revised constantly (through "many trials, and at least as many errors")—much as names can be shifted. There is nonetheless a necessary limitation built into the ways that surrogation might be applied politically when it comes to naming. Although names can be changed, like any other sign, changing names in a way that possesses ontological staying power is the province of a subject who is part of a dialectical struggle for recognition. Its power to reposition sentient beings as subjects is not available to all. Surrogation implies (a) subjects who have access to a credible heritage that they can revise instead of having to start ever anew, even if that heritage is completely made up and (b) subjects whose participation in a symbolic order and a dialectic of history is not precluded by a questionable relation to the category of the human. The problems are ones of foreclosed history—which, since Hegel's introduction of the dialectic, means foreclosed subjectivity, a foreclosure that manifests not only in the violence documented in the past but also the violence of the document itself toward those who would attempt to move through history.

Thomas Thistlewood's serial rapes and excremental punishments offer a graphic account of the pleasures exacted from the destruction and degradation of life and, at the same time, illuminate the difficulty of recovering enslaved lives from the annihilating force of such description: "Gave him a moderate whipping, pickled him well, made Hector shit in his mouth, immediately put a gag in it whilst his mouth was full & made him wear it 4 or 5 hours."

While the daily record of such abuses, no doubt, constitutes a history of slavery, the more difficult task is to exhume the lives buried under this prose, or rather to accept that Phibba and Dido exist only within the confines of these words, and that this is the manner in which they enter history. The dream is to liberate them from the obscene descriptions that first introduced them to us. It is too easy to hate a man like Thistlewood; what is more difficult is to acknowledge as our inheritance the brutal Latin phrases spilling onto the pages of his journals.(S. Hartman, 6)

The significance of how not only speech acts, which philosopher J. L. Austin would distinguish from their circumstances, but also the circumstances themselves name the Black can be seen in this. If shit is among the quintessential objects of abjection, then the act that Thistlewood performs forces incorporation of the that which must be rejected, thereby denying the enslaved man one of the capacities necessary to forming and maintaining subjectivity, for "4 or 5 hours." Moreover, Thistlewood's diary may give us some insights into how he named himself lord of a small Sade-like world, but, to Hartman's point, we cannot know the enslaved and the subjectivity effects of being so absolutely abjected—abjected even from the category of the human—that Thistlewood can deploy the enslaved to work through his own abjection via the performance of a repetition compulsion. There may be multiple surrogations here that help Thistlewood, Hector, and the third slave adapt to their respective traumas. They are, indeed, all victims of a traumatism in this sense. But Thistlewood's working through of his trauma has structural access to the use of abject and fungible others who can stand in for his imaginary traumas. Both slave and master live in trauma, but their power difference enables them to do so very differently. The master's trauma can yield a repetition compulsion in which the slave becomes the object of the master's redemption.

All of this is exceptionally important in our analysis here, for it bears on the relationship between the performance of those who can be called subjects—especially the capacity to make culture—and that which is *a priori* of the capacity for naming or altering the terms within the signifying chain. A knowable but fictitious lineage iterated on behalf of a group of people with technologies of overwhelming force may be able to continuously overwrite the history of people who have a real heritage but who lack the capacities of culture making—"the ability to turn endless space into nameable place and endless time into nameable event" ((Wilderson) 100). We must ask whether surrogation is politically meaningful for any purpose other than maintaining the chain of terms within which signification occurs—as a mode of self-conscious movement through history for those whose heritage is obliterated by overwhelming relations of force. We must deal with

the ways that the power underwriting naming affects not only the performance of subjecthood but the very possibility of subjecthood.

A Question of Naming

According to many traditions of thought, naming is something over which a subject might have some control, and through naming, one might create ground on which to resist dehumanizing exercises of power. After all, humans name things all the time in ways that alter the dynamics of their relationship to the things named and themselves. A still larger question asks how naming might work either to fully circumscribe the being of the thing named or to leave even an iota of space for resistance to a totalizing naming that fully captures the meaning of the thing named. In "Che Vuoi," Slavoj Žižek's analysis of the symbolic process of naming discusses the role of power relations in the fixing the meaning of things in what is otherwise an anarchic and tangled field of signification ((Žižek and Laclau) 109).

The problem for Žižek is that a fundamental post-structuralist claim—that meaning shifts and escapes being fixed in one place—must answer for the fact that most English-speaking humans act as if "table" means "table." Žižek raises two theories of how meaning is fixed: descriptivism and anti-descriptivism. Descriptivists say that meaning precedes manifestation. In other words, let us say that a man goes into a store and says, "I'm looking for something with a flat top where I can place things, and with legs so that I can sit close to it," then the clerk goes back to the store room, sees a slab of wood—nah, that's not it—then sees four wood poles— nah, that's not it—and then, *voila*—comes out with something that has all the features the man asked for and says, "The only thing I have like that is this thing that has all of those features." The collection of these features is "tableness." Tableness is therefore named, or nameable, before the table itself exists. Antidescriptivists, or causalists, on the other hand, argue that the first one to name something, however arbitrarily, causes the name to have a specific set of meanings that persist. "Table" is what we call something with a flat top and four legs because the original inventor named it that, and the meaning of all the variations on the theme of the table can be traced back to that original thing called a table. As we will see, both of these theories have important implications for the human object. Žižek, however, does not stop with this debate. Instead, he asks, what more is in a name? Why might we name something anyway? The answer cannot be considered without an assessment of the libidinal investments a human has in the object she names. Žižek reminds us that "the very terrain of the dispute between descriptivism and antidescriptivism is thus permeated by an undercurrent of the economy of desire" (101), a fact that points to the importance of the Symbolic order in any attempt to fix names to an object. This fixing, Žižek acknowledges, is necessarily tautological in its operations:

> [I]t must be part of the meaning of each name that it refers to a certain object *because this is its name*, because others use this name to designate the object in question: every name, in so far as it is part of common language, implies this self-

referential, circular moment. "Others," of course, cannot be reduced to empirical others; they rather point to the Lacanian "big Other," to the symbolic order itself. Here we encounter the dogmatic stupidity which assumes the shape of a tautology: a name refers to an object *because this object is called that*—this impersonal form ("it is called) announces the dimension of the "big Other" beyond other subjects. The example evoked by Searle as an epitome of parasitism[…] indicates, on the contrary, a necessary constituent of every "normal" use of names in language as a social bond—and this tautological constituent is the Lacanian master-signifier, the "signifier without signified." ((Zizek)102-103, emphasis in original)

At some fundamental level, therefore, the referentiality of naming must derive from the power of the ultimate namer, the Big A, which is held together by the *point de capiton*, the signifier that unifies the field and "quilts" the symbolic order, the Lacanian Name of the Father scaled up from the levels of the psyche and the family to the level of Language, where it "unifies a given field, constitutes its identity: it is, so to speak, the word to which 'things' themselves refer to recognize themselves in their unity." To unify the field of Language is to guarantee its meaningfulness—to guarantee that its smaller currencies correspond to something in the vault of value. As with the United States economy, there is never a one-for-one correspondence between *le mot* and *le chose*, even as the *point de capiton* holds the economy of meaning together in order to behave *as if* such correspondence and unity of field did exist. Žižek acknowledges that this centripetal point is a site of power, but the totalizing nature of that power is nothing more than a fantasy.

The attempt to fix the meaning of a word to a thing is not simply an asymptotic pursuit; *it is an imposition of closure on that which can never be closed*, the gap between the demand that is enunciated by naming and what is ultimately and impossibly desired. The possibility of fixing meaning eludes us, and, although the Imaginary creates fantasies in order to close that gap, the gap outrages our attempts to make names stick. *Che vuoi*, Žižek says, "marks a certain limit at which every interpellation necessarily fails" (135). This *che vuoi* is an important component of Žižek's argument that all naming is radically contingent. Names must be fixed in order for human interactions to be able to work through various forms of Language. It points to Lacan's radical notion of *das Ding* or the Thing, the lost object that overdetermines each of us, the *objet petit a* that we search forever to find but can never recover, an object linked to our most primordial sensations of unity with the mother, but that spawns all of our desires until we die. This point brings Žižek back to the political. If the *che vuoi* gives the subject "breathing space" (138) beyond the totalizing power of the Name of the Father, then totalitarian regimes cannot win. There is always a space for elusiveness, for breathing that makes foreclosure impossible. This impossibility, Žižek rightly observes, does not, however, prevent a totalitarian state from trying to impose closure. The fantasy that the Imaginary uses to fill the gap of the *che vuoi* can be anticipated and prepared for in order to foreclose the possibility of the *che vuoi*.

It is interesting to note that of the examples that Žižek sets forth for the elusive *che vuoi*, only one directly pertains to the question of this paper, that of Jesse Jackson's failed 1988 presidential bid (which, for Žižek, was haunted by what he thinks of as a racist *che vuoi* that was stated literally throughout the news media when Jackson experienced some early victories, to wit, "What does Jesse want?"), although other examples might bear an indirect relation. We will return to this point in just a moment.

Žižek has augmented our set of questions here by reminding us how complex the apparatus of naming and interpellation is and that, in the last instance, it is held together by a fantastical tautology that quilts the very Symbolic order and guarantees that some aspects of the world, if they are not equivalent to what they are named as, are at least close enough. This is a productive way to look at the guarantees of naming the black. Frantz Fanon, quoted earlier, remarked, "The cause is the consequence. You are rich because you are white; you are white because you are rich" (Fanon and Philcox (5). Isn't this tautological? *Yes, it is because it can be.* Fanon was, of course, aware of this tautology. This kind of tautology, Žižek rightly points out, grounds the order of naming itself. What we cannot do is attribute it to the writer who argues that this is so. So the critique of Fanon as essentialist says nothing to the ways that the world—the lifeworld, the Symbolic—itself essentializes black people. It may be that such critiques blame Fanon for being the descriptor of an essentialist world order.

One question that arises from Žižek's argument has to do with the relationship that this "radical contingency" bears to the naming of the black as such. Žižek's use of the case of Jesse Jackson gives us some insights as to how he might apply the notion of radically contingent naming in the case of blacks. He reads racism through anti-Semitism, which he thinks of as "the purest, so to say distilled, form of racism," which implies that he is able to think within his schema about a subject whose oppressed and victimized status is structured in some powerful ways into the psyche of the European. The fact that such an easy analogy between antiblackness and anti-Semitism has been critiqued repeatedly for *not* being analogous to the situation of the black (Fanon, for instance, referred to the Holocaust as "little family quarrels," echoing Hannah Arendt's famous statement that the Shoah signified the visiting of white European violence upon white Europeans that had long been visited upon African, Asian, and Native American peoples) doesn't automatically render such comparison irreparably problematic. We should take note, however, that Žižek reads this element of radical contingency into the experiences of *both groups*, suturing this analogy into his analysis of the possibilities of naming.

One thing that should certainly be clear at this point is that Žižek's reading of Lacan gives us useful tools to work with as we seek to address how the Symbolic—the order of names— figures in the question of black naming. Clearly this order is an aspect of the Symbolic order of which Lacan spoke, the mechanism created when the prohibition coming from the Name of the Father causes (usually) the child's pursuit of her/his desire to be displaced onto language. The order of naming is an economy thoroughly underwritten by desire. This means that it is a potential site in the naming of blacks as blacks. But how

does this economy operate to foreclose on, or to open up, possibilities for black subjectivitiy in that naming? Whose desires count and how could they possibly work to create blackness, let alone designate it as an index of absolute otherness? Doesn't language enable humans to separate knowledge from experience? If so, then doesn't it make the question of black naming a matter of performative iteration? As we explore this question further, we will have to examine sources that take up this question of black naming in a manner that more closely theorizes antiblackness on its own terms and not as a less "pure," less "distilled" form of anti-Semitism.

Whatever the nature of the experience, however cruel the task at hand, however abject the economy of phenomenal bodies as comities, the slave knows him- or herself as being heterogeneous from the it that is used up in slave labor. Knowledge liberates in announcing the heterogeneity of the instance of self-knowing, of apperception, from experience. Such self-knowing is what is called human nature. The human is that creature which knows itself knowing. The human can be enslaved but never *is* a slave. The human can be designated a phenomenal thing of the slave experience, *nigger*, but never *is* a nigger. This is a liberal knowledge that presumes the universality of apperception without knowing it and makes the human the significance of experience. ((Judy "On the Question of Nigga Authenticity")216-217)

"Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" is a reflection on how Spillers is marked (Spillers *Black, White, and in Color : Essays on American Literature and Culture*). "I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth." She is here confronting the problems of a libidinal economy of discourse that gives the nation its order and coherence. The black woman "can be seen as a particular figuration of the split subject that psychoanalytic theory posits" and who is the object of an "overdetermined nominative property…assigned by a particular historical order" (((Spillers)203). Spillers here is addressing Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a US Democratic and Republican presidential advisor, cabinet member, and senator, whose 1965 report on blacks (*The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*) declared that black families were defined by a "tangle of pathology" because they were, *de facto*, matriarchal structures in a society that Moynihan—speaking both descriptively and normatively—declares to be defined by patriarchy. Moynihan reiterated what previous students of black families, including W.E.B. Du Bois and E. Franklin Frazier, had previously advocated: the rise of a black patriarchy modeled after the perceived white American norm. According to Moynihan, Spillers says, "the 'Negro Family' has no Father to speak of—his Name, his Law, his Symbolic function mark the impressive missing agencies in the essential life of the black community…and it is, surprisingly, the fault of the Daughter, or the female line" (204). Spillers, is not disagreeing with Moynihan as to the proliferation of mother-headed households, but she does dispute Moynihan on the question of causality. Moynihan, Spillers says, is engaged in a "stunning reversal of the castration thematic, displacing the Name and the Law of the Father to the territory of the Mother and Daughter" (204). The problem is not just that

black women have no access to the Name of the Father; neither do black men. That is the core problem of Spillers' essay, often interpreted as a critical theorization of the "both-ness" of black female oppression. The fundamental problem to be addressed is that Moynihan is reiterating a tendency to read black gender formations as inherently pathological. "Daughters and Fathers are here made to manifest the very same rhetorical symptoms of absence and denial" (204).

A careful reading of the pathologizing of matriarchal families with Žižek will suggest that we are talking here about nothing other than the *che vuoi*. The *de facto* nature of matriarchal households suggests an adaptation to something—an eluding of the quilting signifier. Naming blacks as cargo both presupposes and renders blacks as without family, as having "no symbolic integrity," no Name of the Father worth protecting.

Returning to Spillers, black men in the world of *Corregidora* do not function as patriarchs. Moynihan's goal of making the creation of a black patriarchy a national policy objective is just that—a white man's desire to name. There are very few people in whom we can rest the mantle of patriarchal dominance. In fact, there is really only one: the original judge, the name of the father, Corregidora.

Spillers asks whether slavery's "marking and branding actually 'transfers' from one generation to another, finding its various symbolic substitutions in an efficacy of meanings that repeat the initiating moments" (207). In one sense, therefore, one might argue that she is stating that naming as black flesh must be performed. But, as when this question arose about Patterson's theory of slavemaking and the exceptional place black American slaves held, the problem seems to go much deeper than a case-by-case performative naming or interpellation that can be altered.

> [T]hese lacerations…punctures of the flesh create the distance between what I
> would designate a cultural vestibularity and the culture. (207)

The availability to violence is sutured by a paradigmatic distinction between what black flesh means and what the flesh of all others means and how it is either precluded from or available for contesting its position in the hierarchy.

If we are going to address the question of what kind of self-naming is possible for blacks, one of the things that we need to understand is the relation that such passage through the vestibule of culture might play in suggesting that discursive solutions to the problem of black humanity might be possible.

My reading of Spillers' analysis raises serious questions about the extent to which mere shifts within discourse can reduce the distance between the black and the human because that distance occurs at the level of paradigm—the *a priori* of legitimate knowledge. Ruling epistemes, as Foucault would surely acknowledge, are violent in themselves, and it takes violence to displace one episteme with another. The point here is not ever to glorify violence but to expose it as always already operative, even within regimes of knowledge that we might think to be Enlightened. Spillers reminds us that not only is violence operative; it is the very condition of possibility of a ruling episteme. We would be hard pressed, moreover, to unearth any historical violence since the violence of

Conquest and the Middle Passage that displaced that originary violence of Modernity. Spillers also reminds us that any naming based on the Name of the Father cannot come from the black, father-figure or not. This is a crucial point in Spillers' analysis—an analysis the complexity of which is often elided by shorthand descriptions that reduce the radical meaning of Spillers' "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" to an elaboration of the "differential construction of gender" between races—because we have until now been relying on Žižek's notion that the Symbolic order, quilted by the *point de caption*, and the *che vuoi* release naming. Spillers reminds us that something else intervenes. Prior to the vestibule where naming takes place, some people are available to be turned into flesh that is fungible. Prior to the economy where property and affect are exchanged, the black has already been named as property (in-waiting), a naming that opens all blacks to an extreme availability to violence beyond the limits of the humanly tolerable. We need a theory of naming that acknowledges the pre-linguistic violence that it takes to make a slave.

Performative Naming?

Jones peoples her novella with several characters whose names evoke animality, reproduction, and genealogy. Cat, Mutt (a mixed-breed dog), Tadpole (a frog in its early developmental phase). Ursa (redolent of Ur-text) is Latin for "bear"—a noun that, if used as a verb, also evokes pregnancy. Along those same lines, the name Corregidora itself, as Christina Sharpe notes, "combines the Spanish corregidor, 'magistrate' and 'corrector;' with the Portuguese *carregador*, 'laden,' 'to load or carry,' to overdo.'" In the world of *Corregidora*, the elision of reproduction and cargo is the ground for the aspect of black life that Orlando Patterson calls natal alienation, the absence of any claim to one's kin, ascending or descending. The Corregidora women have an anxiety about reproduction structured into their psyches. "The important thing is making generations. They can burn the papers but they can't burn conscious, Ursa. And that what makes the evidence. And that's what makes the verdict" ((Jones) 22). Memory and repetition become the basis of a challenge. But it is a challenge within some sort of discourse.

The grounding logic of Roach's notion of surrogacy is the theory of performativity. The idea of performatives, which Judith Butler derived from Jacques Derrida and J.L. Austin, says that certain discursive statements produce the effect that they name—speech can be an action. The ways in which speech functions as an action has been tied up in questions of things like kinship from the very beginning, for Austin's original example of a performative iteration, in his book *How to Do Things With Words*, was the marital statement "I do." The value of this statement, he said, was not located in a truth that it described, but, rather, in what it did, what it performed: It created a marital bond. The circumstances for such a creation must be conducive—or "felicitous" in Austin's parlance—but clearly at least some statements have the force of making true what they state to be true. Butler's major 1993 work, *Gender Trouble*, replaced Austin's instance of naming a marital bond as such ("I do") with another instance of filiality: the naming of a newborn baby ("It's a girl").

[A]cts, gestures and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are [sic] fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.' (((Butler)) 136)

This theory of performativity builds on Derridan citationality to argue that the force of an iteration is built up by repetitions, each of which cites previous iterations and mutates it in some way. These iterations therefore gain a kind of material force through momentum. Butler maintains that this force can be interrupted and parodied. Hence, once something is known (or named) as performative, it is available to change by political mobilization.

But—and this is one of the key questions to which this analysis has been building— is the naming of racial blackness qua racial blackness *performative*? In other words, must blackness be either performative—and open to change within the order of naming—or ontological—and wholly metaphysically foreclosed? And, if not, does the performative ever usurp the supremacy of the ontological?

The above theorization leads us to suspect one of two options with regard to the subject effects of naming: Either black ontology underwrites the black performative, or it does not. In other words, performativity, which I read as the movement enabled for subjects (flesh with the potential to become bodies) within Spillers' vestibule of culture, enacts subjectivity. Being can become doing for subjects, even subaltern ones. The problem would appear to be that blacks are in some way structurally barred from subjecthood. As Wynter and Spillers would agree, racial blackness fixes gender in way that gender does not fix racial blackness. Spillers says that the overdetermined nominative properties that collect around blackness "outrage" gender formation, and Wynter says that black women and black men are on wholly different "grounds" than are white women and white men. Even though gender and sexuality are each quintessentially performatives that also act *as if* each was "the effect of an internal core or substance," Spillers and Wynter are both right to report that, discursively speaking, blacks show up with uncanny regularity as those who must not be allowed access to subjectivity.

Thus the significance of the performative lies not in the ability to overcome this condition or provide remedy but in creating a context for the collective enunciation of this pain, transforming need into politics and cultivating pleasure as a limited response to need and a desperately insufficient form of redress. ((Hartman) 51-52)

Jared Sexton goes even further. In the case of blacks, Sexton argues, the question of subjectivity, of capacity to make performative changes, is so fundamentally called into question as to be a function not quite of metaphysical ontology but of what can be called *political* ontology. Sexton's description of the genealogical context of blackness as a political ontology is worth quoting here at length:

> Not all free persons are white (nor are they equal or equally free), but slaves are paradigmatically black. And because blackness serves as the basis of enslavement in the logic of a transnational political and legal culture, it permanently destabilizes the position of any nominally free black population. Stuart Hall might call this the articulation of elements of a discourse, the production of a "non-necessary correspondence" between the signifiers of racial blackness and slavery. But it is the historical materialization of the logic of a transnational political and legal culture such that the contingency of its articulation is generally lost to the infrastructure of the Atlantic world that provides Frank Wilderson a basis for the concept of a "political ontology of race." […] Political ontology is not a metaphysical notion, because it is the explicit outcome of a politics and thereby available to historic challenge through collective struggle. But it is not simply a description of a political status either, even an oppressed political status, because it functions as if it were a metaphysical property across the longue durée of the premodern, modern, and now postmodern eras. That is to say, the application of the law of racial slavery is pervasive, regardless of variance or permutation in its operation across the better part of a millennium. ((Sexton) 36-37)

The "historical materialization" and the "as if" are the points to which we must be attentive to assess how black self-naming performances fail to succeed in repositioning the black ontologically. Repetition and surrogation as modes of performance are not coextensive; some repetition can *become* the *a priori* of the paradigm. This is why it would be erroneous to say that Fanon's phrase "the cause is the consequence" is performative. The antiblack racism that produces and maintains blackness is remarkably protean and the absolute phobic abjection of blackness appears to have a fundamental suturing effect on various structures across scales, from the psychic to the geopolitical. It does not behave *as if* it is fundamentally performative because performatively grounded theorizations of how to levy challenges to antiblack racism tend to do so within the discursive formation of the order of naming, rather than being motivated by the *Ding* of the slave of Modernity: the end of the world.

The notion of a political ontology, not originated by Wilderson, takes on a unique set of meanings in relation to the black because the structural position of the black is defined by a specific grammar of unrecoverable loss.

Performative naming and its relation to subjectivity has been an important aspect of theories of subjectivity at least since Descartes' *cogito*, a declaration of human personhood derived from the very fact of self-knowledge. But by several accounts, blacks function within a very different relationship to the sign than did Descartes, a relationship the genealogy of which dates certainly since the designation of blacks as nonhuman, if not before. As a result, the question of black naming and its relationship to black positionality is a very important meditation in discourses of blacks—not only for blacks as individual and collective bodies but also for the activities that are associated with cultural modes of exchange among black people.

Another small but prolific minority of theorists, examining the same set of knowledge from a vastly different epistemological framework, argue that blackness is foundational to Modernity, essentially did not antedate Modernity, and is difficult if not impossible to abstract away from the violent force that has created it:

> Of particular importance in this regard is the belonging-togetherness of the categories nigger and work, an association articulated in the American English expression "to work like a nigger," as in George Eliot's incidental remarking in 1861: "Charles... will… work like a nigger at his music"; or Twain's more renowned" He laid into his work like a nigger." Nigger could mean exceptionally hard work, because niggers, by definition are labor commodities (i.e., nigger is an index of productive labor that is somebody else's property). A nigger is both labor and value, a quantitative abstraction of exchange: the equivalent of three-fifths of a single unit of representational value. The value of the nigger is not in the physical body itself but in the energy, the potential force, that the body contains. That force is there in the nigger body, standing-in-reserve, as it were, for its owner to consume as he/she likes. That force is the thing that the planter owns. It is the property of the planter that is the nigger. The nigger is that thing. ((Judy "On the Question of Nigga Authenticity") 223)

I am interested in reading how we come to name the figure of the black and the effects that that naming has on the subjectivity, or possibilities of subjectivity, for black people. But if the naming of blacks as blacks (or as niggers) is something that blacks themselves have no power to fix, this analysis might realize a disjunction between blackness and the order of naming itself.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have considered *Corregidora* and shown its interest in naming. The violence of slavemaking, it would seem, persists in naming blacks as nonhuman, in ways that are difficult to address via various modes of performative renaming. These ways of naming blacks as nonhumans are diverse and complicated but doubtless underwrite the findings of recent empirical psychology literature that document a powerful and longstanding association between phenotypic blackness and particular forms of animality, and further document that this association "alters visual perception and attention, and it increases endorsement of violence against Black suspects".[65] In this paper, I have attempted to address the question of naming that which exceeds any totalizing attempt at naming. For blacks in the world of *Corregidora*, one finds not only that the naming of persons is anticipated by the *a priori* of the Middle Passage, but so are the compensatory and resistive activities that blacks use to resist an overdeterminative regime of naming placed upon them. I have shown above that Jones works to center the work on naming in ways that highlight blacks' collective and asynchronic inability to name.

So, what's in a name? What is at stake in this philosophical digression? First, let us think about a particular, hegemonic sense in which blackness has been named so that we

can impose a control on our preconceptions about what blackness is. For the moment, we must suspend any lingering understanding of blacks as an ethnocultural group of dispersed African-lineage-bearing humans. Black ethnic groups exist among Arabs in Iraq and Latinos in the Americas, for example, but they are vastly different from each other in each place. The argument in favor of a multiracial identity, while irredeemably problematic in a variety of registers (Sexton *Amalgamation Schemes : Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*), has at least reminded many of us of the arbitrariness of naming— that people identified as blacks often have less of that ideologically laced materiality called "African DNA" than many people who are identified as white or nonblack. Unlike Jewish and Chinese diasporic subjects (for example), black ethnic groups as a transnational aggregate cannot be definitively said to constitute a worldwide diasporic community, united with each other by consciously held religious beliefs, shared linguistic ties, or other common points of identity and indentification.

Such efforts, therefore, have had to be controlled in this study as though they are among many alternative efforts-in-progress to name blackness as being in some way analogous to Jewishness or Chineseness—or as being something else. It is, of course, the case that people identified as black share something that exists independently of the experiences of black people, something like genetic predispositions for certain kinds of immunities or diseases. Indeed, despite many claims to the contrary in the humanities and social sciences, the ontology of race is far from being a settled question among those who study such things empirically. The questions at play in that debate are, however, quite different from questions of what blackness is and whether blacks are human. Being identifiably black, tautologically, seems to be all that is required to be treated as black. As Frantz Fanon said, "The cause is the consequence" (Fanon and Philcox 5).

Moynihan's report articulated nothing less than what I will call an ethical imperative—and made law and policy with it. He did not originate that ethical imperative. He took it up and co-opted it, rendering it as something that could be prepared for within the already existing order of relations. One big result was the creation a burgeoning Black middle class thoroughly inculcated with the perverse ethical imperative to "do like white folks," while never themselves being equal to the whites whose ways they were expected to adopt— as such, that is, *because* whites authorized them. [66]

We have to make a distinction here between what is *performative* or *ontical* about blackness and what is *essential* or *ontological* about blackness. Obviously, a category like blackness *can and does* function as an identity through which hundreds of millions of human beings (including the author) find the benefits of community, resistance, and meaningful purpose—i.e., love— and yet not be essential to how black people are positioned ontologically in the world—i.e., whether blacks are positioned as subjects or objects across a wide range of senses or registers. The black is what is at stake in the question of human naming. The question of whether our love for each other matters ontologically is a separate one, one that is included in that question of naming. Unnaming

ourselves as the slaves of Modernity, as those who are always already dead, requires performances of love that few people are willing to undertake.

Chapter 3: "Magic in the Web of It":

The Black Actor and Tropes of Relationality

"Angela Davis tells the story of 'Tanya Haggerty in Chicago, whose cell phone was the potential weapon that allowed police to justify her killing', just as [Amadou Diallo's] wallet was the 'gun' at which four cops fired in unison. To the police, a wallet in the hand of black man is a gun whereas that same wallet in the hand of a white man is just a wallet. A cell phone in the hands of a black woman is a gun; that same phone in a white woman's hand is a cell phone." –Steve Martinot and Jared Sexton, "The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy"[2]

"You *will* play Othello."

—James Winker speaking to the author, May 2007

On 17 April 2010, I was nearly arrested while trying to write this. I had just come to a good stopping point on some reading that I needed to understand the previous section of this article. Knowing that I was going to bike somewhere far enough that I would need to get caffeinated again, I scooped up all of my books, the computer on which I am writing this now, and my dirty dishes, and I walked briskly through the Crossroads cafeteria at UC Berkeley. It was Cal Day, a weekend showcase of the campus for visiting prospective undergraduate students and their families. The cafeteria was crowded, and so it seemed to me that the quickest way to get to the dishroom and deposit my dirty dishes was through the upper section. So I walked past the bakery, down the few steps, and waded into the crowd of people around the salad bar, feeling the familiar gastronomic urgency of one who has been drinking iced tea for the past couple of hours of studying. I reached the dishroom where I carefully executed my ritual—first, cups on the conveyor, then, compostables in the trash bin, then drop off the rest of the dishes and, finally put the silverware in the silverware tray. Then, I saw a mass of people ahead of me: White and Asian families with children, dressed in ways that implied suburbanity. I took a breath. "Just avoid trouble," I could hear my mother saying. "It's so much easier." By "trouble," she meant moments like the one that was ahead of me. I could certainly have plowed ahead, generously scattering "excuse-me's" like chicken feed to no individual in particular, and hoped that no one claimed that I groped any of the women or children against whose grain I would have been walking, with my heavy, bulging backpack swinging awkwardly from my shoulder. The choice was clear in this case: Behind me was a much thinner crowd. Behind me was also the restroom. The latter would ease my bladder, the former, my blood pressure. So I went behind me and weave my way back up toward the bathroom. And that's where Mr. David Campos, a manager at Crossroads, stopped me. He was a short man of medium build and a strong Spanish accent. I tried to take his aggressive and speedy approach with humor.

"Please sir, you have to stand in line or else leave." ...

Wait. Say again, pl...?

"You have to stand in line or leave or I'm gonna call the police."
Oh I was just going to the re...
"I just saw you come in. Go, please, sir, or I'm gonna call the police."
Wait. What do you m...?
"Go, now, sir, or I'm gonna call the police."
What do you mean?
"Go, now, please, sir, or I'm gonna call the police. Okay. I'm calling the police."
You must have me con...
"I'm calling the police." And here he took out his phone.
You must have me confused with someone else.
He's ignoring me. He's on the phone.
At this point, I finally realized what was going on. In the midst of the bustle and confusion of people around me—all of whom could be witnesses to the crime— but, of course, he was trying to make me go away, and that there would be no crime in that because it would be the police who would make me go away. Nor would any of these families of Cal students see anything except a nigger in a dispute with a manager. In fact, the cops were already here because there was a union rally outside the front door. This manager had a cellular connect to the cops. The phone was to his ear. Within seconds of his call to 9-1-1, the dispatcher in the UC Berkeley police station in Sproul Hall would contact the officers in front of the building. And now, within seconds of my decision to avoid trouble, I was in trouble. So, the choice: to argue with unreason, or to run?

The first method module that I selected was a mathematics of genocide. The cops were so close that they would be through the door in less than 20 seconds from the time Mr. Campos called. From the door to the place where I stood was probably about 100 feet. There would be no clear shot. Even with the extremely accurate trajectory of standard-issue Glock 9-millimeter slug, for the officer to hit me at center mass at that distance would be a challenge with all these Cal students and their families standing so close to me. I was "the tuna in the dolphin net." This was good. It bought my life a few more seconds. By standing close to the white and Asian people, I made it so that the police would have to clear people away to get close and take care of me with the Taser ®.

I was trembling. I just realized that this dude meant to end me, and was being very official about it.

I tried again, at least one more time. But there was no meter to our conversation, or, rather, the meter was one of violence. Constant interruptions. Calling the police on a nigga is issuing a death warrant, so Mr. Campos knew that he had all of the power.

Having bought a moment—but just a moment—of time, I thought of something, and before thinking I said, "You can go check my card and see that I paid here." And I proceed to reach for my pocket and pull out my wallet.

Mr. Campos kind of puts the phone down from his ear to study what I'm getting out of my pocket, and he says, "Please sir."

Up to that moment, words on a page cannot really describe how his "please" and "sir" worked as coercive terms. The closest I can come is that he targeted them so that they were dogs on a leash. Don't make me sic them on you. Don't make me do this. I'm a business man. I'm running a cafeteria. Don't make a scene. Just go. The German soldier questioning Itzhak Stern in the clearing of the ghetto scene in Schindler's List came to mind in that moment. "Deine papiere, Jude!!!" The cinema intruded IN THAT MOMENT. And THAT was what awoke me. It was the words Please and Sir that awoke me because of what they connotatively signified. Not what they should have been for me. Please, sir, I don't want to die. Don't release your dogs on me. I'll go if you insist. But please can I go to the restroom? He took even that from me.

But when he looked carefully and put his connection to the police away from his ear to study what I was pulling out of my pocket, his "Please" and "Sir" were slightly less sure of themselves. They heeled and tucked their tails—never quite submitted, though. Maybe Cesar Milan was right about who needs the training. And yet though the words connotatively signified dogs for me, it somehow was not enough to tame the dogs or appropriate them to my ends. He was looking at me pull my wallet from my pocket. For black people, a friend will later tell me, pulling anything out of your pocket is always playing Russian Roulette. Always.

This dude is watching me pull something out of my pocket like,... like what? Like Murder is so inscribed in and around my black body that he sees shit that ain't even there. He didn't perform that inscription on my body. He didn't have to. The inscription of murder on my body had been performed a priori of and his arrival in this country. Shit, it was even on my body before my body existed. But then again, he did perform that inscription. Because immigration emplotted him in a narrative of humanity, a narrative that is a path to a condition of ontological safety—whiteness. Is this too theoretical? He was performing it in this moment. And I had no point of intervention. He didn't care to see what I could produce—whether I was one of those who "finds things, founds things" (Moten 2008). He was not worried about my performance. My speech was not relational, and so could not initiate a dialectical countermovement. It had no contemporaries.

And then he saw that the wallet I was a wallet. And when it flopped open that it was my wallet. The police officers who shot 41 rounds at Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo had to kick and pick over Diallo's corpse before they made the discovery that Mr. Campos had just made. Some might consider this to be evidence of an evolving discourse, a dialectic movement through which my removal of my wallet produced knowledge, suggesting that perhaps the conditions under which Diallo removed his wallet were not comparably felicitous to his attempts to iterate his person as non-threatening.

And then, with no apology or even a word, he went back to work.

There is a performative chain that is initiated when the police are called. Something happens and it has to be responded to. Words do things. But your words have to count first. My performance is insufficient to position me as one who is not always already available for the violent chain of signification he was preparing to initiate. There is nothing

that I could have done as a black. Blackness cannot intervene in the signifying chain of antiblackness—because what would it say? "I'm not really black?" My ID was my temporary projection of whiteness. But everything up to my flashing the ID made me available for violence. More to the point, my ID is only worth something because most black people will never have anything of the sort.

If Mr. Campos had been a cop rather than simply connected to the cops or if he hadn't been so concerned about making a scene so that he simply called the cops without confronting me himself, what might have happened? There are no limits.

I was still shaken about it. I needed to talk. I needed to walk. I couldn't just get on a bike shaking like that. I called my friend. As I talked to him, my nerves were calmed. I was walking south on Hillegass. Went into Willard Park because I heard something that sounded like African drums. Then I saw the drums. There seemed to be a public performance of African music and dance. But somebody forgot the Africans. There was one woman who might have been a very, very light-skinned black. None of the drummers, none of the dancers except maybe that one woman. Afro-Brazilian music. But no Afros. Not even some cornrows. I took a picture and then escaped. I took a right turn onto Ashby and walked west, downhill to Ashby BART where the flea market was going on. And there were the drummers, nearly all black. Okay. These are formations of violence. Could they not have found black drummers or dancers at Willard Park? I found them right down the street, a 26-minute stroll or 5-minute drive away. To describe these simply as different "communities" does not work for anyone except one who is fundamentally uncritical of it. These are formations of violence—structural antagonisms. But how can one give that coherence without doing violence to the life-circumscribing violence in which most black people live their lives every single moment of every day, even though we may never see it?

Actorly Discipline and Black Truth

In the modern USA, what kinds of things are people inclined to believe about Black people? What do people "see" us do, even when we haven't done anything? Prior to our performance, what is already attributed to us? And if, as chapter 2 argued, the genealogical isolation of blackness renders it non-indexical (for instance, the ways Black people are routinely arrested for things we did not do), how does the concept of "truthful" performances of blackness make sense?

If we read the burgeoning literature of implicit cognition or implicit bias, we can certainly understand not only some of the thought processes, but also the sort of thinking that comes before thought, thinking that is really as much (if not more) feeling—an *affect* of antiblackness.

> [T]he world has more than one way of keeping you a nigger, has evolved more
> than one way of skinning the cat... ((Baldwin) 371)

Kerry Washington and Leonardo DiCaprio have been held up as models of actorly commitment to craft for their work in *Django Unchained* (2012, dir. Q. Tarantino). For the

moment, let's consider DiCaprio, who reportedly cut his hand while the camera was rolling and kept going with the take (Doty). This was an example of something that the guru of American realistic acting, Russian director Konstantin Stanislavski, would have called "living the part." It's almost exactly like a moment in Stanislavski's first English translation, An Actor Prepares (Stanislavsky) 12-13), when the actor (accidentally) transforms his physical discomfort (the heat from the stage lights, the heaviness of his robes, etc.) and says his lines more truthfully than he did before. "Living the part" was, for Stanislavski, the highest form of acting, the moment when the actor (the person playing the character) responds to real, genuinely felt impulses and transforms those impulses to do something that serves the goals of the character. It's not that DiCaprio's cut hand substituted for his work in developing the part, but it might have helped him go a little more ballistic and his willingness to just go with it might have helped him reach the ballistic pitch called for in the moment.

In this same vein, then, DiCaprio also let Samuel L. Jackson cuss at him to act more like a slave master because, as Jackson reportedly said about having to endure racism and the repetition of the epithet "nigger," "this is just another Tuesday for us" (Access Hollywood). Jackson reportedly said this to DiCaprio to encourage him to really invest his energies in a role (Calvin Candie) that DiCaprio reportedly found abhorrent to play. Jackson was there for DiCaprio in a way not so different from the way that his character, Stephen, was there for DiCaprio's: getting him to treat Black people like "niggers," and giving DiCaprio the license and support he needed. Imagine a world in which a Black person says to a white person, "Please, pleeease call me 'nigger!'"-- and remember, as Baldwin said, that this can happen in multiple ways-- and you've just thought of what a Black actor goes through on "just another Tuesday" working in a play or film telling the story of Black life and history in slavery. That is, in fact, considered a basic professional courtesy that a generous actor just does if she or he is acting opposite a white person who says things like "Buddy, I'm having a tough time with these words," as DiCaprio reportedly said. It's just what a "good actor" does. And, again, to push Armond White's point just a little further, it's also what a good house slave did. Be sure to notice, of course, that a cut hand is probably not a routine occurrence for DiCaprio, whereas being called "nigger" is such a defining aspect of Black life (circa 1858 and 2014) as to be "just another Tuesday" for Jackson.

And then there's Washington, who actually subjected herself to torture to such an extent that she feared for her sanity if the shoot had gone any longer than it did and, as it was, had to take the unusual move of bringing her family to the set just to get through the whole ordeal ((Sperling)).

I can't claim any insider knowledge of the *Django* set, but, speaking as a Black person who has worked professionally as an actor, I can say that Washington's willing subjection to beatings and other forms of torture in preparation for playing Broomhilda are examples of how the professional/artistic ethic of psychologically realist acting works. It is a mode of control that Michel Foucault called disciplining.

A common saying among actors goes, "The worst insult someone can give you is to tell you that you did a good job of acting." That's because acting is supposed to just look like being. If you look like you're acting, you probably need to keep doing (practicing) it until it looks seamlessly like being.

These backstage/off-screen profiles show how much doing goes into being without distracting from the illusion that what happens on screen is "real." Even the master illusionist Hollywood apparatus can afford to share little off-camera peeks at how it "makes the magic." Details that might otherwise be restricted to trade journals show up in the LA Times, and media outlets encourage us to think about actors as being more than just bodies. They appear as intellectual, learned, inspired, disciplined.

"Good actors" are "disciplined" actors, and for Black actors this rule is no exception. But--and this is a big but-- when you're expected to play a slave-- a nonbeing, a "nigger"-- the stakes of doing the things that help you create a being (a character) are quite different from the stakes that other actors face in building any other kind of character. After all, you are a nonbeing playing a nonbeing and expecting to be recognized as a professional for doing so-- by beings. Gaining that quasi-recognition involves subjecting yourself to modes of discipline because, otherwise, things might get out of control and you might get swallowed up by the role, or perhaps even go all Nat Turnery on that ass. So you have to call it "disciplined" and "professionalism," when it looks and feels a lot like the same old slavery.

By "disciplining," I mean that, rather than explicitly punishing you, forcing you, or twisting your arm into doing something as extreme as Washington does, the protocols of professionalism routinely instruct Black actors to do this same type of thing as a model of what it is to be a "good actor." And you can't say anyone put a gun to your head and told you, "Let me whip you and lock you in a box, or else!" if you are the one who asked them "Will you please help me get into this role by calling me a 'nigger' with your mouth and your whip and your chains and your locks and your body language--on camera and off camera?" in the first place.

That's what "disciplining" means in Michel Foucault's sense of the word described in the book Discipline and Punish (1977):

> [I]t dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. ((Foucault), p. 138)

In other words, the disciplined worker no longer has to be beaten into doing something as in slavery; when "disciplining" is how power operates, the worker just does it so that she can be "good." She feels it adds something to her, say, a certain skill needed in acting, while at the same time it is subjecting her to the uses of powerful institutions, say, like Hollywood.

To speak of "good acting" is to speak regardless of whether it's "good" for you. And that's where Washington's concerns about her sanity become a way of talking about how

our day-to-day lived experiences with disciplining mirror the contours of the antiblack paradigm we live in. I mean, why would Washington need to worry about her grip on reality if she didn't have anxiety about how close slavery is to modern-day black life?

In the backstage/off-camera context, this disciplining often bears more than a passing resemblance to slavery. For example, I once worked on a set of a cop show in Los Angeles. A gang of heavily armed off-duty cops (two white, one black) tortured my character and his partner, both of us Black Jamaican drug dealers, and forced them to drink each other's urine out of the toilet. Between takes, as the producers decided what to do with us, I stood there and watched the three cop actors plus the white, Asian, and Latino grips, camera ops, and others (a few women but mostly men) pointing at my and my partner's bodies. And then they did it all over again.

Of course, slave masters and overseers back in the day, like teachers, bosses, and prison guards today, knew the same thing Foucault knew: It is easier to use the slave who self-regulates and is intrinsically motivated to "be good" at something than one who has to be punished and forced into doing everything.

What Foucault didn't quite understand was how very adaptable slavery was. Antiblackness is so powerful that not only can it reconstitute slavery after the Emancipation Proclamation and 13th Amendment as sharecropping, convict leasing, wage slavery, and prison slavery; but it can even extend unique and under-appreciated modes of slavery into the coteries of the Black elites, so that even studied, disciplined, acclaimed actors who graduate from college, speak at the Democratic National Convention and star in an ABC series and drive Range Rovers and have Louis Vuitton clothes can be enjoyed like...well, any old slave.

In Washington's case (as with that of Jackson and Foxx), self-regulation *is* subjection to torture. For Black actors, our on-camera lives as slaves bear much resemblance to our off-camera lives. That's not because we can't get over it or because everybody goes through the same thing; it's because that's still where we as Black people are-- still getting pushed out of jobs and neighborhoods to make room for white people; still getting sodomized, battered, and shot by those who are supposed to "protect and serve"; still getting blown away by civilian white people who deputize themselves to be our overseers. Being well-spoken graduates of competitive higher learning institutions does not relieve us from the demands that the slave estate has for our bodies-- to brutalize, enjoy, experiment on, and destroy our bodies. Dressing in expensive clothing does not render us safe. Walk on the set; you're a slave. Walk off the set; you're still a slave. Asking someone to subject us to slave treatment almost seems redundant, except that we are expected to do it in the name of being "good actors." Torture and discipline, abjection and professionalism go hand in hand.

Actors are taught in acting classes and directed on sets to see behavior like Washington's not as masochistic but, rather, as something that demonstrates an admirable level of "commitment" to the craft. We are taught to aspire to it. And while I've never been instructed explicitly to do what she did, I've often been told, "You know, the really

committed actors are able to get over the painful legacy of slavery, imperialism, and genocide and just do the work. Those are the ones who get jobs. Do you want a job?"

Most Black actors playing slaves cannot fly their parents to the set and get themselves mentally back in balance. Many Black actors don't have their parents, or any people who help them get back on balance. Most Black actors will play a slave, then turn around, and hit the temp job or a night shift at the diner, if they even have jobs, where their bosses and coworkers routinely treat them...well, you know...like slaves. Much of Black life isn't really balanced. If it ain't one thing, it's another. All of which is to say that, if we think of slavery as a set of circumstances in which one is defined by an external marker (say, skin color and facial features) and in which one is available to uses that abuse the body and mind for the purposes of other people's gain and pleasure, for most Black people, it is difficult to distinguish day-to-day life from slavery. "This is just another Tuesday for us" indeed.

And that's why Washington's experience and Jackson's reported words, seemingly intended to reveal something about how much they sacrificed for the craft, end up showing something that is much more revealing-- something that perhaps all of us Black folks can relate to: that whether backstage/off-camera or onstage/on camera, the life of the Black actor, like the lives of most Black people, is still unshielded from the violence of slavery. You can replace whips with pink slips. It does not change the position of blackness in (non)relation to all others.

This means that disciplined Black actors present certain sets of allowable representations of blackness to the world at a time.

I Am Not Latasha Harlins…

It is midnight in a year that is of no particular importance. Somewhere, a leading criminologist who spent all day on the air calling Black boys "Superpredators" is sleeping next to his wife or graduate student. And somewhere in the commercial/industrial no-man's-land that buffers my white friend's neighborhood from mine, a lone cop stops me in front of an out-of-the-way building. When I ask him what the problem is, he tells me that he has stopped me about a recent car theft in the area.

I am on my bicycle.

I am really scared. And I am alone with him in a dark parking lot.

He is really scared. And he has a car, floodlights, pepper spray, a baton, a pistol, at least three primetime television shows, and the state's full might behind him and his brothers and sisters in blue.

Well, some stubbornly naïve part of me replies, he is not thinking rationally. I am going to be calm for both of us, the way I would around a mountain lion. And everybody always says that nine times out of ten if you weren't doing anything, you don't have anything to worry about. Right?

But of course, nobody who is Black says that and actually believes it. Even among white people, saying that involves a massive disavowal of what they know to be true.

Shit—my parents don't even say that to try to make me behave anymore. There's just too much evidence against it. The truth is the police, and white people more broadly, have already shown me and every other Black boy and girl and woman and man that we are available for captivity and killing at any time and for any reason. (Nobody ever tells you about that tenth time out of ten.)

The cop gets my ID and peppers me with questions that are really none of his business because this whole fucking thing is ridiculous. And still I answer the questions, all without hesitation, just like I'm supposed to.

"Where have you been?"

"At a friend's house."

"Which friend?"

You wouldn't know him, pig. "Dave Slocumb."

"Where does he live?"

"He lives over in Dilworth."

"Where in Dilworth?"

"Tremont Street."

"And where are you going now?"

"Home." And, when he asks, I give my address in a complex up by Central Avenue right down the street from the Wal-Mart.

There is silence and again the reality sets in. This cop is alone and I'm alone.

…and these motherfuckers are as dangerous as wild animals in these circumstances.

Maybe it calms me down a little to tell myself a different, less humiliating story about what is really going on here. It helps me get by to think, He's the wild animal.

But then comes the other thought. I'll be the one who ends up dead, tased, mauled, or in a cage. And, of course, even if this cop were a wild animal, it's not like I have the raw strength (the tranquilizer darts) to subdue him. His gun won't magically disappear from his holster just because I tell myself a different story in my head. He stands for an entire network of apparatuses that enable him to do what he wants to do to bodies like mine and then say that what he did was justified. Their fantasies have objective value, as David Marriott would say, and, as Jared Sexton would say, their fantasies become law. This cop's gun, his badge, and my Black skin— that's what makes him right. And truthfully, all of that comes ultimately from the gun. He's not giving any of it up. That would all have to be taken by force. And only a people's army would be up to such a task. And I'm alone in a dark parking lot with no witnesses around and a cop who thinks a car thief would be riding a bike at midnight.

My calm only lasts for a moment. Got to get it back. It is the one thing I cannot afford to lose right now.

A new thought comes to mind: Be a calming presence to him.

I try repeating images I know that work, that I can remember and perform. I am Sidney Poitier. I am Diahann Carroll. I am Barack Obama. I am the 'white negro.' I stiffen

up my spine, tighten up my lips, put fully rounded "r" sounds at the ends of certain words, nasalize my vocal resonance, and smile while shrinking out of any speech or movement pattern that might signify blackness. I will not act Black, whatever this pig might think Black is…

I am not Latasha Harlins.

What a strange thought. I don't know what made her come to mind. She was fourteen. I am nineteen. She was a girl. I am a man. She was in Los Angeles, paying for some juice, and a store clerk shot her in the back of the head. (It's all on camera.) And then a judge saw to it that the clerk never did any jail time behind it. And I just want to go home. I just want to go home.

But you know, I can hear that part of me saying, Latasha did talk back to the store clerk…

I can't. Not now. Not with this pig and his gun right here. I just can't. I can't dwell on the fact that teenage girls "talk back" every day without having a hole punched in their brains. But I am trying mightily to be very positive and practical about it all. I just want to survive. And this is taking forever. And suddenly all I am thinking is that whatever it was that got Latasha Harlins a bullet in the back of the head—I don't want this cop to associate me with it. That is all that might save my life and, I think, my "freedom." He is white and a cop. I am neither. He has guns. I do not. His use of the gun is always legitimate; mine is always illegitimate. And I don't even have or want guns. Doesn't matter. It is too late. I am the image of a Superpredator. And I already did the crime, whatever it was.

I am not Amadou Diallo…

"Tell you what I'll do," says the officer.

…I am not going to die in a hale of 41 bullets…

"I'll let you go if you can recite the license number on that bicycle you're riding without looking at it."

"Three four six one seven five."

It comes out of me like nothing, like an exhale, all in one breath, almost as though I'm singing out a serial number like an inmate. And, like an inmate, I am taking care to avoid eye contact.

This situation is a normal enough experience for a Black person that it qualifies as a "when" instead of an "if." ("When the police decide to fuck with you just because they can,…") Perhaps this whole thing is a necessary inconvenience that everybody has to go through in these trying times. Maybe I'll tell Dave about it later and he'll say he went through the same thing. I doubt it. But for now, I don't ask questions. I can't afford to know the answer. I wait.

The cop is surprised for a brief moment by how automatically he is able to elicit this reply, and then he speaks.

"All right, son," he says. "Go on. Get out of here."

Does he even check to see if the number I stated was correct? I don't recall.

"Thank you, officer," I say, remounting my bike, and, as if my words matter, I almost add, "I hope you get whoever you're looking for," but I see that he is already back on his radio ignoring me.

A Black Actor Prepares

It is a truism among those who teach and coach performance that acting remains the closest thing to a genuine virtual reality experience that most humans will ever have. At its most rigorous and challenging, the practice of embodying not a two-dimensional avatar on a screen, but a relational person is arguably one of the most dynamic ways of expanding the borders of personal experience to which modern subjects can gain access. The teaching text that is most used as a guide for this process among actors-in-training in the United States, Konstantin Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* is a quintessential tool of modernity precisely because its kernel concept suggests that there can be a deep level of understanding among humans of vastly different experiences. As far as it goes, this underlying assumption glosses over the challenges of black relationality. The magical concept of "if" outlined in the text of An Actor Prepares elaborates itself on a relational ground that is depoliticized, deracialized. In other words, while we may read the experiences of a black actor, the true object of this analysis is the kind of life-world in which such experiences can happen—the antiblack economy in which the chief knowledge producers in modern American society, actors, and knowledge consumers, audiences, operate.

What is the work that black cultural workers do to attempt to gain and sustain relationality with an audience presumed either to be white or acceptable (read: nonthreatening) to white people? I am interested in the theory that grounds the training and creative production processes of most actors in the United States. If we study acting theory with an eye not toward how we might build more effective and efficient actors, but, instead, toward how actors' lived experiences open up unique ways of knowing the world, we get a clearer picture than we had before of what Frantz Fanon meant when he said, "For not only must the black man be black, he must be it in the perception of the white…. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (Fanon)110).

I am specifically interested here in a key concept in the acting theory of Konstantin Stanislavski: the magic "if," the contingent grammar that grounds an actor's preparation, making the preparation of a character seem less like an outright lie, child's-play, or madness, and more like a scientific experiment conducted under shared imaginary conditions of exposure as if they were not illusory but real. As a method for producing believable actors, the magic "if" of the Stanislavski method, although it remains hegemonic, has been rightly and roundly criticized for assuming a universal subjectivity, devoid of gender, heteronormative, and un-raced. Rather than rehearsing these critiques, however, I am far more interested in theorizing the possibility of an efficacious "if" as a model for the problematics of black performance in a variety of registers. In this way, I

hope to render the magic "if" serviceable as a way of knowing, specifically of understanding the work blackness performs within the economies of meaning that converge in, but inevitably exceed, the world of the theater.

Konstantin Stanislavski, the West's most popular student of acting, said that he did not invent ex nihilo the practices that became the hallmarks of his famous system, a system that profoundly influenced the founders of American method acting and was foundational to the emergence of a uniquely American form of cinematic acting taken up by students of Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner. Rather, Stanislavski taught his system as something derived from what the most effective performers he had seen— especially the Italian performers Eleanora Duse and Tommaso Salvini— were already doing. He theorized that what made these actors effective was that they had developed such a relationship to the characters they played that the characters seemed not to be characters at all but "lifelike" figures that drew observers into their stories, subtly making audience members lose awareness of the fact that they were separate from the context they observed, that they were in a theater watching a performance.

These performers, Stanislavski suggested, went beyond "representing" their characters, seeming to transcend the structuring "self-other" boundaries of their day-to-day personae, and ascended into the highest form of art for the actor. He termed this form of acting "living the part." Stanislavski described the paradox that "living the part" resolves:

> We are supposed to create under inspiration; only our subconscious gives us inspiration; yet we apparently can use this subconscious only through our consciousness, which kills it. ((Stanislavsky))14)

Here, Stanislavski was reflecting on a paradox as old as acting itself, what Robert Cohen calls the paradox of Ion, a reference to Plato's dialog with Ion the rhapsodist ((Cohen)) 176). The performer must be "mad" and "sane," that is must try to be another person completely *and* try to be "herself" completely if she is to perform convincingly. The performer must also be concerned with how she is received in the gaze of the audience and yet must also be oblivious to that gaze. *An Actor Prepares* privileges the "subconscious," internal, psychological dynamics of the actor, character, and even audience in addressing this paradox:

> In the soul of a human being there are certain elements which are subject to consciousness and will. These accesible [sic] parts are capable in turn of acting on psychic processes that are involuntary. To be sure, this calls for extremely complicated creative work. It is carried on in part under the control of our consciousness*, but a much more significant proportion is subconscious and involuntary*. ((Stanislavsky)14-15; emphasis mine)

The first struggle for the performer, therefore, is the paradoxical task of finding a conscious route to what Stanislavski calls the subconscious. The answer to this dilemma, Stanislavski posits, is an "oblique instead of a direct approach" to the subconscious, in which the performer uses conscious actions that can trigger subconscious responses. The paradox never fully ends, though, for once aroused to speak, the subconscious responses

must continue, must be allowed to live through the actor's consciously played objectives, beats, and actions—must be channeled along a certain track, the plot of the play, consisting of specific conscious actions delineated in the script and played by the actors. Moreover, the subconscious must speak effectively enough to be seen and heard at the back of the theater house. Stanislavski, then, attempts to resolve the actor's dilemma by codifying a system that constantly mediates between two separate positions: subconscious and the conscious. Stanislavski is steadfast in arguing that the subconscious provides the link between the actor and the character, and that the chief problem of an actor's preparation consists in uncovering her subconscious connection to the character she plays. The Director says,

> [The artist's] job is not to present merely the external life of his character. He must fit his own human qualities to the life of this other person, and pour into it all of his own soul…You must live it by actually experiencing feelings that are analogous to it…(15-16)

Another way of phrasing the work that goes on in an actor's preparation, therefore is "the projection of one's own personality into an object, with the attribution to the object of one's own emotions," the same definition that Daniel Boyarin gives for empathy (Hartman Scenes of Subjection 19). We now have science to lead the way and verify for us that we weren't crazy after all, that people really do see us as slaves, or, perhaps less charitably, as animals, but perhaps the more fundamental affect underwriting all of this is that there is a structural prohibition against empathy with Black people. This does not mean that individuals do not feel empathy as individuals for another individual. It does, however, suggest that there is a structural antagonism between Black and non-Black people and that empathy with Black people is a problem in itself. That is because antiblackness is like the gravity of the world. And opposing that gravity, while possible, cannot be sustained except under the most artificial of conditions, not as things are presently configured.

The literature of implicit cognition/bias is vast and complex, too complex to receive anything like the treatment it deserves at my hands. But that is not my project here anyway. I am concerned with the affective economy of antiblackness within which Black people who perform must circulate, at least in part, as floating signifiers who will still have to win many battles before we have the power to fix our own meanings.

In whatever plays of light against darkness cause cell phones to look like guns, might we find some clues about how projections of blackness enable the white viewer to see "an alternative reading of ego" ((Spillers)211). The content of what the figure of "the Black" means to modernity is not an empty vessel waiting patiently to be filled, but is rather a void onto which desire can be projected. Blackness is so fungible that it can be made to mean whatever the person viewing it wants to see. And in the absence of the capacity to contest that fungibility at its most essential—at the level of ontology, of existence itself—any attempts to alter the meaning of blackness in modernity prove

remarkably capable of shifting the terms of Black fungibility without changing anything essential about blackness.

In a published study, we find the following words: "Historical representations explicitly depicting Blacks as apelike have largely disappeared in the United States, yet a mental association between Blacks and apes remains. U.S. citizens implicitly associate Blacks and apes" (Goff et al.) 292). Such findings ought to be considered in the light of other similar research in the field of implicit association and implicit bias, findings that specifically suggest a willingness among research subjects' drawn from diverse sectors of the US population (even black Americans) to shoot blacks more quickly and holster weapons pointed toward blacks more slowly than the same subjects evinced toward whites.

There is also a burgeoning literature that popularizes implicit cognition/bias research, including most notably *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell. *Blink* summarizes implicit bias, in part, by reference to auditions among professional classical musicians and it connects the first impressions (the "thin slices") that auditors get when they see their auditioners with the way four police who shot Amadou Diallo "saw" Diallo's wallet as a gun and killed him in a hale of 41 rounds (Gladwell) chapter 6).

Despite the scientifically precise prose, the affective irruptions around the research suggest a kind of excess that positivist science is not prepared to acknowledge or describe. Sometimes, for instance, researchers have been open about the connection they see between their lives and their research. Psychologists Jennifer Eberhardt and Phillip Atiba Goff, both Black, have authored several studies that found that people in the United States draw a "disturbingly" significant connection between Black people and apes. Eberhardt began talking with Goff about leading the study after she heard her child referred to as a "monkey" by an adult at the nursery school. As he began to study the data, Goff said, " I spent two days under the covers... I was sick and depressed. When I left my apartment, I felt everyone looking at me would see a monkey" (Jacobs). The researchers and popularizers of implicit cognition research present a body of literature that repeatedly challenges one of the dominant assumptions of B.F. Skinner's behaviorism, that the existence of unconscious thought cannot be empirically documented and that psychology should devote its attention only to behaviors. But their research clearly has direct personal implications for them, as bears on the willingness of police, security forces, and vigilantes to shoot them or their loved ones— Black Americans— once every 28 hours, according to the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (Malcolm X Grassroots Movement). It clearly points to something with greater stakes than the philosophical dominance of Skinnerism in the field of psychology. It is a performance that is more than just a contribution to the discursive framework of academic psychology. It points to ways in which the authors themselves are—and recognize themselves to be—existentially threatened by the thing their research describes but does not name. Certainly, there are many people who experience themselves as implicated in or even threatened by the results of their labor. But

there is a special concern at work when the thing you spend your time doing helps you uncover the ways in which you are not recognized as a human being.

Affect and the Conditions of Visibility

> On the set of an episode of [a popular cop drama], for which I took a day off from my African American film class... A gang of heavily armed off-duty cops (two white, one black) tortured my character and his partner, both black Jamaican drug dealers, and forced them to drink each other's urine out of the toilet. Between takes, as the producers decided what to do with us, I watched the three cop actors plus the white, Asian, and Latino grips, camera ops, and others (a few women but mostly men) laughing and pointing at my and my partner's bodies....If shows like this are becoming more common, what does that say about the economy of fantasies at large? In other words, what additional labor am I really doing here?
> --adapted from my journal, circa 2006.

Actors are not just any knowledge producers. It is perhaps their work that most permeates the psychological environments of the life-world inhabited by the modern subject. Actors add resources to the economies of affect and the knowledge that structures those economies. There are thus extremely high stakes in the ethics that Stanislavski's method sets up for actors.

There is a relationship between the concepts of empathy and relationality, such that we may say that Stanislavski's system attempts to broker a form of empathy. The term empathy, of course, already has many uses in the theater. At the scale of the staged performance, it generally denotes a feeling an audience member has toward a character with whose motives he identifies, but is it possible, or even important, for theater artists to think empathy at more scales than this? I contend that the scale on which we theater artists are accustomed to thinking empathy is almost always at the plane of individual and filial relations. Even plays that take on issues of serious cultural and social import—wars, genocides, rape as an element of women's lived experience, the impact of crack on black communities in America—conceal the various scales of empathy that underwrite the characters and situate them as beings whose motives we can recognize. Frank Wilderson has called this type of empathy *relationality*, the capacity to signify, to "make endless space into nameable place and make endless time into nameable event" (173). This concept implies that there is something underwriting performance that gives it at least the possibility of signifying—of weaving a narrative that can be recognized as such. We will have to interrogate this site of meaning in the network of performance in order to understand what features of the subject might enable it or disable it.

Wilderson's concept of blackness as "nonrelationality" has significant implications for Black artists. The Black performer has a special challenge to imbue the Black character with both "truthful" characteristics—ones that audiences are inclined to believe—and to be truthful to himself or herself. The problem is, what kinds of things are audiences inclined to believe about Black people? If a cursory glance at many of the insights of

implicit cognition gives any indication, there is a widespread antipathy toward and misunderstanding of Black people—to such a degree, in fact, that (for instance) people are more likely to do violence to Black people without recognizing Black people's humanity or taking more time to see if an individual Black person is actually armed. The insights of implicit cognition help us to add complexity to the picture.

They are also insufficient. After all, the limits of positivism are the vast and expansive modes of experience that it represses. There is no insight that the implicit cognition research or its predecessors (like Stanley Milgram's and Philip Zimbardo's famous social psychology experiments that detailed the sadistic extent to which people's actions would conform to their social roles if someone else claimed to take full responsibility for the actions) of the last 50 year provide that Black and Native American people's fugitive epistemologies, relied on for their day-to-day survival in the Americas, have not had for at least 500 years. Implicit cognition is late. And it is late because it is premised on ignoring certain modes of knowledge that are not admissible within western positivist networks of academic knowledge.

"[A] basic tenet of psychological realism," says Debby Thompson in her article "'Is Race a Trope?'", "is that characters live inside of you and that you create a character through a process of realizing your own similarity to the character" (Thompson))130). Indeed, Thompson points out that an essential element of naturalistic forms of acting is the assumption that empathy is not merely built but uncovered as though its potentiality had been there all along:

> Because of the belief that all human beings share a common nature or soul, and that this commonality matters more than individual differences, actor and character can and should, in Naturalistic acting, connect through a shared human nature. Hence distinctions between the actor and the character, in Naturalistic acting, should disappear for the audience and become minimized (to varying degrees) for the actor. (128)

Stanislavski's Othello: Bringing Near the Slave

In the work of Stanislavski's system, a certain kind of empathy that I am calling relationality is the goal, whether one's character is a despicable sociopath or a wide-eyed naif. The performer's aim is to become the character so seamlessly that the audience members forget that they are watching a play and thereby come to identify organically with the characters on stage. Praising a couple of fine performances, the Director says, "you who were playing, and we who were watching, gave ourselves up completely to what was happening on the stage" (Stanislavsky) 11).

We have already noted that Stanislavski believes the actor must be concerned with his reception in the audience but it is instructive to note the ways in which Stanislavski implicitly privileges audience reaction throughout *An Actor Prepares*. Specifically, Stanislavski repeatedly refers to a deep and organic audience interest as a significant

measure of truthfulness. The reaction of the audience, therefore, is central to the epistemology of Stanislavski's actor.

The best example of this privileging of audience interest comes in the book's very first example of a performance when Kostya, Stanislavski's fictitious student who narrates the book, performs a blackfaced Othello in the Director's acting class. With the exception of a brief moment in which Kostya succeeds in "living the part," Stanislavski uses Kostya's performance to represent one of the worst kinds of acting—a form that he doesn't even consider to be art, and to which he refers in subsequent chapters. Kostya relied on uninteresting stereotypes of black behavior, says the Director, to the exclusion of any inner motives. (Stanislavski never calls the stereotypes untruthful, although he does deride them for the lack of complexity of understanding they reflect.) Stanislavski's critique of this performance was not, however, of the fact that Kostya put on blackface (common in Othello portrayals of the time when the book was written), nor because it reinforced what today might be called "negative images" of black people, as modern readers may be tempted to read it. Rather, it was because the "stereotyped methods" (((Stanislavsky)) 31) Kostya used did not represent *his* truthful living of the part. And how can the Director tell this? Kostya's untruthfulness was evident because the majority of Kostya's performance did not compel the deepest kind of audience interest. If Kostya can find a way to structurally adjust his internal approach to the circumstances in which Othello lives, he will supposedly be able to (first) live the part, with the (secondary) result that he will also compel the deepest kind of audience interest.

The one exceptional moment in Kostya's performance also illustrates the importance of audience interest to maintaining the initial synthesis of the actor-as-character. This moment happens when the actor's frustration comes out as Othello's (the character's) frustration on the line "Blood, Iago, blood!" Then, Kostya says, "for a moment the listeners strained forward, and … through the audience there ran a murmur. The moment I felt this approval a sort of energy boiled up in me" (11-12). Because he was "living the part," in that moment Kostya uncovered "an artistic truth [which] becomes more pleasing, penetrates more deeply, all the time, until it embraces the whole being of an artist, and of his spectators as well" (31). Compelling and maintaining the interest of the audience, then, is a barometer of artistic quality not just in one's career as a performer but actually within Stanislavski's model of actor preparation.[ii]

Sylvia Wynter's theoretical work examines the work of discursive regimes in making the human, and proposes the necessity for minority scholars to assert a minority discourse that might move toward relieving or reforming certain intolerable aspects of black life. For Wynter, discursive regimes are the basis of naming. They are also things over which, Wynter says, academics have some amount of control as knowledge producers and educators.

In various ways, Wynter frames blackness as a function of discourse and argues that academics have the power to shift that discourse. For example, Wynter's "No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues" is primarily concerned with names

as systems of thinking and the ways in which they classify and order behavior toward young black men ((Wynter "'No Humans Involved": An Open Letter to My Colleagues")). Wynter uses the conceptual other, someone who, in the words of Helen Fine, is "outside the sanctified universe of obligation," to describe a naming practice—"no humans involved" or "NHI"— that members of the Los Angeles police used to identify incidents involving young black men in low-income areas. Wynter draws our attention to the antiblackness built into this concept of an NHI. This "universe of obligation," Wynter says, binds and protects whites and nonblack nonwhites in ways that it does not bind and protect blacks with nonblacks. For Wynter, only blacks are so isolated. Indeed, in another of her essays, "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman,'" Wynter takes gender, a category indispensible to naming the human as such, and exposes the ways in which feminist discourse presumes a normative white woman—and, importantly, a non-black woman—as its primary agent ((Wynter "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman'")). The silencing of women, Wynter says, has been rendered secondary in importance to the silencing of "natives." By my reading, "silencing" here bespeaks not an inability to speak nor the performance of a voluntary aphasia or refusal to engage in (and thereby subject oneself to) discourse, but rather an *a priori* foreclosure of the very possibility of sound making, let alone relational speech. Wynter says that natives are defined within the ruling episteme *in opposition to* the human within the discursive regime that names—and the "nigger," she says, is the quintessential native. One way of thinking about postionality in the hierarchy is through the characters in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Wynter believes that black feminists have aligned themselves with Miranda's set of ethical concerns—with the feminism of white and nonblack women—and that, instead, they need to go "beyond Miranda's meanings," in order to theorize their positionality from Caliban's woman's silenced ground if they hope to undo the naming that oppresses them.

I suspect, however, that Wynter's interest in the power of discourse, and readiness to analogize the ways in which blacks are positioned with the ways in which others are positioned (i.e., situating them as being on the same continuum, situating the differences as ones of degree rather than kind), helps her to claim that shifts in discursive regimes are central to ending the category of the "NHI," the nonhuman black youth. A unique problem faces the theorist who would base a theory of black genocide that does not face those of other genocides: Neither the Armenians nor the Jews, for example, were created as peoples by the fact of being available to the kinds of horrendous violence that they underwent over the eras of pogroms that culminated in the Catastrophe for the Armenians in the Ottoman Turkish Empire and the Shoah for the Jews in Europe. Blacks *as blacks* did not exist before the violence of the Arab slave trade and Middle Passage created them as slaves. Frank Wilderson, critiquing the belated nature of Giorgio Agamben's claim that the death camps of the Shoah were an altogether new prism through which political subjectivity might be thought ("something so unprecedented that one tries to make it comprehensible by bringing it back to categories that are both extreme and absolutely

familiar") says, "Jews went into Auschwitz and came out as Jews. Africans went into the ships and came out as blacks. The former is a Human holocaust; the latter is a Human *and* a metaphysical holocaust. That is why it makes little sense to attempt analogy: the Jews have the Dead (the *Muselmenn*) among them; the Dead have the Blacks among them" ((Wilderson)) 35-36). *Ab initio*, the project of Modernity requires a slave. The violence of Modernity names blacks as blacks in ways that it does not name other peoples or blocs. We need to consider a critique of this analogy as an important theorization of what blackness is—of what happened in the hold of the ship.

Psychological realist acting theories like Stanislavski's labor under the specter of analogy. In "'Is Race a Trope?'", Thompson confronts two epistemological drawbacks with psychological realism: the reliance on the actor's abilities to assimilate the character's experiences and assumption that the audience can discern the "truthfulness" of a performance. Thompson's framework helps us break this problem down to two distinct scales of the self-other problem actors that must negotiate: empathy between the actor and the character (including the character's world, peopled with other characters) and empathy between the actor-as-character and audience. (This, of course, comports with the order of priority that most Stanislavski-based acting teachers employ in their studios: *Find your character first, and, if you are being truthful, audience interest will follow.*)

In the first place, she argues, psychological realism assumes that an actor can, given a high level of physical skill and professional discipline, assimilate all of her character's experiences with all or at least some of her own.

One problem with this kind of striving for authenticity in performance is that it is based in the actor's self; it is "self- oriented." Because the characters represented must remain within the emotional and experiential range of the actor, the range of identities and emotions possible for the character are constrained by the much more limited range of identities and emotions actually experienced and already known or at least imaginable (through the "magic if" or "as-if") by the actor. (Thompson)

It is therefore interesting that Stanislavski used an example of racial otherness to illustrate the problematics of bringing the other near. For example, implicit to the Director's critique of Kostya's overacting is not only the assumption that Kostya *can* make an empathic connection with Othello's specific experiences—that you *are* your experiences and environments rather than some independently existing essence—but there is also a significant assumption about the universality of Othello's body and an assumption that the performer's body also is, or can be, a blank slate capable of taking on any role given the right level of commitment and strong professional discipline. Othello's blackness, for Stanislavski, should be something that an actor can put on and take off— indeed, as was the case with almost all professional productions of Othello until the 1970s. Some advocate the reuptake of this framework of empathic identification.[iii]

Indeed, Shakespeare (and the original author Cinthio) gave Stanislavski ample reason to use this example to make this precise point. Othello, the story's tragic hero, must possess a number of "anthropological touchstones of cohesion" ((Wilderson)232) —

manifested mostly in the beautiful verse Shakespeare "gave" to Othello and in his regal bearing and his slight boast that "I fetch my life and being/ From men of royal siege" — that *make* him human by "giving" him the characteristics of an exceptional human—a hero. The experience Shakespeare has given him has made Othello a creature of excess humanity. That is how Othello is possessed of relationality and hence capable of creating empathy within the person of the actor himself and with the almost certainly all-"white" audiences of Shakespeare's London. Othello would not be Othello, in other words, if he were just a black who eloped with Brabantio's daughter. He requires some pegs on which empathy can hang—and an excess of these to make up for the fact of his blackness. The heroic characteristics constitute a compensation for, and an erasure of, Othello's blackness, fitting him not only to rise from slavery to command the sons of Venice in protection of that city-state's territorial/somatic integrity and honorable name ("in Aleppo once" he slew "a malignant and a turban'd Turk" when the latter "beat a Venetian and "traduced the State"), but also fitting him for access to the gene pool of one of Venice's most esteemed families, even against the wish of that family's patriarch (Bloom).

What Shakespeare understood by Moor is, of course, subject to debate. Elizabethan/Jacobean references to "Moors" included peoples whom today we would call Arabs, Turks, and people from anywhere on the African continent. If we dwell on this question, however, we are drawn into empiricist debates attempting to historicize—i.e., render diachronic—a synchronic paradigm. As with the question of Jesus's race, this is, to a great degree, an errand of diminishing returns when one remembers that the overall cast of the Othello story as Shakespeare renders it is that Othello is human precisely because of his ability to transcend and render irrelevant—albeit titillating—his otherness. What will eventually be an even more significant reading of *Othello* is the question of whether culture or location of birth are even necessary to questions of what it meant to be black, or whether, as Ronald A.T. Judy, Hortense Spillers, and Frank Wilderson hold, blackness indexes a status of objecthood, the absolute foreclosure upon, rather than the loss of, relationality. What is nonetheless clear is that Shakespeare picked someone whose otherness was indexed not merely by belonging to a foreign culture but by his dark appearance—and then proceeded to heap upon him the experiences and qualities of a hero that make him not merely an heroic foreigner but to give him relationality among Venetian contemporaries.

Shakespeare makes the hero tragic by the standard empathy-building trope of creating a counterpoint to the expectations for the dark-skinned other—and perhaps Othello is not so much a subject as an anti-Other, so laden with heroic traits and encomiums as to cover up that which makes him other—and then showing how far those heroic traits can be unraveled and negated by an all-too-human implosion. A being who, long before the play even begins, has fought for and earned the consideration—the empathy— of his Venetian contemporaries (and, hence, the play's audience) is, in short order, reduced first to the status of an irrational and abusive man, then a captive body, and finally flesh. *The tragedy is that the relational can be so quickly reduced to the*

nonrelational. This is to say that the white(ned) can be made black, the living can be made dead, despite the earlier successes through which Othello won empathy from his contemporaries and from the audience.

We find this same narrative strategy of disidentifying black figures from their blackness in order to render black figures worthy of empathic identification when we shift two centuries forward from the 1603 opening performance of *Othello* to the contentious 19th-century debates about slavery, and this narrative strategy is still operating, interestingly enough, within a context in which slavery and practices of empathy building are coeval and politically necessary.

For many white Christian Americans living around the turn of the 19th century, the possibility of experiencing enslavement might well have been in relatively recent memory, given the wide circulation at that time of captivity and redemption narratives of white Christians captured and enslaved by North African Muslim traders known in the United States as the Barbary pirates ((Peskin) 86). According to social historian Lawrence Peskin, several abolitionists in the late 18th and early 19th centuries employed the "Christian savage" trope in newspaper editorials and published pamphlets. This trope drew a "moral equivalency" between the Muslim enslavement of European Christians captured at sea and the Christian enslavement of Africans captured and sold through the transatlantic slave trade. Abolitionists drew this analogy in order to challenge the putative biblical moral authority that US slaveholders claimed for the institution and practices of slaveholding. Peskin says that the abolitionists' end goal was to use the affective power these narratives had among whites in the slaveholding South to create an empathic bond with the slaves that those white Christians held. In this context, "the plight of the Algerian captives [i.e., European captives of Algerian slave traders] had become a useful tool in the rhetorical arsenal of the early national antislavery movement" (86-87). Peskin is careful in his reading of this trope, however, adding the caveat that deploying these spectacular narratives in the discourse of antislavery movements proved useful *only to the extent* that it refuted the ostensible moral superiority of white Christians over dark-skinned Muslims, leaving completely intact the ways in which whites defined themselves as slaveholders in relation to blacks:

> [T]he authors of the many contemporary narratives about white Americans in Algiers attempted to criticize slavery without getting bogged down in issues of racial inferiority. Condemning African American slavery outright could open up a Pandora's box of racial concerns. By condemning enslavement of whites rather than of blacks, these authors no doubt hoped that readers might momentarily be able to separate the inherent evils of slavery from the racist justifications underpinning that institution in America" (88).

Social historians like Peskin might go further into examining the failure of the "Christian savage" trope by looking closely, for example, at the organizations that promoted it. In the final analysis, he can only hint at the reasons for this failure. "In the

end," he concludes, "'tawny' skin, savagery, and slavery were simply too tightly connected in too many Americans' minds for this approach to have widespread success."

There are two points to which the student of black performance and performativity should be attentive in Peskin's approach. First, while rendering a clear connection "in too many Americans' minds" between being a slave and having dark skin, Peskin appears to believe that he is identifying a phenomenon that is essentially historical, hence contingent and performative. In other words, Peskin's analysis sticks very close to the archive in order to tell a story of slavery as a discrete diachronic historical event, but it glosses over an explanation of the tight connection between slaveness and blackness that Peskin observes. The explanatory power of Peskin's analysis relies on commonsense notions of how antiblack racism is sustained, how the connection between black and slave is sutured and naturalized. It is not, however, sufficient to examine the nuances of how that connection is drawn, and leaves several questions unanswered. How many Americans count as "too many"? Can we explain the persistence of the black-slave connection as an accumulation of numbers of Americans who believe blackness equals slaveness? Without extrapolating too much from Peskin's words, is there an implication that undoing this belief was a matter of changing people's minds? How do we explain this connection? In all fairness, it is probable that the methodological protocols of social history make it so that Peskin's concern is primarily to document *that* such attempts to broker empathy failed, rather than to explain *how* or *why*. This latter set of questions might require us to shift our framework to approach affect and the psyche.

Second, Peskin's reading of the documentary evidence also does not lead him to specificity about blackness. I am not saying he is someone who would agree with Stanislavski's theory of the subject. Since "tawny" is quite relative as a designation, any number of people could be said to have had "'tawny' skin." In this reading, we are still left with a slave body that is "darker" by comparison. Again, Peskin is sticking very close to the record here, juxtaposing darkness of skin with blackness. As a social historian, he does not conceptually entertain the question of whether blackness might be something of another order than skin color, ethnicity, and stereotyped savageness.

Saidiya V. Hartman targeted the assumptive logic behind this kind of empathy-building process in another case of a body seeking to cultivate an empathic connection with a black body. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman considers an 1837 letter from white abolitionist John Rankin to his slaveholding brother, in which Rankin tries to cultivate empathy for black slaves. Weaving a fantasy based on his witnessing an actual slave coffle, Rankin imagines his own body and the bodies of his family members in chains as slaves. That empathy, far from emancipatory, simply indexes another arrangement of "enjoyment in the economy of chattel slavery" that was available to all whites, not just those of the slaveholding class nor even of those who wanted to be of the slaveholding class. This ability of those with relationality to advocate for the welfare of black bodies by way of a narrative displacement of those bodies may well have been intended as a part of the project of empathy building, but was only able to work, Hartman shows, owing to the

"figurative capacities of blackness," its absolute absence of capacity, that make it useful not only as a fungible commodity for any use whatever but especially useful as a tablet upon which those endowed with relational capacity were able to write meditations on their own lives ((Hartman)). Such usages became inscribed on the African body as black body.

Conclusion

We have before us several examples of empathic tropes with which to contextualize Stanislavski's work with Shakespeare's Othello. Those of the early abolitionists brokered a connection between a story that had unquestionable affective valence in itself (the Algerian captivity narratives) among white Americans with the more immediately present suffering of black American slaves. Those of Rankin brokered a connection between the suffering black American slave body and his imagined white slave body. The condition of possibility for this suturing of affective concerns is an erasure of the black *qua* black. Hartman's cultural history reading, however, helps us to pressure the rather empiricist reading of social historians like Peskin. She looks at documents from similar and later eras and poses questions that might suggest to us why empathizing with blacks is not simply difficult but somehow barred. Unlike a social historical reading, Hartman's reading notices the gaps and silences in the documentary record. In the spaces where people should be showing up, Hartman can find only objects that are figured with human traits when such figuration is useful to those people whose relational capacity is recognized and who are writing *about* those blacks. That usefulness is in no way confined to the realm of exploitation within a material economy; the economy of affect is fair game as well. Rankin's fancied imagination is able to roam freely over terrain constituted by bodies that show up in the record only as chattel or (rarely) as criminals for their spectacular acts of resisting their chattel status. As Hartman commented on Rankin, "It's as though in order to come to any recognition of common humanity, the Other must be assimilated, meaning, in this case, utterly displaced and effaced" ((Hartman and Wilderson)189).

Hartman's reading of Rankin invites us to read in Kostya's (Stanislavski's) use of Othello's body, in order to make his experiences "universal" or accessible to Kostya, a kind of displacement of Othello's blackness. If Kostya's inhabiting of Othello's body only requires a few internal and external adjustments, then can it be predicated on a theory that really acknowledges what it means for the slave to suffer? In even asserting that all bodies are equally interchangeable, it might be that one has disavowed the slave's lived experience. As Fanon says, "I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without." Stanislavski's approach has already foreclosed on the question "What does it mean to be human and to have a body?" with the answer "To be human is to be classified in Linnaean taxonomy as *Eukarya Animalia Chordata Vertebrata Mammalia Placentalia Primata Anthropoidea Catarrhini Hominidae Homo sapiens sapiens*," and "To have a body is to

have a pulse and breath within a vessel made of skin, muscle, organ tissue, nerves, fat, etc."

Hartman reminds us how deeply black Absence is rooted in the philosophical categories by which the Modern World makes sense of itself:

> The bourgeois individual, the unencumbered self, and the featureless person that give meaning to the term "political" in its conventional usage, with all the attendant assumptions about the relation of the subject and the state, cannot incorporate the enslaved, for how does one express an individual will when one is without individual rights? (Hartman) 62)

It would be incorrect, in other words, to argue that the categories that lend legitimacy to Modernity's politico-economic and ethical order— i.e., the Enlightenment-era concept of inalienable human rights, the rational agent of classical economics, and especially, for our purposes, the body and the liberal humanist subject—were *accidentally* formulated without black subjects in mind. To the contrary, Modernity actually *relies on* the exclusion of the black subject—indeed, of the very possibility of such a thing as a black subject; in order to maintain coherence as a spatiotemporal site in which those who are subjected—both oppressor and oppressed—contest divergent claims of freedom, Modernity must generate its absolute opposite. "Slaves"—the only category through which black bodies have entered and remained legible within the Modern discursive order— "are not consensual and willful actors, the state is not a vehicle for advancing their claims, they are not citizens, and their status as persons is contested" (65). Or, from the other angle, the designation "Human"—framed in humanist terms as universal—is a proxy term for White, and while it can be extended to groups that were previously uncoded, whiteness/"humanness" can be extended to many but cannot be extended to a group that has already been coded in opposition to it within the ruling episteme in which the political and libidinal economies of Modernity cohere.

This brings us to the other limitation Thompson points out in psychological realism: its reliance on what the audience can understand. Here again, Thompson goes far to point out the political implications of audience reaction:

> [F]undamental to a post-structuralist critique of liberal humanist models of identity is the belief that ideology and ideological state apparati [sic] (including the arts) create "common sense" or "obviousness" or "believability." Ideological state apparati make us experience ideological structures as deeply personal, natural, and instinctive. The way the actor's emotions and identities are experienced, then, will (in a post- structuralist model) be very much embedded in the ideological situations of the actors, but will be presented as "impulsive," "instinctive," "natural," "the truth of human nature." Naturalism, in other words, naturalizes ideology. ((Thompson)129)

Here again we can see the trouble that occurs when Stanislavski's essential concepts—and the seemingly universal categories that form their assumptive logic—collide with the black body.

The goal of the performer must be to "live the part" so fully that the audience members will be utterly absorbed into the life of his character, forgetting that what they are watching is a play and coming to identify with the character. In the case of the character's interaction with the audience, the empathy Stanislavski seeks to build is assumed to result from the interaction of (at least) two bodies. Both Hegel and Stanislavski approach the problem of empathy, and do so in a way that assumes its possibility as the dialectic synthesis formed between two consciousnesses: for Hegel, those of the Master and Slave, and for Stanislavski, those of the actor and the character, and then also of the character and the audience.

We have, then, a basic problem: Although relationality and truthfulness are not identical, the foundational text for producing actors as effective knowledge producers continues to act as though they are—as though it is even hypothetically possible that any person could be— relational as a black. Given what I have shown above, there is a fundamental problem that shows up in historical records and in historiography alike that struggles to explain how blacks gain relationality. What is the nature of this problem?

Chapter 4: Negative Space:

On Negro Removal and the Paradox of Paradise Park

In this chapter, I theorize from the window of my home in North Oakland/Emeryville the rapidly gentrifying area that Bay Area gentrifiers have begun to rename as NOBE or Paradise Park the ways that Black bodies perform both in space and as a collective as the negative space of civil society—constantly being removed so that civil society can (re)make itself and make room for its play of fantasies. It is also a negative space in that Black people, and especially Black image makers, help. I will explore the ways that Black removal and at least the potential, if not actuality, of Black death are essential components for civil society's so-called revitalization projects in the liberal Bay Area. Baldwin's comment on an earlier rendition of this trend occurred concurrently with his break from from his previous modes of writing in his years after the March on Washington (1963) expose the psychic hydraulics of Black removal. Baldwin seems to have recognized that he was participant in civil society's projection of its white self and desires onto the negative space of the Black Fillmore District and Bayview-Hunter's Point areas.

James Baldwin: By "urban redevelopment" you mean…

Orville Luster: Removal of Negroes. Haha.

James Baldwin: That's what I thought

A Tale of Two Gentrifications

The year is 2009. I am attending the opening exhibit of the Gray Area Foundation for the Arts the work of Camille Utterback, a San Francisco Bay area new media artist and Macarthur "genius grant" recipient known for her signature style of playful, digital creations that attempt to hail, in Louis Althusser's sense, the people who experience them to a desire for embodied interaction with digital technologies, often with other people and in very public spaces. Its aesthetic as participatory and public art, however, is framed by the urban space disappearing act known as gentrification and the policing of the bodies associated with the space. The Tenderloin District is known for having a large multiracial population of homeless people, young and old, a cruising site for gays and heteros, a location of crime and drug addiction. It is also the home of Glide Memorial Church, a longstanding Bay Area institution that works closely with these populations and has also become a kind of haven for tourists seeking libidinal pleasure, salvation, or both.

The Tenderloin is a multiracial version of what Kevin Mumford calls the interzone, the vice districts located in cities around the globe where consumers from wealthier neighborhoods can come to purchase their various fixes and then turn their backs and not have to look at the costs of their pleasure. The geographic separation of the interzone neighborhood from their own neighborhood allows the wealthy to externalize not only the economic costs of what it takes to provide their fixes but also the psychic and physical

tolls. Moreover, the interzone exists as an ethical void that can be seen to be in and of itself, disconnected from the goings on of other neighborhoods. Even though the residents of those neighborhoods need the interzone to exist for their own pleasure, they also get enjoyment from denying that they experience any pleasure from it, and can decry it as a space of a concentrated ethical void where they can dump not only their money, semen, vomit, and shit, but also where they can turn to dump their outrage at the doings of "those people" who live there.

Liquid Time, Camille Utterback's interactive digital public participatory artwork, consists of a large video screen on which is displayed a looped, moving image of some quotidian event in the Tenderloin District. The looped video image changes every few minutes. One moment the image might be a group of professionally dressed white-looking people crossing the street; another moment it might be a slightly posed scene of smiling Asian children from a nearby school. When I visited the piece for the first time, I saw several images of homeless people walking, pushing shopping carts, and being approached by the police. The images went back and forth between motion and stillness by responding to the viewer's presence in a very specific way that I will detail in a moment. The following description of this installation on Utterback's web site foregrounds the ways the piece invites us to play individually and bodily with notions of memory, but it is also playing with notions of public space.

> In the *Liquid Time* Series installation, a participant's physical motion in the installation space fragments time in a pre-recorded video clip. As the participant moves closer to the projection screen they push deeper into time—but only in the area of the screen directly in front of them. Beautiful and startling disruptions are created as people move through the installation space. As viewers move away, the fragmented image heals in their wake—like a pond returning to stillness. The interface of one's body—which can only exist in one place, at one time—becomes the means to create a space in which multiple times and perspectives coexist. ((Utterback))

From 1 October to 19 November 2009, Liquid Time was displayed in GAFFTA's Tendorama, a large 15'x7' window display that makes the installation visible only from the front of the gallery on Taylor Street to passersby, not to visitors inside the gallery. This gallery piece therefore seems designed for a non-traditional audience: viewers outside the gallery, walking on the sidewalk. You don't need to be a wine-sipping gallery visitor to enjoy this piece; indeed, to see it, to interact with it, you have to view it from the street. This is art for everyone.

Or is it?

When I saw the piece on 2 October 2009, the Opening gala for the GAFFTA gallery, there were (by my count) six armed police officers clustered on the opposite corners of the same side of Taylor Street where Liquid Time was displayed. There was also a rather large unarmed white male employee of the gallery standing by the door. When I first walked up, he seemed to eye me warily before sharing a nod of the head and greeting

me with a "How's it going?" that, as greetings go, stood poised somewhere between "Can I help you sir?" and "I'm watching your ass." I later found out that his name was Scott. Scott was posted up at the door the entire three-plus hours that I was there on opening night, and cut a foreboding figure against the open door and otherwise inviting sounds of electronic hip-hop/house music coming from the gallery. He wasn't uniformed, but the fact that he was always facing the street and the people on it made me conclude that he could only have been there as a security guard.

On the inside of the gallery, I looked at the other artwork on display. One of the other interactive digital pieces allowed a participant to see mapped demographic figures on the Tenderloin District within a given time period, figures that suggested a rapidly gentrifying area of the city—including building permits applied for in recent months, crime rates, and the average dollar amounts of rents and mortgages in various parts of the District. Surveillance as public art? ["San Francisco-based Stamen Design will debut a series of interactive and printed pieces that allow visitors to explore the Tenderloin through a series of different maps and mappings. Using data from the Uptown Tenderloin Historic District, public data made available by the City of San Francisco's datasf.org, and other data sets, the project will provide a unique view on this fascinating neighborhood. (from http://www.gaffta.org/2009/08/23/inaugural-exhibition-open/ accessed on 5/7/13)] *Liquid Time*, at least, has to do surveillance in order to create a space in which it can encourage people to stand together. It employs and cultivates a politics of participation, which are also a recursive politics of performativity: by declaring the space in front of it as a public space, it makes a public. This is only possible because it is a form of art that actually "looks" back (unlike, say, the Mona Lisa) and immediately processes what it "sees." I say "actually" looks back because just above where it is displayed is a very hard-to-see video camera that tracks the participant's movements and converts them into data that will register as the lines/water ripples on the screen. Unlike most surveillance art, it does not employ motion-sensitive cameras to expose the sense in which modern civil society is a hyper-surveilled and disciplined space. The camera, so far as my research has revealed, does not record images that could be stored but only patterns of movement, translating them via complex algorithmic functions into the ripples on the screen. In this regard, it is perhaps a more advanced version of the motion sensor in a paper towel dispenser or a motion-detecting light. Rather, the camera enables the two-way gaze required for interaction. The camera's gaze upon us and our gaze upon the screen facilitate the "play" of Liquid Time. The public placement and the playful use of gazes work in tandem to make people comfortable being in public, being surveilled, and using digital technologies. All of this builds on a certain level of generalized or ontological trust.

In researching further, one thing I noticed in discussions around GAFFTA was the intertwining of discourse of gentrification and discourse suggestive of life, resuscitation, resurrection, and at the same time of the erasure of the past and discovery of the future—in short, anti-death. On the wall inside the gallery is a quote from San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom praising GAFFTA as central to the planned "rebirth" of the Tenderloin

District. ("The Gray Area will be a cornerstone in the rebirth of Taylor Street, which is a crucial part of my citywide economic development efforts."--Gavin Newsom, Mayor of San Francisco.) Perhaps even more interesting is GAFFTA's easily accessible promotional video. According to this video, various news media have called GAFFTA a "breakthrough," promising a "new arts district" that will "spruce up" the "long troubled" Tenderloin district by taking over a porn theater, club, and liquor store and replacing them first with the digital arts gallery that is there now, and in the next phase with a café, fashion boutique, and state-of-the-art performance and media lab that is available to the whole community. "What is happening, it gives the Tenderloin, I think, a future," says Jack Sumski, the property owner. The video goes on to quote several of the new media artists, including Camille Utterback and others. The video promises that the gallery will make "digital culture accessible, substantive and inspiring" and "aim to help realize the greatest power of technology: to bring us closer, faster." In showing some of the area residents it means to benefit, the video shows a smiling group of youths who look to be of east Asian descent, presumably Asian American, probably adolescents, getting a tactile introduction to many of the new media technologies they might someday use to make art.

Another thing really stands out to me about the artwork itself: Aside from images of a man sweeping the streets of the Tenderloin and another man pushing a grocery cart full of plastic garbage bags and cans onto a curb, I see no signs of black life. I'm it. Perhaps, as Fanon said, it is "too early, or too late" ((Fanon) xi) to see the black. When I'm outside the gallery again, I think it is important that the people who look like they live in the Tenderloin—who look kinda like me, black, dark-skinned— do not seem to stop to interact with Liquid Time. They keep moving by. In all of my time at the gallery on 2 October and on my brief subsequent visits, I never saw another black person interacting with Liquid Time in the Tenderloin. And I am not sure why that is, but I have an idea. Could it be that the other black people in the Tenderloin are hailed by the frame—the heavy presence of police, Scott at the door, the music coming from inside suggesting that this is zoned for the Settler, not the Slave— more than by the art itself?

The functions that enable standing together to reveal more of the screen also work recursively toward a particular end. In standing together, people in this public space may speak to each other, something that digital technologies generally seem to make us do less of. There is a feedback response that makes one attempt physically to produce certain effects. At a certain point in the interaction one no longer simply watches for the responses one's movements make, but actively pursues an objective, usually an aesthetic of completion. We strive for this bodily because of the induced state of frustration that Utterback's artwork seems to play with. It is, of course, an asymptotic pursuit; we will never see the entire picture before it flashes on to a new picture, and this picture may have a very different algorithmic relationship to our movements such that what, in the previous picture, allowed us to see more of the picture may now make us see less of it.

One experiences a kind of frustration in interacting with this piece because there is not a way to see the entire 15'x7' image as a unified whole. This frustration is "healed,"

like the website says about the image, when another body stands by one's side. Standing together as two people helps make the image a little more unified, a little easier to narrativize. The "beautiful and startling disruptions" that one makes, and that passersby make, are possible because the camera is capable of processing multiple individuals at one moment, creating multiple ripples in the image, each of them windows into distinct micro-moments of the same scene from the Tenderloin. It frustrates us when we cannot see the whole image, frustrates us when we see that we are being watched from above, frustrates us when we come back anyway to participate in its magic, and frustrates us that we can only move but so far into the future by our embodied interaction with the Tenderloin as mediated by Liquid Time. The fun of playing with our bodies to manipulate perspectival space and through it manipulate time, sutures a kind of seeming power that I, for one, am not used to having.

Speaking about Liquid Time in her lecture at the UC Berkeley Center for New Media's Arts, Technology, and Culture (ATC) series, Utterback noted that the proximity of one's body controls "the flip," back and forth in time, highlighting one way in which the interaction itself works as a technology, like a light switch or, perhaps, a keystroke combination such as the "Undo/Redo" keystroke combinations—"Command+Z"/ "Command+Y," recalling the need to "revitalize" the Tenderloin and other spaces, and the common practice of "flipping" houses and cars, buying them at low prices and repairing them enough to justify raising the price substantially. But if to remove certain bodies from a place is to revitalize it, this prompts a question: Who killed it? Whose agential actions are we "flipping," in the sense of reversing, in order to revitalize the Tenderloin? What makes the Tenderloin "dead" such that it needs to be brought to life? And, if we answer that question, we have to ask if *Liquid Time* is really healing time or helping or hailing us to a particular imaginary of space-time.

"Interactivity itself is the subject of the work," Utterback said in the ATC lecture. Her work attempts to help humans "bridge" what is different about the analog world from that of the digital. And yet, something in the placement of Liquid Time is haunting me. The Tenderloin installation features digital video images of Tenderloin residents, a large portion of whom are homeless, Black, and Brown people. Liquid Time invites people to stand together and occupy a public space and, importantly, to interactively celebrate embodied existence, allowing passersby to manipulate the video images, to toggle time and fragment space—but, in doing so, it simultaneously asks people to turn their backs to the people walking behind them, many of whom are homeless, and who, if we consider GAFFTA's role in a larger project of gentrification, may very well be displaced within a short time.

The Aesthetics of Black Removal

In the wake of the massive foreclosure crisis, that disproportionately affected Black homeowners, how does the urban disappearing act known as the gentrification of Black spaces constitute a mode of performance? How do new media constitute performance

document the project of gentriying Black communities? The sources I read here concern three sites of gentrification in the San Francisco Bay Area via three modes of new media: a documentary from the public television archive about Bayview-Hunter's Point and Western Addition in San Francisco proper, a realtor's YouTube documentary about North Oakland and the counter documentary produced from it by a local collective of activists, and a piece of new media public art in San Francisco's Tenderloin District. The leadership imperative that I explore is the way that the presence of Black bodies fucks with the work of the figure of the Motherfucker, even as the Motherfucker proceeds apace with the project of shoring up his mastery, his social life.

The San Francisco MSA (specifically, SF proper and Oakland) is presently aestheticizing its "renewal," a "renewal" that includes, or perhaps needs or perhaps *is*, Black erasure. Does Baldwin and Luster's formulation of gentrification as "negro removal"--and in the same space—help us understand an essential antiblack antagonism—and Black people's response to that positioning?

I am interested here in the ways that aesthetic projects document who was there before even as they push them out. I will examine one more video project, a local set of promotional videos being circulated about the neighborhood in which I write these very words, North Oakland, the birthplace of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense.

The gang injunction area of North Oakland is a site of prioritized policing, where youths who appear to be congregating can be labeled as involved in a gang activity and stopped. The gang injunction area is basically coterminous with the zone of the "Paradise Park" revitalization area.

How does Baldwin's knowledge in the space of San Francisco's destruction of Black communities shape the shift in the tone of his writing? And does this shift in his writing reflect on how subjectivity is broken in the Break/Interval? How does this space relate to the change in his relationship to the space of the ghetto, the children in that space that takes him right back to Harlem?

Between Illusion and Necessity

 "If one could find out—and this is something white people have to do, Negroes can't do it—exactly what a Negro means to a white man… then the conundrum of the housing situation in San Francisco would not be a conundrum, because it is based on that."
—James Baldwin, Take This Hammer (1964)
"What I remembered—or imagined myself to remember—of my life in America (before I left home!) was terror…"
—James Baldwin, The Evidence of Things Not Seen (1985).

In the closing moments of the public television documentary Take This Hammer,[1] James Baldwin indicts his white liberal viewers for needing something called "the nigger." By this point, 40 minutes into the film, the viewers have seen this author, known for the ease with which he could establish rapport with his readers, walking

through several neighborhoods in San Francisco in the spring of 1963. Baldwin has not yet directly addressed the camera, and the cinema verité style of filming and editing in this documentary has thereby preserved a voyeuristic "fly on the wall" mode of address. The viewer has seen Baldwin witnessing a snapshot of some of the problems of black life in the USA, apparently in accord with the documentary's purpose. That stated purpose frames the film relatively early, when the rarely heard announcer, probably director Richard Moore, says that Baldwin and he agreed to "explore the existence of… attitudes of...bitterness, demoralization, and despair [said to be increasing among northern black youths] in the city of San Francisco" ((WNET.ORG)1964) (1:30). The viewer has seen Baldwin counseling a group of (probably) unemployed black youths in the predominantly African American neighborhood of Bayview-Hunter's Point to "realize that you can become a—you can become the president [of the United States]" (7:40). Baldwin has moved from standing at the construction sites of expensive new high-rise condominiums while discussing the displacement of black residents that was both an effect and a condition of possibility of that construction to meditating on "exactly what a Negro means to a white man" (35:15). But, given the ethnographic tenor of this documentary, it is hard not to notice that an author whom Norman Mailer famously accused of being "incapable of saying 'Fuck you' to the reader" and whom many have said was without peer "at creating a sense of intimacy with the reader" ((Campbell)142) has not faced his viewing audience to perform the facilitating or mediating role often seen in such documentaries.

Now sitting comfortably in a living room interior that has previously been established as the site of some of the film's most intimate and reflective thoughts, Baldwin finds it necessary to implicate his viewers in the problems that the film has brought into focus. Baldwin appears to be in conversation with someone seated just off-screen right of the camera. What follows is a kind of monolog by the 38-year-old Baldwin that retroactively threatens the viewers' framework on the preceding 40 minutes.

> One of the great American illusions, one of the great American necessities, is to believe that I, a poor benighted black man whom they saved from the elephant-ridden jungles of Africa, to whom they brought the bible [here Baldwin pauses to strike a match and light his cigarette, and then, shaking out the match, he continues], is still grateful for that. (Take This Hammer 1964) (40:30)

Up to this moment, Baldwin has not looked directly at the camera for any sustained period of time. Baldwin appears to be engaged in a conversation with a third party on the topic of self-knowledge among black Americans, and especially of the role of racism in the self-knowledge of black American youths.

> What you say about somebody else, you know, anybody else, reveals you… I'm not describing you when I talk about you. I'm describing me. (41:40)

Baldwin elaborated something far more philosophically complex than a view of the interdependence of ideologies about blackness and whiteness or generalizations about the *psyches* of white people and black people. After all, in the prior moments of the film, Baldwin has focused as much on institutional structures of power—what Baldwin and his

interlocutors in the film refer to as urban redevelopment or "removal of Negroes" (21:15), police surveillance and harassment, systemic unemployment of black youths—as on psychic formations in illustrating Baldwin's central concern with the question of "exactly what a Negro means to a white man." These structures, of course, are not just located in the realm of psychic or ideological formations but actually help to form the subject as such. They are illusions *and* necessities. Baldwin's living room meditation on self-knowledge is therefore puzzling and instructive, for it seems to indict the viewer:

> I've always known—I had to know by the time I was 17 years old—that what you were describing was not me, and what you were afraid of was not me. It had to be something else. You had invented it, so it had to be something you were afraid of. And you invested me with it. (42:10)

At this point, Baldwin has begun to turn his gaze on his viewers, and, although he is not yet in direct address (looking directly at the camera and, hence, the viewer), he is as close to it as he has been. "[P]art of the agony," says Baldwin, is that he has always known himself not to be "the nigger." The question, however, cannot be easily dismissed: "Who *is* 'the nigger?'" It is not necessarily a question that he must answer, and perhaps he might have chosen to leave it rhetorical, but, for whatever reasons, Baldwin now pursues it as a way of getting at a larger assertion. "I am not the victim here," he says, a defiant, perhaps even tearful smirk creeping across his face as he finally shifts to a direct address. Now at his most intimate, he appears to look the viewer directly in the eye, and elaborates a very brief history of his own production of knowledge about himself as a black person. "I've always known that I was not a nigger… I've known this because I've had to know it." Here he glances down, inhales, and then picks up the cigarette that he had put down. The intimacy evaporates. "But you still think, I gather, that the nigger is necessary." He drags off of his cigarette, gesturally effecting a kind of making strange of the self he has presented in the previous 43½ minutes. "Well he's unnecessary to me so he must be necessary to you. I'm gonna give you your problem back. You're the nigger, baby. It isn't me" (42:55).

Taking Baldwin's performance in *Take This* Hammer as a point of departure, the present meditation explicates some of the important philosophical stakes of Baldwin's performative reversal. In this documentary, one sees the trace of an emerging shift in Baldwin's political consciousness that fundamentally indicts the unique ways that the United States situates black people as "niggers." Baldwin is not, however, the subject here so much as is his performative break, and, even more specifically, the structural antiblackness that his performative break identifies, even as that structure continues to anchor the meaning his black performance can have. Baldwin's performance of an analysis of racial blackness as something that is both *illusion* and *necessity* amplifies a more extensive analysis in which "the nigger" is fixed in place by a political order that needs it to stay there. This fixing is not merely a function of an ideological superstructure because, as Baldwin notes, the fixing shows up not simply as an illusion mobilized to preserve existing relations of production, but as an "American necessity"—part and parcel

of the relations that constitute America as such (the base, if one prefers). These aspects of the "nigger"—its fixity as a psychic formation surrounding Afro-descended bodies as uniquely outside the family of humanity ("elephant-ridden jungles of Africa") and its being a necessity to the existence of America—put Baldwin's analysis in the spring of 1963 in line with his memories of 1985, also cited in the epigraph, in which America is "terror."

Baldwin's performance in *Take This Hammer* offers valuable insight into how we might think about the concept of a *subject position* as something inclusive of yet beyond *identity*. Baldwin had maintained through much of his work that white Americans know themselves by knowing black Americans as that which they are not. In this process of white self-knowing, whiteness also, however, inadvertently reveals what it needs for blackness to be, the frameworks within which it expects blackness to stay—reveals, in other words, a will to make blackness mean something specific—*for whiteness*. This was a theme to which Baldwin later returned many times in his writing and speaking.

For instance, in "A Talk to Teachers," a speech delivered later in 1963, Baldwin says, "So where we are now is that a whole country of people believe I'm a 'nigger,' and I *don't*, and the battle's on! Because if I am not what I've been told I am, then it means that *you're* not what *you* thought you were *either*! And that is the crisis" (Baldwin, *Price of the Ticket* 325). *That* is *the crisis*. In other words, if white people need black people to be the various things that they make them—entertainers, impoverished dependents, objects of sexual desire, objects of fear, dear friends, mammies, movie savages, and above all, grateful—then that need is itself revealing about what whiteness means and the ways in which whiteness exists as something that can be understood only in relation to blackness.

There is far more in play here than the "bitterness" of black youths who are discriminated against and "can't get jobs" (*Take This Hammer* 1964) (7:40) although that particular issue, among others, is clearly important to Baldwin. More fundamentally, there are unstated issues of power at stake—and particularly the grounding that certain epistemologies have in *structural* relations of power—for when black people are not available to produce the self-knowledge that white people desire—or, more to the historical point, when black people are actively contesting the terms on which blackness will mean—the result is a "crisis," the likes of which Baldwin saw engulfing the United States through the movements of the 1950s through 1970s.[2]

This entanglement of blackness and whiteness is more than just a relational nexus of different cultures or identities, for it would not otherwise be as constitutive as Baldwin says it was of the very shape of American society ("the housing situation...is based on that") and it is something that white people have the power to change ("this is something white people have to do, Negroes can't do it"), even if, unfortunately, they do not change it. Rather, the entanglement also reflects a substantial power arrangement that runs so deep as to be defining of who Americans (think they) are. Underwriting Baldwin's articulations around blackness and whiteness is an observation of how knowledge and power work in relation to black people in ways so fundamental as to be an "American necessity." Black people produce self-knowledge for white people, and vice-versa, but, in

the historic moment in which Baldwin writes, they are contesting the terms by which this self-knowledge is produced, and this contestation bumps up against something so fundamental to American whiteness as to cause a "crisis."[3]

Baldwin's cold and ironic renaming of the white viewer as a pejorative term for a person of African descent tries to give the Negro problem "back" to the white viewer. It insists that white people are the ones who properly own the problem ("something white people have to do") and it situates "the nigger" as something that Baldwin—here functioning as a stand-in for all black people—did not, and perhaps does not have the power to, invent.

This move is striking at several levels that are important to consider here. First, it is a performative "curse" (Brooks, "Nina Simone" 188-189), and it points to a desire to reverse and reappropriate a certain designation that is regularly imposed on black people. "Nigger" is imposed even when the word itself is not used. Indeed, if, as Baldwin would later observe, "the world has more than one way of keeping you a nigger, has evolved more than one way of skinning the cat" (Baldwin, *Collected Essays* "No Name in the Street," 371), then over the course of *Take This Hammer*, being named "the nigger" might be said to look like a shaken 14-year-old black girl (interviewed in the film) who is worried that her family will be "living on the street in tents" because they will soon be displaced by "urban redevelopment" (*Take This Hammer* 1964) (20:30), like a young black man who makes an off-hand reference to having been arrested at the age of 8 (16:10), like a young black man telling another black man, "We have no country" (15:45), and even like an accomplished black author being asked to do a documentary about the "bitterness" of black youths, when the ostensibly "bitter" youth whom he will interview live in a ghetto in the wealthiest nation on Earth. Baldwin's renaming of the white viewer is particularly striking coming, as it is edited to do, at the end of the film, the privileged locus of the final meaning-making sequences of a film. It alienates—that is, underlines and comments on—the labor that Baldwin, supposedly the privileged knowledge producer in this film, has done to improve the white audience's understanding of the black world—a labor that was analogous to that which he had done throughout his literary career, before he had decided "I was never going to be anybody's nigger again" (Baldwin, *Collected Essays* "No Name" 371). As the subsequent analysis will make clear, Baldwin performs a certain kind of "break," a black irruptive resistance that threatens to "disrupt the totalizing force" (Moten *In the Break* 5) animating the documentary—a desire circulating among white people to make black people "the problem" and using the documentary to inquire about why black youths are "bitter."

There is, however, another level on which this iteration performs. By the end of the film, Baldwin's performance has articulated or implied two key tenets of what has recently come to be called *afropessimism*[4] (Wilderson, *Red, White & Black* 39-40). First, Baldwin has affirmed that blackness is created by whiteness, or, more specifically, by a white power structure that, with or without the conscious will of its constituent members, tries to reduce black people to the fantasies it ascribes to blackness. Second, his performance

shows how white America *needs* blackness—in a unique and constitutive kind of way—to mean something that, as Baldwin's statement quoted in the epigraph observes, is fundamental to the shape that American society takes ("[the housing situation] is based on that") and, as his statement to the teachers observed, is so fundamental to white people's sense of themselves that a "battle's on" and a "crisis" is induced when that meaning is contested.

These two elements of Baldwin's performance point to blackness as something that, as Frank B. Wilderson III points out, is "structural" (Wilderson, *Red, White & Black* 7-8). To call blackness structural is to say two things. First, it means that it is created by an antiblack social structure that creates itself in opposition—an antagonistic relationship—to blackness, for blackness did not exist before the network of interconnected social and historical forces known as the global trade in African slaves (the Atlantic slave trade and the East African slave trade) and its subsequent shifting modalities (like jimcrow and the prison), as well as the unique set of meanings that situated sub-Saharan Africa as the site par excellence of slaves. Blackness also shows up in Baldwin's understanding as structural in the sense that it gives meaning to all other positions that can know themselves as not black. For Baldwin in *Take This Hammer*, then, blackness exists as something that is clearly created out of a set of human practices, as opposed to being biological or metaphysical, but it is nonetheless pivotal in the self-knowledge of America. Between a "great American illusion" and a "great American necessity" exists the grateful "nigger" who could have been left to perish in the "elephant-ridden jungles of Africa" but was spared that fate by the slavery that was foundational to America's formation as a set of relations. In Baldwin's filmic performance, then, "the nigger" emerges as a kind of copulative figure conjoining the collective fantasies of America—its illusions—with the collective needs of America—its necessities. In this regard, Baldwin articulates something like what Wilderson calls a political ontology of racial blackness (Wilderson, *Red, White & Black* 55), which is to say the converging networks of forces and affective meanings that create blackness as a state of being that is firmly fixed in a structurally antagonistic relationship (i.e., the "Slave") to America (the "Master" or "Settler"), even though that fixedness is human-made—hence political— and not essential or metaphysical (Wilderson, *Red, White & Black* 29-31).

Thinking through the antagonisms that Wilderson says are inherent to the political ontological position of whites ("Settlers") and that of blacks ("Slaves"), the ways that Baldwin relates to his film audience in *Take This Hammer* must be part of the reading of this film. Because *Take This Hammer* is a documentary, there is consistently a sense that Baldwin is indirectly engaged with the television audience, and by the last scene, it is clear that his work in this film has been both directed toward and aimed against the white liberal viewers of this documentary. The final monolog that takes up the last three minutes and fifteen seconds of the film is more than just Baldwin's parting word. It is the moment when Baldwin might exert affective and rhetorical force to prevent the film from imposing closure on the fragmented narratives that have emerged, by rendering them as "problems"

that might eventually be solved within the American framework, and it underscores the ways that he has found a seam in the signifying field of the film and shifted its meaning from being an exegesis on Negro "bitterness" to one that explores "exactly what a Negro means to a white man." It is, as the subsequent analysis will make clear, a *performative break*. What is just as clear, however, is that its efficacy in shifting the performative field is severely limited by the very figure it invokes—"the nigger"—and the meanings that figure has and cannot have in the USA.

Performative Breaks and the Time of Blackness

What does it mean to call Baldwin's work in this film a performative break? To call it performative is to say both that his words do more than merely describe, and that Baldwin does more with those words than merely to utter them (as he might, for instance, in a lecture). Performance must here be understood as a mode of human subjectivity and sociality in which discourse takes on a life of its own and words *are* actions, rather than simply being descriptions of them.

To read Baldwin's performance in *Take This Hammer*, however, this framework of the performative must be expanded because it is being mobilized to consider black performance. Fred Moten and Daphne Brooks use performativity as a model for both acknowledging how signifying practices create and are created by subjects and as a model for resisting the power of subjection to those signifying practices. Moten's and Brooks' work mobilizes performativity to read the performances not just of artists like Adrian Piper and Nina Simone, but also of black activists like Henry "Box" Brown and Mamie Till. Performativity therefore seems a helpful tool for an analysis of what Baldwin is making his words do in *Take This Hammer*.

Two aspects of the framework of performativity apply to Baldwin's performance in *Take This Hammer*: its relation to the embodied practices and its capacity for altering the chain of iterations. Performativity, as Judith Butler applies it as a framework, attempts to make sense of the body's gestures as both products of a discursive field and as constituent elements of that field. Hence, the ways that Baldwin represents his views "through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (Butler 136) direct the viewer's attention to alternate takes on what *Take This Hammer* is saying and how it is saying than written words alone can describe. For instance, Baldwin's texts and some of his other documentary appearances, like the static *Baldwin's Nigger*, a film recording a lecture he gave to Caribbean students in London, show Baldwin in one location and do not situate his words as he moves through particular spaces before the eyes and ears of his readers/viewers and gestures in ways that might not do in a lecture room. In this sense, studying Baldwin's work as performative entails a reading of the embodied practices that words do not adequately describe. In the above-mentioned monolog, for instance, the moments in which Baldwin strikes his match render the distinction between word and act highly problematic and require the viewer to consider the slippages and excesses in

Baldwin's work in this final moment of the film. (This is part of the reason why one has to see the 45-minute film to really understand what this essay is getting at.)

The other sense in which the performative is important to this analysis involves the ways that Baldwin parodies, or cites while commenting on, similar roles in previous documentaries—previous iterations of the role of the documentary subject. Baldwin, in other words, is not just performing in the sense of doing something with his body; he is also performing in the sense of making an iteration—a repetition—that cites (and hence reinstates) prior performances of the documentary subject while simultaneously revising those performances into something that parodies earlier performances of documentary subjects. When Baldwin coolly says, "You're the nigger, baby," part of this statement's significance derives from the fact that it is a parody of the expected role of polite host to the viewer and all of the supposed epistemic authority that might otherwise accrue to a documentary subject. This parodic performance, in turn, enables further iterations that might further deform the boundaries of how one can perform this role of the (black) documentary subject.

But to what limits might this performative parodying be carried out? And, indeed, if the gaze of the camera-qua-viewer is a significant locus of power, what does it mean when Baldwin gazes back and calls his viewers (the most abject of) human objects? Is there any efficacy in this utterance? Does Baldwin's iteration have the power to make itself true? If not, why not? Here is where the way that one theorizes blackness really matters.

Fred Moten's concept of "the break" helps make sense of the critical project in which Baldwin's performative intervention engages. For Moten, "the break" is a rupturing of the totalizing forces that render blackness as an object. Moten engages black performance and performativity in the context of the kind of black radicalism with which Baldwin was engaged—jazz, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Power Movement. For Moten, black performance *is* black radicalism, with radicalism defined as "the performance of a general critique of the proper" (Moten,"Case of Blackness" 177). Both black radicalism and black performance emerge "in the break" from the irrepressible scream of the human object who resists complete dehumanization. The force that seeks to fix the place of—or positionalize—*blackness* as objecthood, then, is never enough to positionalize *the black person*. Racism, no matter how totalizing it seeks to be, cannot foreclose the lines of flight that Moten calls a "freedom drive," because even strict power regimes like the antebellum South and jimcrow Mississippi contain an invaginative space—a spatiotemporal "cut" within the folds of which lie the possibilities of its opposite—and cannot stop the material force of the object's resistance to absolute dehumanization. This invaginative space is the site of "the break," the space from which both black radicalism and black performance arise.

What are some of the ways that black performance and performers negotiate "the break"? How might we be able to tell whether Baldwin exposed the break through his performance? Brooks' important work helps identify the ways that some 19th-century black performances—both aesthetic and non-aesthetic—employed certain kinds of unruly and

self-alienated behaviors that employed their abjection (say, through minstrel shows) in order to comment on and disrupt the regimes of power that gave rise to their abjection. She calls these performances "Afro-alienation acts," and in them, performers "channeled varying forms of alienation and dissonant identity politics into [their] performances [and] …stylized alternative forms of cultural expression that cut against the grain of conventional social and political ideologies" (Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent* 4). Those "conventional social and political ideologies" are familiar, distinguished from those that Baldwin faced in the 1960s only by the details of diachrony; paradigmatically, there are the same dehumanizing ontological conditions situating Baldwin's blackness as situated Adah Overton Walker's or Bert Williams' blackness. By "making strange" different articulations of antiblack oppression, Afro-alienation calls attention to different possibilities for what blackness might be, possibilities that are separate from what the oppressive structure tries to make of blackness. Unlike the strict definition of a performative, Afro-alienation acts do not so much make new truths as they make accustomed truths strange in order to bring new possibilities into view. Such performances might not actually realize those possibilities, but rather constitute small victories that can open up imaginary horizons of black freedom struggle.

The break must break something, and, after all, there are a lot of things that need breaking. Moten is clear that there are breaks in space and time. Many breaks must be made collectively, not merely by individual acts of performative iteration, but by a whole break that is greater than the sum of its individual breaks. What is that thing to be broken so that, as Moten says, "If we linger in that cut,...we might commit an action" (Moten, *In the Break* 223)? What is the role of the violence that defines, circumscribes, and characterizes the temporal framework prior to "the break"?

Baldwin's "break" at the end of *Take This Hammer* takes on several specific forms of antiblack violence, such as the psychic violence done to the self-knowledge of black youths and the physical displacement of black residents of San Francisco and other cities. To consider Baldwin's monolog moment in relation to these forms of violence, one must read the violence *within* the temporality from which Baldwin's performance emerges in *Take This Hammer*. In other words, in geographies like Bayview-Hunter's Point, violence cannot simply be the name for something that happens as an iteration to be broken. The very existence of the ghetto—a convergence of technologies of force that fix certain people in place—is itself violence against the people who live there. In one moment in *Take This Hammer*, Baldwin describes the ghetto by calling attention to the "million forces which are inevitably set in motion when a people are despised" (1964) (23:30). What would "the break" look like in such a context?

For guidance on this problematic, one must look to film theorist Kara Keeling's careful reading of Frantz Fanon's study of black ontology, the fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, the title of can be translated either as "The Fact of Blackness" or "The Lived Experience of the Black Man" (Keeling 34-40). Keeling utilizes feature films to help locate the violence that, for Fanon, structures the temporalities of black colonial life: "The Negro

is a toy in the white man's hands; so, in order to shatter the hellish cycle, he explodes" (Fanon 140). Essential to these violently *structured* and violently *structuring* temporalities are the projections of images of what the black has been, images that might, theoretically, be parodied along with other representations of blackness, but that, regardless of whether they are parodied or not, are so deeply essential to the modern world's recognition of itself that they continue to "fix" the black in a "hellish cycle" of continually being mistaken for those images.

> The hellish cycle wherein the past constricts the present so that the present is simply the (re)appearance of the past, felt as affect, restricts by anticipating in advance the range of the black's (re)actions to his present experience. (Keeling 36)

The anticipation by the power structure calls to mind not merely discrete events like the infiltration of organizations like the Black Panthers by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO), but also the very structuring of the ghetto and prison as weapons against their residents. This anticipation is therefore key to Keeling's sense of the temporality of blackness and part of the reason why it is so crucial to one's understanding of Baldwin's performance in San Francisco's Bayview-Hunter's Point and Western Addition neighborhoods. For Keeling, the time in which black people live is the time of the "interval" between ever-repeating moments in which one is forced to know oneself as the object of colonialism and slavery, even as one seeks seams and ruptures in the interval (34). In the interval of colonial societies like San Francisco, rupture is an ever-present possibility—in the sense that the unexpected can happen, even if only as a phobic image in the collective psyche—and also an impossibility—in the sense that it is so unthinkable that the world would not recognize itself as such if the socially dead were socially alive. The repeated violence that forces one to know oneself as a slave of Modernity can be punctured by the rupture of decolonizing violence that could break the "hellish cycle" of antiblackness.

Keeling's "interval" is another dimension of the same problematic that Moten's notion of the break describes, but Keeling politicizes it in a dynamic way, pointing out that in a colonial society, "Because the black's explosion has been anticipated within the terms of the hellish cycle to which he is confined, it does not liberate him; instead, it fulfills and initiates the infernal circle" (Keeling 35.) The *anticipation* of intervals of violent black liberation struggle, in other words, along with the repressive technologies used in that anticipation, are as necessary to thinking about black life in settler colonies like San Francisco as are the potential breaks or moments of liberation. "The break" and "the interval" can thus be read together, but only if we acknowledge that the violence of an antiblack society is what "the break" breaks, and that the structures that articulate that violence attempt to anticipate—to break, or brake—"the break."

Killing Fields, Lies, and Morale

Baldwin's performance brings into focus the limitations of the basic framework of performativity for understanding black performance. These limitations come into clear

focus in Baldwin's ethical dilemmas around raising the "morale" or self-knowledge of black youths. Morale relies on an iterative and recursive process: It is meaningless unless repeated and revised, and it is something that furthers itself when it is present. Yet, in an antiblack society, investing black youths with morale takes on a fundamental ethical complexity: If one advises black youths that they need only believe in themselves in order to achieve success in their goals, as though the larger framework has nothing to say about the matter, one is disavowing the lived experience of black folks (and if one is black as well, one will likely have to disavow one's own lived experience). An extended sequence of edited moments (starting about 6:20 into the film, and ending at about 9:35) early in *Take This Hammer* illustrates this by introducing a simple question about how to make black youths in Bayview-Hunter's Point believe they can succeed in gaining access to the institutionality of the USA. Baldwin asks this question to Mrs. Nichols, possibly an educator, whom Baldwin's guide Orville Luster says is "a good representative of one of the indigenous leaders in this area." Baldwin asks, "What precisely do you say to a Negro kid to invest him with a morale, which the country is determined he sha'n't have? Or to start out more specifically, when dealing with a Negro kid and trying to insist that he can do anything he wants to do, how do you make him believe it?" (6:30). Nichols says that she is supposed to be able to teach a young man that he can be president of the United States. She continues, however, "By the time [a young man in Bayview-Hunter's Point] gets 14 or 15 years old, he begins to find out that this is not true and you have to make him face, be able to face what's coming to him in the future" (7:10). Nichols' comment that she has to make black youths "be able to face" a questionable future inhibited by antiblack racism introduces within this film one of the ethical dilemmas of black people who guide black youths. In accord with the bourgeois individualism of the USA, teachers are expected to teach black youths to think of their life chances as performative iterations that they can make true regardless of the fixed and fixing structural forces to which racism condemns black youths to be disproportionately exposed, like poverty, crime, illness, and the prison-industrial complex. The portion of Mrs. Nichols' comment that the viewer sees suggests that she is thinking of this dilemma as a challenge, not a paradigmatic impossibility. As most teachers must, she appears to operate within the dominant US framework while also preparing the youths to face the fact that none of what Baldwin calls "the American assumptions" (18:15) applies to them.

Here, the film cuts to Baldwin sitting on a curb, talking with a group of four black youths, who are seated above him. He is in conversation directly with one youth who is probably in his teens:

Youth 1: [Ain't] gonna be a Negro president in this country.

Baldwin: There will never be a Negro president in this country? Why do you say that?

Youth 1: We can't get jobs, how we gonna be a president?

Baldwin: Ya got me. But I want you to think about this: That there will be a Negro president of this country but it will not be the country that we are sitting in

now... But if you say to yourself that there will never be a Negro president, then what you're doing is agreeing with white people who say you are inferior. It's not important really, you know, whether or not there is a Negro president—I mean, in that way. What's important is that you should realize that you can become a— you can become the president. There's nothing anybody can do that you can't do. (7:40)

While Baldwin is talking with the young man, the reverse shots show the reactions of the youth and three other youths standing around him. The camera slowly pans right, showing us the physical distance between this youth and Baldwin, and then the camera zooms out to reveal several youths standing around Baldwin and listening to the conversation. Some of them are chewing gum and watching him. Some have altogether serious faces and others have slightly amused but stoic faces. One youth puts on his sunglasses and resumes chewing his gum just as Baldwin is saying, "you can become a— you can become the president." He might just be shielding his eyes from the bright sun, but this gesture gives the appearance of a mild dismissal, or perhaps an interested reluctance. The film then cuts back to the conversation Baldwin is having with educators:

The truth is …you have to be five times as good as anybody around…. This is what is so dangerous I think. You have to have a certain— the boys I grew up with—I grew up in the streets, in Harlem—and of the survivors, what marked all the survivors was a certain ruthlessness which was absolutely indispensable if one was going, if one was going to survive. (8:25)

In prefacing his statement by saying "The truth is," Baldwin is "making strange" and commenting on the previous concealment, which the editing helps to read as the theatricality, and perhaps lying, involved in this kind of morale-building work. Baldwin's disparate performances and the editing seem to intentionally demonstrate the ways in which the calm and patient belief in "the American assumptions" that black leaders like Mrs. Nichols were supposed to teach, counsel, and exemplify was precisely the opposite set of characteristics from the "ruthlessness" that enabled "the survivors" of Baldwin's youth "in the streets" not to succumb to "million forces" imperiling the lives of those living in the ghetto. Unlike Ms. Nichols, Baldwin seems to be aware here that his discussion is not revolving around questions of what calibration of educational content might make these youths more likely to survive. He seems to be locating the epistemic privilege in the bodies of these youths. The educational system might not have anything that they can use. What is more important is the indict the framework for what it does to Black youths, even if that is what is pragmatic within the "art of the possible." These youths know what time it is and what space they are in.

Editing is key here to reading Baldwin's counterpoint to himself as an act of Afro-alienation. The fact that Baldwin was, in the scene prior to the street scene, talking with Mrs. Nichols about the impossibility that any of these youths might be able to become president of the United States puts in stark relief how conscious an act of mendacity Baldwin is engaging in by counseling the youths that they "must believe" in their abilities

to be elected to the US presidency. The editing implies that "the truth is" what Baldwin discusses behind the doors of the Bayview Community Center's meeting room, exposing the lie in what Baldwin says to the youths in the public space of the streets. The youths, of course, are skeptical. *These youths know what time it is.* Baldwin, who often referred to his youth in Harlem, is aware that these youths can see what others cannot see. He sees it, too. "This is the San Francisco Americans pretend does not exist," Baldwin says in some of the film's opening lines. "They think I'm making it up" (00:40).

Whether Baldwin engaged in intentional duplicity or something else is unimportant. Baldwin's *performative break* is apparent in his Bayview Community Center moment, and he and the youths share it. Producing the self-knowledge or morale that will help these youths survive emerges as an ethical dilemma, or even impossibility, for the black teacher who is wedded to the US institutional framework. The viewer sees Baldwin urging "you can become the president," and also, after the intervention of film editing, that this performance has been untruthful. Through performing an ambivalent truth, Baldwin, intentionally or unintentionally (if not both), parodies, and finds an invaginative space within, the required performance of a black community leader who works with black youths. The youths on whom the film focuses always seem able to generate better arguments than Baldwin can muster. Finding this space, Baldwin and the youths produce a different type of knowledge that might not have been possible had there not been the imperative that Baldwin clearly felt to "invest" youths with "morale, which the country is determined [they] sha'n't have" (6:45). The required performance of the "indigeneous leaders," when undertaken by Baldwin, are made strange through repetition, but only to the extent that they ironically draw attention to structural (im)possibilities, like that of a black president.[5]

> There is no possibility for [the Negro teenager] to act on what we always like to think of as the American assumptions….The only way a Negro teenager can make it is to step outside that system, you know, to become, in effect, a criminal… or to turn to Malcolm X. (17:45)

Self-knowledge is a central aspect of the collective performance of African American society. "Knowledge liberates," says Ronald A.T. Judy, "in announcing the heterogeneity of the instance of self-knowing, of apperception, from experience." This means that one of the functions of African American society is to make African Americans know—or, at least, *believe*—that they are different from what the broader society treats them as. "The human can be designated a phenomenal thing of the slave experience, *nigger*, but never *is* a nigger" (Judy 216-217). African American society attempts to pry self-knowledge as human away from self-knowledge as "nigger," while the production of the latter self-knowledge (as "nigger") is the chief function and purpose of the ever-proliferating policing apparatus (whether performed by official government entities or by other entities that labor to regulate the black body within civil society). There are, as Baldwin pointed out, many ways to be made into a "nigger." To be named as a "nigger" can mean far more than just being called the actual word "nigger," for a "nigger" is a

"commodity-thing" and so indexes a variety of ways that civil and political society have for rendering black people as "commodity-things." These "commodity-things" are "what emerges from the demise of human capital"—much like the surplus people in Bayview-Hunter's Point and the Fillmore District/Western Addition whom Baldwin shows being displaced by an inexorable procession of white desire known as "urban renewal." Being treated as a "nigger" includes being isolated to those geographies where civil and political society confine black people, geographies that Judy refers to as "killing fields" or "the place of non-work for the complete consumption of needless workers." In such sites, "niggers" live in "collections" but can never form communities that the dominant society is bound to respect, and, hence, "niggers" can be treated as members of the dominant society see fit. African American society, much like Mrs. Nichols, tries to make people know themselves more as members of African American society, and therefore less as "niggers," by using self-knowledge, and, from self-knowledge, elaborating something called "moral behavior"[6] (230).

As with Baldwin's meeting of the youths in Bayview-Hunter's Point, several instances in Baldwin's writings are suggestive of how his consciousness was shifting around his role in the very processes of knowledge production of which Judy writes. In "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One-Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation" in *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin makes it clear to his nephew that American society pursues a genocidal course against him as a black child:

> This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish. Let me spell out precisely what I mean by that, for the heart of the matter is here, and the root of my dispute with my country. You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason. (Baldwin, Collected Essays "Fire Next Time" 293)

To combat the effects of living in such a society, Baldwin suggests two actions to his nephew. One of these is Christian love of one's enemy ("there is no basis whatever" for thinking that "*they* must accept *you*. The really terrible thing, old buddy, is that *you* must accept *them*"). The other is self-knowledge, the lack of which is something that Baldwin says destroyed his father. "You can only be destroyed by believing that you really are what the white world calls a *nigger*" (291). Notice that, although the Baldwin of *The Fire Next Time* constructs something of a bleak picture of black life, at this moment, he still sees possibility within the framework of US political relations. He still thinks of it as "my country," with no apparent irony, and he guides his nephew toward Christian love for his "countrymen."[7]

Wilderson notes that Baldwin's 1968 novel *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, by contrast, signified an important shift in his formulation of the United States as irredeemably antiblack (Wilderson, *Red, White & Black* 12). Instigated by his onstage heart attack at the beginning of the novel, Leo Proudhammer, a black actor through whose point-of-view the novel is narrated, anticipates the return of his sometime-bodyguard and romantic partner, a young black militant, Black Christopher.

I was nearly twenty years older than Christopher, and it made me ashamed, very often, listening to him, watching him, understanding the terrible round of his days, that not all of my endeavor, not all of the endeavor of so many for so long, had lessened his danger in any degree, or in any way at all sweetened the bitter cup. And, since I was so much older than Christopher, I knew far better than Christopher could how little warrant I had for agreeing that his options and possibilities were different. I had to agree because I loved him and valued him. I had to agree because it is criminal to counsel despair. I had to agree because it is always possible that if one man can be saved, a multitude can be saved. But, in fact, it seemed to me that Christopher's options and possibilities could change only when the actual framework changed: and the metamorphosis of the framework into which we had been born would almost certainly be so violent as to blow Christopher, and me, and all of us, away. (Baldwin, Tell Me How Long 330-331)

Here, Baldwin articulated the role in counseling self-knowledge differently than he had in his letter to his nephew or his conversations with the youths in *Take This Hammer*.[8] Proudhammer still feels the pressure to lie. The preface "But, in fact…" in the just-quote passage is structurally homologous with "The truth is…" in Baldwin's rhetorical usage; it signifies a prior presence of duplicity. More important here, however, is to notice the ways that Baldwin, through Leo Proudhammer, is locating something called "the framework" that makes Black Christopher know himself through the "bitter cup" and "danger" that has not decreased with time and effort. Baldwin's support for Christopher is premised on a knowing disavowal—a lie—that the framework will change without an extremely violent break with what it has been. This framework is one within which people's subjectivities are formed, and the destruction of this framework "would almost certainly be so violent" as to blow "all of us, away." This is structurally homologous with the fixity of the black subject position that Wilderson calls the political ontology of blackness—something that is both illusion and necessity for the USA as a set of relations and that, if it is contested, might induce a "crisis" (Wilderson, "Gramsci's Black Marx" 225). For Proudhammer, the destruction of this essential, meaning-making framework marks the only real hope for Black Christopher's future, even as it might also consume that future.

Baldwin's earlier performance toward his nephew and, later, Leo Proudhammer's relationship to Christopher both illustrate a similar problematic of black performativity to that which, as Baldwin's performance in the Bayview-Hunter's Point scene in *Take This Hammer* illustrates, emerges every day in the interactions that community leaders and teachers have with black youths. The imperative to encourage youths that "you can become the president" typifies the ethical dilemmas of the performance of morale building that teachers of black youths must often face. Baldwin's iteration, "you can become the president," might, indeed, necessitate a break in the cycle of violence these youths face—*structural* violence that includes, for one of many examples, being confined to geographies where police harass them, where liquor stores are ubiquitous, and where

many of them were coming to doubt, in 1963, that the approach of nonviolence would be sufficient to secure the freedom their parents had not found in coming to San Francisco.[9]

Conclusion

Although the present chapter has not argued that the 1963 documentary *Take This Hammer* shows that Baldwin was becoming an afropessimist, it is important to note that by the time Baldwin was writing about the Atlanta Child Murders in what would be his last work, he would come to say, "What I remembered—or imagined myself to remember—of my life in America (before I left home!) was terror" (Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* xiii). Baldwin's performance in *Take This Hammer* articulated what Wilderson has called a political ontology of racial blackness, in which a collaboration of structural forces and patterns of relationality render the illusion of "the nigger" as not merely a image that might become a reality, but actually a necessity. A particular awareness, if not a concrete analysis, of the role that power plays in creating and maintaining the black subject position shows up in Baldwin's performance in *Take This Hammer*, and in some of his contemporary and subsequent writings.

This chapter has engaged Baldwin's performance in *Take This Hammer* as a kind of performative theorization, and has examined it to identify some of the problematics of performativity in relation to blackness. If black performance articulates black desires for freedom through the body and via intervention in a chain of signifying iterations, it is an ambivalent articulation because of the aporetic condition that Wilderson calls the political ontology of blackness.

What this chapter has not said is that Baldwin was an afropessimist. That is an argument that one hopes will be carried on more widely within Baldwin studies, if it is an important one. It really does not matter in the context of this chapter whether or not afropessimism, as present-day scholars develop it into an academic field of study, would have received Baldwin's support as a philosophy with some explanatory power; what matters is the extent to which afropessimism already shows up as a more diffuse structure of feeling in the everyday utterances of black people, like Baldwin and his interlocutors in *Take This Hammer*. This chapter closely examines aspects of Baldwin's everyday performance in *Take This Hammer*, contextualized with a few themes highlighted in Baldwin's post-1962 work, to think about two qualities of black political ontology, being "the nigger," that align well with what Baldwin described as "one of the great American illusions, one of the great American necessities": its illusoriness—its anchoring in fantasies about black people—and its necessity within the signifying field of the dominant society.

In being mobilized together for a reading of Baldwin's presence in *Take This Hammer* as a kind of performed theorization of "the framework," the afropessimism of Wilderson, Keeling, and Judy and Moten's "black optimism" (Moten, "Case of Blackness" 182) need not be read as antagonistic to one another for they are focusing on different aspects of the same thing—the seam in the enclosing structure where black performance resists its ubiquitous dehumanization. If we understand "the break" as "social life," there is,

as Jared Sexton says, "black social life in black social death" (Sexton para. 24). "The break" must therefore not be misread as freedom itself but rather as an articulation of a *freedom drive*, and always in the context of "the interval" of the "hellish cycle." Black resistance must not be read as something completely separate or separable from the repressive antiblack context to which it is in resistance.

Notes to Chapter 4

. Commissioned by National Educational Television and its New York affiliate, WNET, *Take This Hammer* was shot by a mobile film crew from San Francisco public television station KQED and aired in 1964.

[2]   . The broad set of theses that historians of social movements of the mid-twentieth century have presented, sometimes refer to as "good sixties, bad sixties" theses, shorthand the changes that took place between the supposed optimism of the United States during the Kennedy presidency and the supposed pessimism that emerged in the wake of some major national tragedies such as the September 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, and the escalation of the war in Viet Nam. See Peter Gelderloos, *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2007). Jama Lazerow and Yohuru R. Williams, *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). See also Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che*, New ed. (New York: Verso, 2006). Several scholars have noticed that "good sixties, bad sixties" theses tend to attach the "bad" of the "bad sixties" to black radical organizations and even to certain artists, like Baldwin.

[3]   . Frank Wilderson III writes that, in the period of the 1960s through the early 1980s, the mere existence of active organizations like the Black Liberation Army, the Weather Underground, the American Indian Movement, and the Red Guard had an effect on the artistic imagination of a wide range of filmmakers, both black and white, who were, suddenly, accountable to black people's structure of feeling in ways they would not have been in the absence of these organizations. Wilderson cites one 1968 film reviewer who says, "It's still a shock to see blackness as a frame of reference on the screen" (Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black* 97).

[4]   . Frank B. Wilderson III coined the term afropessimist in this usage. The afropessimists whose theoretical work is heavily referenced here are Frantz Fanon, Ronald A.T. Judy, Kara Keeling, Jared Sexton, and Frank B. Wilderson III.

[5]   . Some may object that Barack Obama's election shows that a black president is clearly not a structural impossibility. A framework of political ontology could hardly justify reading Obama the person as anything but black. (How else to theorize the Tea Party's well-mobilized campaign to smear Obama except to see him as the lightning rod of a special kind of antiblack racism that, once one gets past the administrative titles, does not look so different from the on-the-job politics black folks deal with on the daily?) But is he a president who can, or is inclined to, use his position as a bully pulpit for addressing the unmet demands of African Americans not to be positioned as objects? Hortense Spillers recently observed how Barack Obama benefits from "a misplaced sense of black loyalty to the black president, who doesn't return it, as far as I can see." Spillers is not doubting Obama's genealogical ancestry or cultural authenticity, nor is the present author. She questions whether Obama, at the level of affect, is or can be a leader who can address black people's concerns. See Hortense Spillers, "Destiny's Child: Obama and Election '08," *boundary 2* 39:2 (2012): 9. Spillers also points to a statement James Baldwin made, dismissing the hopefulness of Robert F. Kennedy's 1961 prediction that the USA would be ready for a black president in 30 years: "[W]hat really exercises my mind," Baldwin said, "is not this hypothetical day on which some other Negro 'first' will become the first Negro President. What I am really curious about is just what kind of country he'll be President of." See Randall Kenan, "Introduction: Looking for James Baldwin," in *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, James Baldwin and Randall Kenan, ed., (New York: Vintage International, 2011), xxix.

[6]   . It should be noted that Judy considers "moral behavior" to be "an ontologically inauthentic way to be" (230). He is not arguing in favor of African American society, but, rather, that its prohibitions misread the utterances of hip hop in ways that assist the police state's genocidal destruction of black people.

[7]   . Also in his 1973 *No Name in the Street*, Baldwin recounts an incident in which he was recruited to moderate a debate between Malcolm X and a student leader. Malcolm X raised the same issue of the heterogeneity of self-knowledge and experience.

"If you are an American citizen." Malcolm asked the boy, "why have you got to fight for your rights as a citizen? To be a citizen means that you have the rights of a citizen. If you haven't got the rights of a citizen, then you're not a citizen." "It's not as simple as that," the boy said. "Why not?" asked Malcolm. (Baldwin *Collected Essays* "No Name in the Street" 411)

Baldwin recounts this incident not by way of agreeing with Malcolm X, but to illustrate Malcolm X's gentleness and skill in helping his young interlocutor grapple with a crucial question of self-knowledge "as though he were talking with a younger brother" (411). Baldwin nonetheless says of Malcolm X's assertions, "there was no way I could disagree with him" (412).

[8]   . Although "it is criminal to counsel despair," Proudhammer has no reason to believe that he is the one who has made Black Christopher pessimistic *about the country against which he rebels*. The country itself has done that. Proudhammer, in a

sense, is belated in his desire to protect the already-radical Christopher. Any intervention Proudhammer could make might help Christopher to feel better about himself, but could not protect Christopher from the knowledge that the society will produce in him. Is it really, then, "criminal to counsel despair" in a society that isolates children to ghettos "in which...it intended that [they] should perish"? And, if so, according to what law?

[9]   . At about 16 minutes into the film, one young man is talking about the need to get black people together for armed revolutionary violence, a vastly different epistemological framework from the "integrationism" that Baldwin says characterized his politics at this time. This scene is particularly interesting because a number of the 20 or more youths standing near Baldwin appear to be smoking a joint and passing it around. In one moment, one of the youths says, "Here come the man!" and a few of the youths look nervously in the general direction of the camera, as the young man says that it would not be by sit-ins but by violence that blacks would get the respect they were owed from white Americans.

Baldwin struggles with the youth, but the only objections he raises are those related to the topic of strategic balance of forces, a terrain of debate on which the youth has apparently done some thinking. Baldwin is *not* shaming the youth into thinking that only nonviolence will be acceptable. The camera zooms into a super close-up on one of the youths standing and listening alongside the speaker. The youth in the closeup looks shaken, like he's either cold or nervous about something—possibly the conversation about revolutionary strategy, and possibly about something else more immediate. The film then cuts to a long shot that shows "the man"—a San Francisco Police Department car in profile parked *right there*, perhaps 20 feet removed from the youths, synchronous with this very conversation, with the white two officers, one near and one far, very likely close enough to hear these youths discussing armed violence and smell whatever is being smoked. The police officers watch the group of black youths for a moment and then get into the police cruiser. A moment later, the film cuts to a long shot that clearly shows that the group is clustered right by the entrance of a liquor store and under the watch of the police. In front of the Super Liquor store and under the surveillance of the San Francisco police is where Baldwin and these youths have been having their conversations.

The sequence of shots performs a powerful highlighting of a structural framework. The shot-reverse shot-close up-long shot sequence maps some of the sites that form and enforce the logics and epistemologies that contain the youths in Bayview-Hunter's Point: the liquor store, used to build consent (by disoganizing dissent), and the San Francisco Police Department, used to force obedience. The ubiquity of these two institutional nodes of antiblack racism is a clear demonstration of one of the ways that a network of forces within civil and political society anticipate "the break." The youths, of course, bravely plot their "break" anyway.

Conclusion

Two Tales of Black Leadership: Part 1

On 21 June 2008, the late poet-playwright Amiri Baraka posted a commentary to nathanielturner.com about the opposition of several black intellectuals and leaders to the (by then) all-but-inevitable Democratic candidacy of Barack Obama. "[N]o amount of solipsistic fist pounding about 'radical principles,'" said Baraka, "will change this society as much as the election of Barack Obama will as president of the US. Not to understand this is to have few clues about the history of this country, its people, or the history of the Black struggle in the US" [7]. Throughout most of his brief screed, Baraka argues, contra the candidacies of black former congresswoman Cynthia McKinney and white perennial left-independent Ralph Nader, that Obama's seemingly centrist, if not reactionary, positions on matters of foreign policy—the "war on terror," support for Israel, helping exiled Cubans to return to Cuba and usher out the vestiges of the Castro regime—amount to the *realpolitik* necessity of radical left compromise with a centrist major party platform. About three-quarters of the way through the article, however, Baraka took a slight digression away from his prior concerns and issued his own commentary on black men. Praising Obama's similar commentary during his Father's Day address in Chicago, an obligatory call for black men to "step up" and be fathers to their children, Baraka wrote the following:

Some people were grousing about [candidate Obama's] father's day address and the stance he took lecturing Black men to actually become fathers not just disappearing sexual partners. But can anyone who actually lives in the hood, and has raised children there really claim that what Obama said is somehow an "insult to half a race." [sic] We need to take up that idea of making Black men stand up and embrace fatherhood (a lifetime gig) as men and quit winking at the vanished baby makers that litter our community with fatherless children. This is where a great deal of the raw material comes from for the gangs that imperil our communities. As I answered one irate e-mailer who was pissed off at Obama for leveling that challenge, a Negro man killed my only sister, a Negro man killed my youngest daughter. I can't give no mealy mouth slack about that, we need to Stand Up!

By this, Baraka suggested that the "anti Obama rascals" of the black left were disavowing some fundamental realities of "authentic" black life ("anyone who actually lives in the hood")—that blacks are rarely afforded the prestigious and powerful opportunity to prove themselves as leaders of people who are not within the black community, that black men in particular desperately lack role models who call on us to be responsible fathers. The implied connection of responsible fatherhood and national leadership echoes a notion that Ronald Judy called the "downward continuity" of leadership that, since Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1964 *The Negro Family: The Case for*

National Action, has been reified almost exclusively in the context of a broad discourse around black families (although, within the context of black communities, such discourse is at least as old as W.E.B. DuBois's 1896 book *The Philadelphia Negro*). According to such a "downward continuity" heuristic, a crisis of leadership indexes a crisis of manhood, particularly at the site of the fatherhood role. Strong black families—with "strong" being defined in opposition to female-headed— supposedly create strong black leaders. According to this view, the void of black leadership into which Obama steps is thus a result of failures at the level of the family.

But why Baraka's affect-laden digression? Did Baraka need to use black criticism of candidate Obama to make what is clearly a much larger comment about the murder of his sister and daughter by black men? What is the connection here? Certainly, if more pressure to be "responsible" fathers corresponded to more "responsible" fatherhood—in a kind of socio-cultural empirical indexicality—one might argue that both Baraka and Obama would be irresponsible leaders indeed if they did not use every opportunity to apply such pressure. In the absence of such evidence, however, it is unclear that such calls amount to anything more efficacious than other oft-repeated cries of desperation in producing the effects it claims to desire—an honorable black community in the context of an antiblack world. Moreover, few commentators could have had any basis for knowing how candidate Obama might, as president, go about making amends for or seeking to prevent the kinds of problems that "imperil our communities" mentioned by Baraka, and by Obama—problems including black internecine and domestic violence, absent fathers and struggling mothers, poverty, truancy, and low expectations—although, notably, *not* including state and civil antiblack violence committed by nonblacks. And now, well into the second term of the Obama presidency, the same is very likely true: Few could say what Obama plans to do about these matters of essential importance to black survival. Baraka's call, in other words, was less for black people to support Obama's stated platform—since the candidate stated no specific policy aimed at addressing the problems that he raised regarding black men—than to acknowledge the possibilities, the potential energy, that Obama's very presence in the White House might inspire in a broad cross-section of black men who would otherwise, presumably, have gone on being irresponsible. This portion of Baraka's comment is most fundamentally about questions that blacks need to be posing of ourselves—more about what blacks need than anything specific that Obama himself offered. And yet Obama provides a useful hook on which to hang expectations of all manner of hope. This is instructive and worth noting for a number of reasons, but few more than this: The most striking thing about President Obama is not merely how little people know about him, but, with that, how little they need to know about him. America—and, as Obama's Nobel Peace Prize suggests, the world—reads Obama through what it needs him to be, not what he "is."

This forced, "positive" misrecognition points us to the affective core of the real problem that Amiri Baraka spends most of the article failing to identify because of its potentially deadly implications, what can at best be called a crisis in black leadership.

Obama enjoys support from black folks of the center, left, and even right that is fairly inflexible and that proved thorough enough that virtually overnight, as we saw following Obama's 2008 victory in the Iowa Caucuses, Obama displaced the candidate hand picked by the much-beloved Bill Clinton as black folks' favorite the very moment after it became evident that Obama had the support of ultra-white Iowa. Baraka was calling black leftists to hold the line and get "our guy" into office not because he thought their support was essential—and, again, it would seem from blacks' dumping of Hillary Clinton, a move that was largely cued off of white responses to Obama, black support was indeed *not* essential to the demand for an Obama presidency nor to the larger project of modern civil and political society—but because Baraka himself is identified as one of the black left's gurus and didn't want to be on the wrong side of history by association. But I think there is something brewing beneath the surface of black leftists' suspicions of Obama, something Baraka disingenuously failed to acknowledge in this commentary. Obama annoyed many longstanding members of the black left because he came onto the scene already having a virtual lock on one particular highly coveted role: the leader of black America. This was the hat that Obama wore when he critiqued black manhood publicly—i.e., in front of the white gaze. Once again, it seems that the undisputed leader of black America has been selected overwhelmingly for blacks by whites.

In saying this, I am updating what W.E.B. Du Bois said about Booker T. Washington in the epigraph above. As with Washington, the fact that Obama became black folks' chosen leader overnight and in the wake of his getting the white nod, as Washington did in the early 20th century, amounted to something of a coronation after the fact. The defining moments of Obama's early candidacy (his Atlanta Compromise moments) were moments in which the initial skepticism black folks had of him proved irrelevant: The Iowa victory indicated a white desire that an Obama presidency, more than a Hillary Clinton presidency, might fulfill, while the father's day commentary on black men showed Obama to be a churchgoer who would speak out against the presumptive black male default state of irresponsibility in ways that no white Democratic president could. Obama, it seems, *is* a technology for white preconscious desire to work upon blacks while seeming to come from an *authentic* black (i.e., *pace* Ann " Our blacks are better than their blacks" Coulter, Obama did not read as a culturally "whitened" black like Alan Keyes or Colin Powell, although Herman Cain might give him a run for his money on the black authenticity count) and, at the same time, doing what whites demand. Black Americans may have known that we would eventually come around to the bloc support so many of us now have for Obama, but the fact that we could not allow him to become labeled as the black candidate *ab initio* says something. It means that we are still taking our cues on leadership from the people whose leadership into the hold of the ship made us from various ethnic groups of Africans into blacks—and has been re-making us in that same image ever since.

But we still must ask: Why is this so? This brings us to the essential point about black leadership that the skeptics of the black left might have lingering in their

unconscious: The history of the last 40 (not to say 500) years has shown that whites choose the most prominent black leaders at least by a process of unnatural selection in that they simply kill the ones who pose a danger for real change—i.e., a radical redress of the kind Saidiya Hartman referred to in the following statement from her chapter on black performativity in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*:

> The event of captivity and enslavement engenders the necessity of redress, the inevitability of its failure, and the constancy of repetition yielded by this failure… [T]he work of restoration or recompense is inevitably incomplete… It is impossible to fully redress this pained condition without the occurrence of an event of epic and revolutionary proportions… (77)

Black folks are so conditioned to the inevitable failure of redress that what Wilderson calls an "affective injunction" constantly stymies effective black leadership in the freedom struggle. Blacks are still waiting for the other shoe to drop—waiting for the punchline to a cruel joke—regardless of how moderate the course that Obama pursues. I think that black leftist hesitancy has to be read through the historical lens that poses the questions "What kind of leader can he be to black folks if white folks selected him?" and "How good can he be for black folks if he's still breathing?" To choose to be a leader in black freedom struggles—from Fannie Lou Hamer and Martin Luther King in his last days to Bunchy Carter, Fred Hampton, Assata Shakur, and Huey Newton—is to place oneself in an encounter with death—whether that comes in the form of physical expiration, entombment, insanity, addiction, or exile. According to such a definition of black leadership, Real black leadership—leadership which does not shy away from an encounter with the Real—must be very rare indeed, and short-lived at that.

Baraka surely knows these things about black leaders of the past. The name of the Web site on which his article appears, nathanielturner.com, alludes to the fate of one of the most effective black leaders of freedom struggle. Nat Turner was one of few black leaders in the history of blackness—which is also the history of whiteness—who embraced death by realizing a political analysis in which America itself was the problem, tapping into something that lies at the affective core of blackness itself in the way of Lacan's notion of *das Ding*—a desire for the dissolution of blackness and of whiteness—in brief, the end of the antiblack world. Baraka's disingenuous apologia disavows any awareness that Obama lectures black men about manhood in the way in which he does it not mostly because he thinks it will do anything to abate the social problem of black father absence but, rather, primarily for white delight. Baraka wants us to perform our witnessing of Obama's address on black fatherhood, made in the mise-en-scene of a black church in South Side Chicago, as though it were an "in-house" statement—"in-house," even though it was performed before all manner of news network cameras. Perhaps even a revolutionary leader like Baraka needs for black fatherhood to remain an "in-house" issue because if it is ever allowed its fullest public expression, the nonblack subjects whose very status as subjects is sutured by the rank object status of slaves will have to be called to an ethical

accounting for things that are inextricably implicated in the so-called absence of black manhood and the subsequent crisis of black leadership, events like the War on Drugs, CIA operatives' role in introducing crack cocaine in black communities, and the prison-industrial complex, and structural dynamics like the impunity "police" in civil as well as political society enjoy in hunting, confining, and exterminating black bodies.

So when Baraka insisted that blacks should ignore Obama's stated positions as mere posturing, we have to ask, "Posturing for *whom*?" When Baraka says that blacks need to recognize Obama as the best hope for "chang[ing] this society," Baraka is failing to acknowledge that the terms on which Obama sought election to the US presidency simply serve to reconstitute those walls of white supremacy that Obama's mere presence in the White House is assumed to fracture. Baraka knew better at some level; he knew that Obama would not be a servant of two masters. And yet, if Obama has been selected to do specific forms of political, cultural, and symbolic labor by whites and for whites and blacks, labor that extends down even to who he "is," and can represent himself to be, we have to ask to what extent he even can be a leader, amid all the kinds of semiotic and affective work he must do as an administrator of white desires and an object of white fantasies. His leadership potential must be considered under erasure.

Skip Gates and W.E.B. Du Bois: How Black Leaders Are New Media

> "The slave narrative represents the attempt of blacks to write themselves into being."
> --Henry Louis Gates, Jr., The slave's narrative (xxiii)
> "Our Y/CS25 provides reliable markers for tight genealogical connections, plus guaranteed placement of your Y chromosome (Y/CS) on the 'tree' of mankind.
> -- Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s company AfricanDNA.com

Henry Louis Gates holds a position as one of the foremost literary and historical scholars of Black folks in the diaspora. In many ways we can think his project as an elaboration of leadership strategy by mapping blackness onto the time and space of modern Subjects, the domain of the Human. The early project he studied in slave narratives was to show that slave narratives were slaves' efforts "to write themselves into being," confirming an association between the written word and ontology. It is an effort to counter the very things that Patterson says render us slaves—the absence of a heritage—and confirm that we exist. It is a project that makes sense in some ways as a effort to give Black people a usable past, a respectable past, and to integrate us into some kind of family tree of the Human, other peoples who have heritages that are recognized. This canon formation project is part of the project of empathy building and part a project of rigorous conservation of the body of knowledge, both of which have been parts of the expansive and the constrictive purposes of modern academia since at least the 19th century.

With his publication of *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self* (1987) and *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988), Henry Louis Gates established himself as one of the foremost literary scholars of black

Americans. In his the volume he co-edited with Charles T. Davis, *The Slave's Narrative* (1985), Gates says that, contra Immanuel Kant and GWF Hegel's specific exclusion of Africa and Africans from Reason and History, the slave narrative at once disproved her/his presumed inferiority and also deliberately undermined the basis of the supposed relationship of writing to inherent intelligence and humanity. In other words, not only could Black people write every bit as well as Europeans; they could also explain why those who couldn't write weren't therefore intellectually inferior. Gates's further elaboration of his academic project and personal project relates to this earlier work of which so many black scholars are and have been a part: to illumine a truthful and usable past for blacks.

But Gates, arguably more than others, has made this project modular, transporting it to the projection of popular written information sources, as with his realization of that of which WEB DuBois had only dreamed, the 1999 *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African-American Experience*, co-edited with K. Anthony Appiah. With AfricanDNA.com, Gates has made a for-profit business from reversing some of the work of biological, if not genealogical, knowledge destruction done by the middle passage.

Ronald A.T. Judy's 1993 book *(Dis)Forming the American Canon: African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular* and his 1994 boundary 2 article "On the Question of Nigga Authenticity" overtly or implicitly acknowledged Gates's (at that time) literary project of literary canon formation, but critiqued it on the following grounds:

> What is heterogeneity?...What is it about the organization of knowledge and its relation to social formations of power in bourgeois society that necessitates diversity's being conceptualized only in terms of hierarchy, of the supposedly empowering inclusion of the disparate periphery into the ordered center? Why is the process of that empowerment currently conceived of in terms of resistance, either the resistance of the periphery to centralist expansion, or the center to peripheral intrusion? In any event, resistance through canon formation is legitimated on the grounds of conservation, the conservation of authenticity's integrity. (Judy, Disforming 19)

The personal and the political conflate in some very interesting ways here. Gates has been working for some time now on a project that Judy calls canon formation. Since his arrest by Sgt. Mark Crowley of the Cambridge (Mass.) Police Dept last July, Gates vowed to be more attentive to racism in policing and the mass imprisonment of black men and women. He has implied the ways that he might map this particular experience onto his overall project. He went out for a beer (post- Obama beer summit) and asked Crowley for the handcuffs used to arrest him which handcuffs he then donated to a museum of African American history. He has proposed a PBS documentary on racial profiling. He has found a common ancestor that he shares with Crowley, proving that they are distant cousins.

Many voices over the blogosphere adjudicated important questions, such as whether Officer James Crowley was or was not racially motivated, but there is much more

than that at stake in this analysis. I am left asking the question of what this bodes for black leadership and academia. I would like to introduce the idea that we think of the Gates arrest incident less as an incidental interruption than something more suggestive that plays counterpoint to, threatens to overwhelm, and therefore opens up readings of Gates's multimedia canon formation project that might otherwise be foreclosed. His life experience should lead him—and all of us— to reflect differently on his project of Black canon formation.

As mentioned above, my reading of Gramsci is that he theorizes leadership as something that ought to be generated from the bottom up. Gramsci would say that all intellectuals are organic to the extent that they represent a particular class. Traditional intellectuals are only those who can claim to represent a general set of interests and have that claim consented to and enforced. The goal of organic intellectuals of the proletariat is to arrive at a moment in history where there is no longer a distinction between organic and traditional intellectuals because there are no classes. In other words, traditional intellectuals are organic intellectuals whose social class exercises force and hegemony to appear, even to itself, as though it represents no class in particular but "universal" interests. Hegemony, then, equals force plus consent. Traditional Intellectuals equal Organic Intellectuals plus hegemony. How does the black traditional intellectual (for instance, Du Bois) abstract his ideas from whom and what he is—black—in order to apply them to the project of consent building and enter history?

Take the case of WEB Du Bois. Looking at how his book *The Negroes of Farmville* was received may help to determine the extent to which Du Bois as a scholar faced the harrowing prospect of participating in a conversation founded on his exclusion. In a review of the book written in *American Historical Review* in 1900, an unnamed author reflected,

> [Du Bois] is perfectly frank, laying all the necessary stress on the weaknesses of his people, such as their looseness of living, their lack of thrift, their ignorance of the laws of health, the disproportionate number of paupers and criminals among them as compared with whites. He shows a remarkable spirit of fairness. (1900)

The same author also later states the need in Du Bois' book for more attention to the beneficial effects of miscegenation for Blacks and to "the possibilities of absorption of inferior into superior groups of mankind." That such an opinion, not radical for the time, was stated in no less a journal than the *American Historical Review* (which, even at that time was a major journal of historical scholarship) is revealing about the kinds of entrenched and mainstream understandings researchers like Du Bois had to address. Except among black scholars, the reception of this book, reflected in this review, was as a restatement of the widely accepted fact that Blacks were inferior—even though this ran counter to what Du Bois had actually written: that the environment, and specifically the historical and socio-economic effects of white racism, were major causes of the materially and spiritually degraded conditions of many black Philadelphians and the perpetuation of these conditions. Thirty-five years later, another review of Du Bois's work, this time *Black*

Reconstruction, contains the following footnote from the Managing editor of the *New England Quarterly*:

> When the managing editor of the NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY [sic] wrote for a review copy of Black Reconstruction, he received, as a reply, a post-card which conveyed the information that Harcourt, Brace & Company were not able to "extend " that "courtesy " to this magazine. His letter of protest elicited the excuse that the supply of review copies was "exhausted "; whereupon the managing editor sent to Dean Taylor [the author of the book review] the copy of Black Reconstruction which he had bought for his own use. Inasmuch as a review of the book had first been suggested to him by one of the editors, and Dean Taylor had already promised to undertake the task, the managing editor wishes to call to the attention of the readers of the QUARTERLY [sic] the nature of the service which Dr. Du Bois has received from his publishers in this matter. It is earnestly to be hoped that the author of Black Reconstruction will not find in this obvious neglect of duty only another instance of a world- wide conspiracy of white men against black. [S. M.]

The black leader, engaging in one of Modernity's quintessential tactics for cultivating consent, publishing an argumentative appeal to reason, finds that his blackness itself is the problem with his argument's ability to be afforded the slightest consideration. He or she finds blackness to be nonrecuperable.

In some ways, this, of course, represents a key point in Gramsci's Philosophy of Praxis: The theory cannot be abstracted entirely from the theorist, and the theorist has a relationship to the means of production. We can debate about the extent to which materiality and ideology are inextricably interrelated, but there will always come a limit: I do not think that ideas or material that are associated with blackness can ever be part of a dialectic because the very fact of their association with blackness renders them immediately unreasoned, nonrigorous, mad—in a word, nondialectical. The black's problem is that she requires an amanuensis—a nonblack interlocutor like the Managing Editor in the above block quote—in order to make BOTH her ideas and her materiality legible. Du Bois, not unlike many black intellectuals, confounds the Gramscian categories of hegemony—force and consent—because the humanity of the thinker cannot itself be thought. An analysis that takes seriously the positionality of black intellectuals—that listens to both consciousnesses of the black intellectual—needs to face the specificities of black exclusion that inhere in the foundational thought that renders a philosophy of praxis thinkable as a tool of/in history: Hegel's 1837 observation of sub-Saharan Africa as "the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History."

It would seem, then, that we are still on the threshold of history, and that the masters of history don't want to let us in the door. We will have to take the door, or else burn the whole Motherfucker down. The starting point for our leadership must be that knowledge.

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[27]   ibid. pp. 44-45, 50-51.

[28]   ibid. pp. 74-77, 87.

[29]   ibid. pp. 68-70.

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[36]   "A Mother Left to Die," *Freedmen's Journal* 1.4 (April 1865): front page.

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[40]   M. French, "Family Relations," *Freedmen's Journal* 1.5 (May 1865): 19.

[41]   H.E. Brown, "A Wedding," *Freedmen's Journal* 1.2 (February 1865): 1.

[42]   Brinckerhoff pp. 27-9.

[43]   Brown, John Freeman and His Family, pp. 45-51.

[44]   Ibid. p. 56.

[45]   Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch *One Kind of Freedom: the Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 47.

[46]   Ira Berlin and Leslie Rowland (eds) *Families and Freedom: a Documentary History of African-American Kinship in the Civil War Era* (NY: New York Press, 1997), p. 185. The document is cited as M.C. Fulton to Brig. Genl. Davis Tilson, 17 Apr. 1866, Unregistered Letters Received, ser. 632, GA Assistant Commissioner, RG 105.

[47]   Berlin and Rowland, p. 187.

[48]   Ibid. pp. 29-30.

[49]   Ibid. pp. 31-32.

[50]   Ibid. pp. 33-34.

[51]   Ibid. pp. 54-55.

[52]   Ibid. pp. 47-49.

[53]   "A Father's Care," *Freedmen's Journal* 1.8 (August 1865): 32.

[54]   H.E. Brown, "Our Home," *Freedmen's Journal* 2.3 (March 1866): front page.

[55]   Geo. C. Ward, "Rules and Regulations," *Freedmen's Advocate* 1.7& 1.8 (1865): (page number illegible).

[56]   Ibid. 2.4 (April 1866): front page.

[57]   It is unclear whether Brown was aware that these women would have been paid much less for an equal amount of work, i.e., even if they had worked the same amount of time as men. This paper draws on a single mention of this practice found in the NFRA's documents, but it is done quite ably by Jacqueline Jones in the appendix of her classic *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family From Slavery to the Present*, (NY: Basic Books, 1985), to which Brown would not have had access.

[58]   H.E. Brown, "Our Home," *Freedmen's Journal* 2.5 (1866): front page.

[59]   Ibid. 2.6 (June 1866): front page.

[60]   Ibid. 2.5 (May 1866): front page.

[61]   Brown, John Freeman and His Family, pp. 79-80.

[62]   Ibid. pp. 85-87.

[63]   Brown, John Freeman and His Family, pp. 8-12.

[64]   Ibid. pp. 66-67.

[65] See, for example, Philip Atiba Goff, Jennifer L. Eberhardt, Melissa J. Williams & Matthew Christian Jackson. Not yet human: Implicit knowledge, historical dehumanization, and contemporary consequences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol 94(2), Feb 2008, 292-306.

[66] Indeed, Hartman's autoethnographic memoir, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, raises serious questions about the purchase that black American efforts at performing diaspora have for themselves and for African peoples on the continent. At places, Hartman suggests that such performances often benefit primarily the wealthy and merchant elements on both sides of the Atlantic, although she cites a moment when African children, begging for change outside of the slave castle of Elmina, approached her and other African American tourists by saying "one Africa" and referring to Hartman as "sister."

[67] The reading I am presenting here is only a portion of what has been translated into English of Stanislavski's written work. English translations of two other books, Becoming the Character and Creating a Role, were published well after the first, too late to have as strong an influence as An Actor Prepares had on the way acting is approached in the US. The latter two books were more concerned than the first book with how physical actions induce internal states—and this is something that Adler and Meisner picked up on in their work. I mention this because some specific examples I employ here may not work if I considered his other works. What all of Stanislavski's body of work relies on is the assumption that categories like "the body" and "the human" are accessible to all actors. It is that idea that I attempt to critique here.

[68] Privileging audience interest is not the same as saying that popularity makes the actor an artist. It is useful to note that Stanislavski's critique of overacting is that it motivates actions by the actor that aim to "impress" the audience, which is different from creating empathy with the audience.

[69] This is a trend that Neil LaBute decries in his now famous *Los Angeles Times* opinion piece of May 6, 2007:

For most white actors today, roles of color — from the classics to some of the sensational writing that is currently being done for the theater — are not even an option for them, and I'm not sure why. For a time this idea was given the name "color-blind" casting, but the only thing it seemed to be blind to was the fact that it wasn't a two-way street; it was obviously designed to provide opportunity for minorities rather than put the best person in a role, regardless of color.

LaBute has a particular prescriptive and political motive that I will steer clear of engaging here. It is, however, useful to note that the disparity LaBute points out serves to expose the very assumptions I am pointing out in Stanislavski.

Ch 3

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Ch 4

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Notes

. Commissioned by National Educational Television and its New York affiliate, WNET, *Take This Hammer* was shot by a mobile film crew from San Francisco public television station KQED and aired in 1964.

[71]   . The broad set of theses that historians of social movements of the mid-twentieth century have presented, sometimes refer to as "good sixties, bad sixties" theses, shorthand the changes that took place between the supposed optimism of the United States during the Kennedy presidency and the supposed pessimism that emerged in the wake of some major national tragedies such as the September 1963 bombing of the

Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, and the escalation of the war in Viet Nam. See Peter Gelderloos, *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2007). Jama Lazerow and Yohuru R. Williams, *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). See also Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che*, New ed. (New York: Verso, 2006). Several scholars have noticed that "good sixties, bad sixties" theses tend to attach the "bad" of the "bad sixties" to black radical organizations and even to certain artists, like Baldwin.

[72]   . Frank Wilderson III writes that, in the period of the 1960s through the early 1980s, the mere existence of active organizations like the Black Liberation Army, the Weather Underground, the American Indian Movement, and the Red Guard had an effect on the artistic imagination of a wide range of filmmakers, both black and white, who were, suddenly, accountable to black people's structure of feeling in ways they would not have been in the absence of these organizations. Wilderson cites one 1968 film reviewer who says, "It's still a shock to see blackness as a frame of reference on the screen" (Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black* 97).

[73]   . Frank B. Wilderson III coined the term afropessimist in this usage. The afropessimists whose theoretical work is heavily referenced here are Frantz Fanon, Ronald A.T. Judy, Kara Keeling, Jared Sexton, and Frank B. Wilderson III.

[74]   . Some may object that Barack Obama's election shows that a black president is clearly not a structural impossibility. A framework of political ontology could hardly justify reading Obama the person as anything but black. (How else to theorize the Tea Party's well-mobilized campaign to smear Obama except to see him as the lightning rod of a special kind of antiblack racism that, once one gets past the administrative titles, does not look so different from the on-the-job politics black folks deal with on the daily?) But is he a president who can, or is inclined to, use his position as a bully pulpit for addressing the unmet demands of African Americans not to be positioned as objects? Hortense Spillers recently observed how Barack Obama benefits from "a misplaced sense of black loyalty to the black president, who doesn't return it, as far as I can see." Spillers is not doubting Obama's genealogical ancestry or cultural authenticity, nor is the present author. She questions whether Obama, at the level of affect, is or can be a leader who can address black people's concerns. See Hortense Spillers, "Destiny's Child: Obama and Election '08," *boundary 2* 39:2 (2012): 9. Spillers also points to a statement James Baldwin made, dismissing the hopefulness of Robert F. Kennedy's 1961 prediction that the USA would be ready for a black president in 30 years: "[W]hat really exercises my mind," Baldwin said, "is not this hypothetical day on which some other Negro 'first' will become the first Negro President. What I am really curious about is just what kind of country he'll be President of." See Randall Kenan, "Introduction: Looking for James Baldwin," in *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, James Baldwin and Randall Kenan, ed., (New York: Vintage International, 2011), xxix.

[75]   . It should be noted that Judy considers "moral behavior" to be "an ontologically inauthentic way to be" (230). He is not arguing in favor of African American society, but, rather, that its prohibitions misread the utterances of hip hop in ways that assist the police state's genocidal destruction of black people.

[76]   . Also in his 1973 *No Name in the Street*, Baldwin recounts an incident in which he was recruited to moderate a debate between Malcolm X and a student leader. Malcolm X raised the same issue of the heterogeneity of self-knowledge and experience.

      "If you are an American citizen." Malcolm asked the boy, "why have you got to fight for your rights as a citizen? To be a citizen means that you have the rights of a citizen. If you haven't got the rights of a citizen, then you're not a citizen." "It's not as simple as that," the boy said. "Why not?" asked Malcolm. (Baldwin *Collected Essays* "No Name in the Street" 411)

      Baldwin recounts this incident not by way of agreeing with Malcolm X, but to illustrate Malcolm X's gentleness and skill in helping his young interlocutor grapple with a crucial question of self-knowledge "as though he were talking with a younger brother" (411). Baldwin nonetheless says of Malcolm X's assertions, "there was no way I could disagree with him" (412).

[77]   . Although "it is criminal to counsel despair," Proudhammer has no reason to believe that he is the one who has made Black Christopher pessimistic *about the country against which he rebels*. The country itself has done that. Proudhammer, in a sense, is belated in his desire to protect the already-radical Christopher. Any intervention Proudhammer could make might help Christopher to feel better about himself, but could not protect Christopher from the knowledge that the society will produce in him. Is it really, then, "criminal to counsel despair" in a society that isolates children to ghettos "in which...it intended that [they] should perish"? And, if so, according to what law?

[78]   . At about 16 minutes into the film, one young man is talking about the need to get black people together for armed revolutionary violence, a vastly different epistemological framework from the "integrationism" that Baldwin says characterized his politics at this time. This scene is particularly interesting because a number of the 20 or more youths standing near Baldwin appear to be smoking a joint and passing it around. In one moment, one of the youths says, "Here come the man!" and a few of the youths look nervously in the general direction of the camera, as the young man says that it would not be by sit-ins but by violence that blacks would get the respect they were owed from white Americans.

      Baldwin struggles with the youth, but the only objections he raises are those related to the topic of strategic balance of forces, a terrain of debate on which the youth has apparently done some thinking. Baldwin is *not* shaming the youth into thinking that only nonviolence will be acceptable. The camera zooms into a super close-up on one of the youths standing and listening alongside the speaker. The youth in the closeup looks shaken, like he's either cold or nervous about something—possibly the conversation about revolutionary strategy, and possibly about something else more immediate. The film then

cuts to a long shot that shows "the man"—a San Francisco Police Department car in profile parked *right there*, perhaps 20 feet removed from the youths, synchronous with this very conversation, with the white two officers, one near and one far, very likely close enough to hear these youths discussing armed violence and smell whatever is being smoked. The police officers watch the group of black youths for a moment and then get into the police cruiser. A moment later, the film cuts to a long shot that clearly shows that the group is clustered right by the entrance of a liquor store and under the watch of the police. In front of the Super Liquor store and under the surveillance of the San Francisco police is where Baldwin and these youths have been having their conversations.

The sequence of shots performs a powerful highlighting of a structural framework. The shot-reverse shot-close up-long shot sequence maps some of the sites that form and enforce the logics and epistemologies that contain the youths in Bayview-Hunter's Point: the liquor store, used to build consent (by disoganizing dissent), and the San Francisco Police Department, used to force obedience. The ubiquity of these two institutional nodes of antiblack racism is a clear demonstration of one of the ways that a network of forces within civil and political society anticipate "the break." The youths, of course, bravely plot their "break" anyway.

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