UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Afrofuturism in Practice: Octavia E. Butler Studies and the Production of Politically Engaged Black Speculative Fiction

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

in

Ethnic Studies

by

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The dissertation of Melanie Marie West is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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2023

DEDICATION

I dedicate the following dissertation to the pursuit of Black liberation.

EPIGRAPH

"Part of anarchy is, dare to go against the grain of conventional ways of thinking about our realities. Anarchists have always gone against the grain, and that's been a place of hope."

- bell hooks, "How Do You Practice Intersectionalism? An Interview with bell hooks." Interview with Randy Lowens.

"The wild thought and dangerous music of the enslaved gave voice to other visions of the possible and refused captivity as the only horizon, opposed the framework of property and commodity, contested the idea they were less than human, nurtured acts of vengeance, and anticipated divine retribution."

- Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, Slavery, and Self Making in Nineteenth-Century America*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

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Thank you, Sharon, for demonstrating that we must live in our truths as artist and do what we were born to do.

VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Afrofuturism in Practice: Octavia E. Butler Studies and the Production of Politically Engaged Black Speculative Fiction

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Professor Andrew Jolivétte Chair

My interdisciplinary research project contributes to the field of Octavia E. Butler Studies by documenting how Butler's work bridges the theories of Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, and Black Anarchism. In my dissertation, I connect my work as a Black Studies cultural practitioner and scholar to the MacArthur award-winning science fiction writer Octavia E. Butler's deployment of Black speculative fiction and neo-slave narratives as a highly generative and necessary space for knowledge production. The analysis of Butler's fiction and the Butler Papers, housed at the Huntington Library in San Marino California, reveals how Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism and Black Anarchism are incredibly compatible when used to support each other

and deeply generative when their tensions produce rigorous questions. Questions that by their nature cannot always be answered, but in that unanswerable tension, we have much to consider. Each of the three theories are fundamentally concerned with the violence of the human category in modernity, anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and civil liberties, even as they enter these conversations differently. I argue each of these theories are also in line with Butler's mission as a writer. Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, and Black Anarchism are political theories which seek to educate, disrupt thinking, abate imperial global destruction, consider possibilities, and always remain in reflection of the past, present, and future. Due to this I not only analyze Black speculative fiction, via Butler's work, I also contribute to creating it in multiple forms in dialogue with Butler's work and Afrofuturist cultural production, which often takes the form of visual culture, such as comics and graphic novels, as well as literary fiction. My dissertation will be a synthesis of three creative projects and an analysis of Butler's fiction and archival material, with an introduction and conclusion connecting the individual chapters. My dissertation constructs the theoretical basis for the importance of my three creative projects, as they connect to Butler's unfinished screenplay "Bound Slave," her short story "Childfinder," and her interviews and archival material which reveal Butler had concerns about humanity, history, technology, and the future which raise questions and observations directly related to the theories of Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, and Black Anarchism.

Introduction: Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism and Black Revolutionary Anarchist Theory in Practice

Octavia Estelle Butler was an African American speculative fiction writer born June 22nd, 1947 in Pasadena, California. Butler was primarily raised by her mother who worked as a maid after her father, a shoe shiner, died during her childhood. Bullying birthed a profound shyness in a young and lonely Butler. Therefore, in the fashion of many awkward children, Butler focused on reading and writing to combat her boredom as a solitary, only child. In time, Butler's passion would blossom into a historic career where she would be the first Black woman to see commercial success writing science fiction and fantasy. The bashful young Butler's dedication to speculative fiction would transform her into a Nebula and Hugo Award-winning author and a recipient of the MacArthur "genius grant." Butler rose to fame and won awards during a time where primarily white men were dominating the genre of speculative fiction. Butler's work was known to challenge notions of race, gender, sexuality, and humanity in the United States (Francis, ix).

In 2015, I won the Octavia E. Butler Memorial Scholarship to attend the Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Workshop where Butler began her professional journey as a writer. During the workshop, I wrote speculative fiction which sought to educate readers about anti-Blackness, white supremacy, police brutality, and the historical construction of whiteness. My short story "What You Pass For," conceived in the Clarion Workshop and published in 2018 by the Magazine of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, uses magical realism as a vehicle to depict the malleability and historical and social construction of whiteness. "What You Pass For" was written with the abject purpose of disrupting conversations around race and humanity in the United States. Working in Butler's legacy, I challenged notions of race and humanity by

highlighting the historical and social construction of whiteness, in an effort to demystify its categorical placement as the default human.

"What You Pass For" emphasizes how the white supremacist maintenance of the human category in the United States has been dependent on the structuring difference of those who are excluded from the category and therefore racialized to mark their exclusion. In the essay "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Toward the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument," Sylvia Wynter argues our modern notions of the human are informed by the historical and ongoing subjugation of racialized and colonized people. Wynter argues modernity is predicated on a colonial and European description of the human or what she calls the "ethnoclass (i.e. Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man." (260, Wynter). The ethnoclass could not exist without colonial violence and a racial project "demarcating human differences through "African enslavement, Latin American conquest, and Asian subjugation" (263, Wynter). In "What You Pass For" a Black man, living in the Jim Crow era, uses a magical white fence painting brush to transform nonwhite bodies for passage into whiteness. Literally painting out the demarcating human differences that have been marked in racialized phenotypes for civil and human disenfranchisement on the basis of their colonial and racial subjugation.

Describing the emergence of the ethnoclass, Wynter states humankind was previously defined in terms of Christianity, primarily as the subject of the church. Further, the human was also defined in the structuring dichotomy between "Europe's Untrue Christian Other" versus its "normative True Christian Self" (265, Wynter). Thus "in order for the world of the laity, including that of the then ascendant modern European state, to escape their subordination to the world of the Church," humankind had to be redefined. The new definition of humankind, which

would bring about the world of modernity, was founded "on the basis of what Michel Foucault identifies as the 'invention of Man': that is, by the Renaissance humanists' epochal redescription of the human outside the terms of the then theocentric, 'sinful by nature' conception/'descriptive statement' of the human, on whose basis the hegemony of the Church/clergy over the lay world of Latin-Christian Europe had been supernaturally legitimated (Chorover 1979)" (263, Wynter). Through this groundbreaking redescription, the world of modernity then arose through a definition of humankind as the "rational political subject of the state" (277, Wynter). Therefore, humanity has come to be known as a category synonymous with citizenship. "What You Pass For" highlights the connection between humanity and legible political subjectivity in the state. The initial clients seeking passage into whiteness are mixed or biracial people of Black descent trying to escape the slap of segregation, which repelled them from civil liberties in the Jim Crow era.

Further, Wynter describes how the European ethnoclass of man took the place once held by the normative True Christian Self, as colonized subjects were forced to occupy the opposing force once held by Europe's Untrue Christian Other. Wynter states, "… it was to be the peoples of the militarily expropriated New World territories (i.e., Indians), as well as the enslaved peoples of Black Africa (i.e., Negroes), that were made to reoccupy the matrix slot of Otherness—to be made into the physical referent of the idea of the irrational/subrational Human Other, to this first degodded (if still hybridly religio-secular) 'descriptive statement' of the human in history, as the descriptive statement that would be foundational to modernity" (266, Wynter). The body then becomes a political site of struggle where any aberrations in the body that do not match the white, cis-heternomative, settler colonial, male human category are marked and condemned for exclusion from humanity and citizenship. In "What You Pass For" I

emphasize how the immediate humanity and civil liberties attached to white masculinity are a direct result of the existential violence and human exclusion experienced by nonwhite, nonmale, and thus nonhuman subjects. “What You Pass For” follows Butler’s legacy by challenging notions of race, gender, and humanity in the United States.

Therefore, in the spirit of Butler’s work, “What You Pass For” has an entire chapter dedicated to it within this dissertation. I offer a brief summary of the politics in my short story “What You Pass For” to illustrate my ultimate mission to carry forward Butler’s legacy in part through the production of my own speculative fiction and comics. “What You Pass For” challenges notions of race, gender, and humanity, in a manner that creates a novel political intervention by also bridging the three political theories of Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, and Black revolutionary Anarchism. “What You Pass For” qualifies as Black speculative fiction, a subgenre of Afrofuturist cultural production which also includes comics. However, “What You Pass For” does not engage any utopian logic or depict any alternative social or political formations. Following an Afro-pessimistic approach, “What You Pass For” does not imagine any sort of ontological framework of identity beyond the present and persisting realities of anti-Blackness and white supremacy in the United States. “What You Pass For” embraces the Afro-pessimistic conclusion that the entire world would need to end to generate Black liberation or rather the obliteration of Black ontology and an anti-Black world which is constituted through Black suffering, exclusion, and social and physical death. However, “What You Pass For” does not shy away from seeking the end of the world within a political program, which Afro-pessimistic thought would complicate if not outright denounce. The final words of the story beg specifically Black readers to divest from the current framework of legible humanity and citizenship. The call for divestment from the metaphysics which contour modernity, including

the modern concept of the human, legible political subjectivity, and participation in our current political order as a means of progress, remains in line with Afro-pessimism as long as one does not attempt to imagine what would come next after global destruction. However, in my analysis of "What You Pass For," I do engage in a consideration of how the world could be reconfigured or what shift would even allow for an alternative political order. To consider another political order then diverges from Afro-pessimism and becomes in line with Black revolutionary Anarchism. The conclusion of "What You Pass For," rejects the nation state by declaring the category of the citizen to be innately demonic. "What You Pass For" heavily implies investments in the exclusionary and hierarchical politics of governments and civil liberties will only root us in a persisting Hell on Earth. Then in departure from Afro-pessimism, I will offer, in the chapter analyzing "What You Pass For," the political project of Black revolutionary Anarchism as a suggestion, not a guaranteed solution, to possibly disrupt our present ontological order. My offering a suggestion, rather than a solution, puts me more in line with a form of Pessimistic futurism, which I will elaborate on in the coming literature reviews within this Introduction chapter.

Figure 1. Covers of my creative projects "Adventures of Selma" and "ACAB: a comic."

My methodologies involve archival research and close readings of creative and academic texts. I conducted my archival research at the Huntington Library in San Marino California in the Butler archive. In my dissertation, I connect my work as a Black Studies cultural practitioner and scholar to Octavia E. Butler's deployment of Black speculative fiction and neo-slave narratives as a highly generative and necessary space for knowledge production. The analysis of Butler's fiction and the Butler Papers, provided me an opportunity to dedicate two chapters to essential work unreleased by the Butler estate including Butler's unfinished screenplay "Bound Slave" and an unreleased afterword for her short story "Childfinder." I then relate three of my own creative projects to Butler's work including my short story titled "What You Pass For" and my two comics, titled "Adventures of Selma" and "ACAB: a comic." My dissertation synthesizes my three creative projects and an analysis of Butler's fiction and archival material. "What You Pass For" and my other creative works, represents a central methodology in my interdisciplinary

project, which I refer to as an Afrofuturist practice or Afrofuturism in practice. Afrofuturism can be understood as a movement that seeks to redefine notions of Blackness for today and the future, as both an artistic aesthetic and a framework for critical theory. Afrofuturism's approach to the past and the future confounds linear understandings of time. The movement of Afrofuturism manifests in literature, music, visual art, and other forms of cultural production. I define an Afrofuturist practice as a performance or text which uses art, in mediums of literature or visual works, to generate critical world making. Both my comics and my literature seek to utilize art to generate challenging critiques, questions, and conversations about our historical modernity and the world's that might follow. Each of my creative works highlight the present mechanisms of world making in our current society including racial capitalism, the nation state, citizenship, anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and humanity.

My Afrofuturist practice has been informed by Diana Taylor and Jose Munoz's definitions of performance. Diana Taylor argues performance "functions as a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis" (xvii, Taylor). Put another way, Taylor states, "by taking performance seriously as a system of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge, performance studies allows us to expand what we understand by 'knowledge.'" This approach to performance studies then becomes vital to how Taylor seeks to transform academic methodologies and standards constituting legible forms of knowledge. Taylor argues that if we divert our attention from written to embodied culture, we can shift our methodologies. By removing our focus from patterns of cultural expression in texts and narratives, we can open ourselves up to embodied forms of knowledge that do not require a traditional narrative description. This shift then alters our understanding of academic disciplines and appropriate canons, to create space for practices outside of disciplinary boundaries. By seeing performance as knowledge, Taylor "decenters the

historic role of writing introduced by Conquest" (16-17, Taylor). Historically, colonizers intentionally made a hierarchy in which existence, humanity, and modernity were framed through the privilege of writing. Further, practices of institutional racism in the Americas sought to keep the privilege of writing from people of color. By challenging the merit of writing in our studies of knowledge, Taylor argues we can resist this ongoing colonial practice and recognize multiple forms of other knowledge production, particularly in the Americas.

I want to take a moment to emphasize and stress that comic making is a performance and a physical ritual that manifests as a methodology for critical theory. Comic making is a performance. The performance of cultivating the image, the page, the layout, the story, the physical art of conjuring the comic, the hours of work it takes to complete the project, the time I spend performing emotive expressions myself as reference, the hours I spend taking photos of myself for reference, the hours in which comic makers like myself spend creating, is an important performance art. I will expand on this performance further in my conclusion chapter. The way the comic page performs itself is also notable. I seek, in the time I dedicate to my works, to imply motion, active dialog, active emotion, and characters who are actively performing for the reader. Beyond the creator, the way the finished images move on the page, especially within a silent comic, where the performance of the visual text is all the reader has to read, is also an important performance art.

The critical theory the performances offer can then be better understood through the work of Jose Munoz. Munoz argues, "minoritarian performance labors to make worlds—worlds of transformative politics and possibilities. Such performance engenders worlds of ideological potentiality that alter the present and map out a future." Munoz posits that performance has tremendous power. Power that allows performance, in both theatrical and everyday rituals, to

produce alternate views of the world (Munoz, 320). The power of a world making practice can be found at the site of a disidentificatory performance. A disidentificatory performance intentionally refuses what the majoritarian culture has defined as "real." Disidentificatory performances embody strategies of "iteration and reiteration" as they "deform and re-form the world." The process of reiteration then generates worlds by engaging with the canonical definition of the "real" or the accepted world, to establish the foundation for "oppositional counter publics" (Munoz, 322). Further, in Munoz's study of disidentificatory identity performances, Munoz concentrates on "identities-in-difference." Munoz argues "identities-in-difference emerge from a failed interpellation within the dominant sphere. Their emergence is predicated on their ability to disidentify with the mass public and instead, through this disidentification, contribute to the function of a counterpublic sphere." Munoz considers "minoritarian subjects" and "people of color/queers of color" to be identities-in-difference (Munoz, 33). All of my creative projects revolve around a disidentificatory performance. I am a Black, queer artist, existing within a minoritarian subject position, and my projects seek to generate counter publics, or critical engagements with modernity. In "What You Pass For" the story interrogates and disidentifies with the majoritarian's culture's historical record of the construction of humanity, race, and citizenship, to produce alternate views of the world. The comic "Misadventures of Selma" disidentifies with integration into the nation state, and labors to make a world where a physical and individual embodiment of the United States can be confronted and condemned for its violence. "ACAB: a comic" utilizes its disidentification with the United States judicial system to generate a counter public or future where mass divestment inspires the complete upheaval of our political system.

In this Introduction Chapter, I will argue and establish how Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, and Black revolutionary Anarchist politics can be incredibly compatible when used to support each other and deeply generative when their tensions produce rigorous questions. Questions that by their nature cannot always be answered, but in that unanswerable tension, we have much to consider. Each of the three theories are foundationally concerned with the violence of the human category in modernity, anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and civil liberties, even as they enter these conversations differently. My dissertation seeks to bridge Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism and Black revolutionary Anarchist thought through the work of Octavia E. Butler and the materials I produce in her legacy.

Butler never identified with Afro-pessimism, Anarchism, or even Afrofuturism although she has been long hailed as a foundational Afrofuturist figure. Although she never identified with Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, or Black Anarchism, I have been inspired to come to all these theories through her work, which I will argue and establish throughout this entire dissertation. Further, I am declaring this act of bridging three profoundly different political Black theories a Black feminist project. Following the Black feminist legacy of Audre Lorde, I am eager to organize around our differences. In "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," Lorde states the weaponized rejection of difference "is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people" (Lorde, 115). Due to this conditioned rejection of difference, "we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals" and thus "those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion" (Lorde, 115). Lorde, then, challenges this conditioned approach to difference to advocate for using difference as an organizing strategy. She emphasizes the crucial need to understand how the different intersections of race, gender, and sexuality produce struggles which cannot be

collapsed into a single category, experience, or fight for liberation. For instance, Lorde highlights how as a Black lesbian woman she has often been unfairly asked to pick one fight in her identity by uniting with others purely on the basis of her gender, race, or sexuality in order to obscure the differences introduced through her other identities. This approach to organizing is, of course, absurd as there is no one experience of pure gender, race, or sexuality as our lives are always configured and entangled in the various intersections of these identities. This, then, creates a dominant understanding of these categories that privileges specific ways they manifest, whether through being a black male, or a white woman, or a heterosexual person. Lorde refuses to organize through these disingenuous illusions of unity and instead demands that we rethink difference. Lorde declares the future depends on our ability to "develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference" (Lorde, 122). I seek to develop new understandings of power and new patterns of relating across differences, by investigating the productive forms of relation Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, and Black Anarchism can have together in their differences and tension.

Lorde continues to emphasize why it is constructive to center differences in the essay "In Learning From the Sixties." By acknowledging difference, Lorde highlights how this organizing strategy allows her to identify the different ways she is oppressed and brought to oppress others. Centering difference means Lorde is willing to ask herself: "In what way do I contribute to the subjugation of any part of those who I define as my people?" Lorde demands readers consider: "who labors to make the bread we waste, or the energy it takes to make nuclear poisons which will not biodegrade for one thousand years; or who goes blind assembling the micro transistors in our inexpensive calculators?" (Lorde, 139). By centering difference Lorde recognizes how the global differentiation of human value based on difference not only incites violence against us,

but also makes us collude in violence towards others. To resist this complex system of violence, Lorde declares once again that we must think through difference as a sophisticated approach to liberation. Lorde states "The '60s should teach us how important it is not to lie to ourselves. Not to believe that revolution is a one-time event, or something that happens around us rather than inside of us. Not to believe that freedom can belong to any one group of us without the others also being free" (Lorde, 141). By prioritizing difference, Lorde makes it impossible for us to abandon one another in our pursuit for justice and freedom. By relating through difference, and respecting difference, Lorde dismantles difference as the ultimate division. Instead, she transforms difference into a foundational piece of revolution and a way to establish ethical solidarity. I demonstrate how difference can become a foundational piece of revolution by putting in conversation three distinct political theories with differing and contradicting beliefs. However, all these theories have in common the desire for Black liberation and in that shared space ethical solidarity can be built across difference, and highlight why difference is important. As I provide a literature review of the three theories in the following pages, I will argue how their differences actually produce important conversations which can in turn inspire paths forward for political organizing.

By operating from difference, as a strength, my dissertation also embodies an Ethnic Studies Project. Ethnic Studies aims to intervene in the oppressive discourse around difference. Ethnic Studies challenges the idea that difference is a problem. Ethnic Studies emphasizes the importance of embracing difference as a method to honor specific paths to liberation and ethical pursuits of solidarity. Further, its critical approach to difference resists hegemonic appropriations of difference in the guise of terms such as diversity. Lorde's analysis of difference highlights how Ethnic Studies utilizes difference as a method that severely contrasts with the approach held

by dominant institutions of power. Difference, often referred to as diversity, has become a very popular term and method of supposed reformation in institutions like universities. However, Ethnic Studies scholar Sara Ahmed highlights how this appropriation of difference in a politics of assimilation into the status quo actually maintains typical hegemonic operations of power. In the essay "The Language of Diversity," Ahmed states that an institutional emphasis on diversity actually represents "the lack of commitment to change and might even allow organizations such as universities to conceal the operation of systematic inequality under the banner of difference" (Ahmed, 236). Diversity and the historically marginalized bodies marked by differences that represent that diversity are tools to be managed within pre-existing oppressive systems, rather than methods to help us critically evaluate and dismantle dominant systems of power. Lorde uses difference as an insurgent methodology, which demands the critical interrogation and transformation of society. An Ethnic Studies approach to difference refuses the false integration of marginalized populations into institutions which were founded upon their rejection and oppression.

In what follows I will provide a literature review of Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, and Black revolutionary Anarchism. I will then put these concepts into conversation while analyzing Butler's archived and unfinished screenplay "Bound Slave." The excerpt of Butler's emerging film "Bound Slave" at once represents an important manifestation of Afrofuturist, Afro-pessimist, and Black Anarchist politics, highlighting the productive compatibility and tension of the differing theories. I argue "Bound Slave" also represents Butler engaging in an Afrofuturist practice, particularly through visual culture and will be an opportunity for me to define and elaborate on the concept of a Black Comix which will support the analysis of my own Black Comix' "Adventures of Selma" and "ACAB" discussed in later chapters. This chapter will then

conclude with a brief outline of the entire dissertation and its subsequent chapter summaries building the theoretical basis for the importance of the three creative projects as they connect to Butler's work and the three theories of Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, and Black revolutionary Anarchism.

Afrofuturism

The term Afrofuturism first appeared in the 1992 interview titled "Black to the Future." Cultural critic Mark Dery gathered a handful of leading Black speculative fiction writers including Samuel Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose. Before the interview began, Dery offered an essay where he coined the term Afrofuturism, as he speculated about the lack of commercially successful Black science fiction writers. For Dery, Afrofuturism is "speculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of twentieth century technoculture—and, more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future." However, the oppressive state violence that frames much of African American history casts a dark shadow on the concept for Dery. Dery questions if African Americans can imagine possible futures. Dery argues African Americans have lost a traceable past due to chattel slavery. The result of this supposed loss, in Dery's perspective, leaves most African Americans consumed with searching for legible traces of their history. The monopolizing obsession Dery imagines African Americans have with the past then limits the possibility for future speculation. Further, Dery wonders if the "unreal real estate of the future" already belongs to white male technocrats, futurologists, streamliners, and set designers who are engineering our collective fantasies (Dery, 180). If so, then Dery implies it may be difficult or impossible for most African Americans to engage in speculative fiction and imaginings of the future.

Several scholars challenge Dery. Mark Bould points out that many Black people were and have been engaging in science fiction and various forms of political speculation longer than Dery realized. A year before Dery's essay, Mark Sinker was already discussing and developing the concept of specifically Black science fiction in the magazine *The Wire*. However, unlike Dery, Sinker's analysis of Black speculative fiction went beyond the production of literature. Sinker's definition of Black speculative fiction included writers Samuel Delaney and Octavia E. Butler, while also recognizing the contributions of musicians like Sun-Ra, Public Enemy, John Coltrane, Anthony Braxton, Miles Davis, Wayne Shorter, Jimi Hendrix, Ishmael Reed, Afrika Bambaataaa, and Earth, Wind, and Fire. Sinker's vision of Black speculative fiction went beyond a traditional narrative. For Sinker, Black speculative fiction existed as a point of cultural departure that acknowledged that the violent dystopian future speculated in much of science fiction has happened for African Americans (Bould, 181).

Afrofuturism has always existed, even if that word was not used in earlier times, and it continues to evolve beyond the purview of Dery's perspective. In 2013 Ytasha Womack published *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*. The text functions as a sort of genealogy for the concept of Afrofuturism, tracing its history before and beyond Dery's coinage of the term. Womack proclaims in the first chapter, "Evolution of a Space Cadet," that she herself was an Afrofuturist before the term existed (Womack, Kindle Location 92). Further, Womack provides several succinct descriptions of Afrofuturism that can help clarify its ever-transforming definition. Womack states Afrofuturism can be understood as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future and liberation." Afrofuturism can "redefine culture and notions of blackness for today and the future" while functioning as both "an artistic aesthetic and a framework for critical theory." Afrofuturism combines several genres, including science

fiction, historical fiction, magical realism, fantasy, and speculative fiction with an Afrocentricity that emphasizes non-Western beliefs. Often, Afrofuturism will revisit the past to aid in highlighting its cultural critiques of the future. (Womack, Kindle Location 119). Afrofuturism's approach to the past and the future, produces an overlapping intimacy across multiple temporalities that ultimately confounds linear understandings of time. Afrofuturism cannot exist in just one form. Afrofuturism is a movement in literature, music, visual art, and other forms of cultural production.

Womack believes that Afrofuturism "unchains the mind." Womack describes how Afrofuturist exhibits championed by museums like the Tubman African American Museum in Macon, Georgia, the Sargent Johnson Gallery in Oakland, and the Museum of Contemporary Diasporan Arts in Brooklyn promote spaces for critical thinking (Womack, Kindle Location 194). Through an interview with Reynaldo Anderson, Womack also highlights Afrofuturism's connection to other theories like post blackness. Anderson, a professor at Harris-Stowe State University and a writer of Afrofuturist critical theory, argues Afrofuturism, like post-Blackness, destabilizes previous encounters with Blackness. Afrofuturism refuses an ignorance of history, but that does not force it to restrain imagination. With an understanding of history, in its ugliness and ongoing legacies, Afrofuturism still provides Blackness with the ability to encounter itself anew, by speculating different futures, identities, and historical contexts for Black experiences (Womack Kindle Location 210).

Afrofuturism as a theory continues to be utilized and expanded upon by scholars. Isiah Lavender III employs Afrofuturism as a way to read Black literature. Lavender III defines Afrofuturism as "a set of race-inflected reading protocols designed to investigate the optimisms and anxieties framing the future imaginings of black people" (Lavender III, 2). By using

Afrofuturism as a method of interpretation, Lavender III argues Afrofuturism offers an innovative way of reading canonical Black literature. Lavender III stresses that scholars have not previously commented on the strands of futurism that exist in novels like *Native Son*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, or *Captain Blackman* (Lavender III, 15). By using Afrofuturism as a way to read all Black literature, Lavender III reveals how Afrofuturism teaches us to recognize the speculative aspects in Black texts that are not categorized as fantasy or science fiction. Making space for canonical Black literature in Afrofuturism, then emphasizes the liberatory dreams and Black imaginings of the future present in texts whose considerations of Black destiny might go ignored (Lavender III, 16).

Sami Schalk expands the theory of Afrofuturism in her interdisciplinary scholarship on Octavia E. Butler, Black feminism, and disability studies. Schalk discovered Afrofuturism through the work of Octavia E. Butler. Butler, a proud Black feminist, populated her stories with characters living at the crossroads of various experiences of race, gender, disability, and sexuality. The range of experiences showcased in Butler's stories, and how they prompted readers to question preconceived ideas of Blackness, disability, sexuality, and womanhood, then led Schalk to her own definition of Black women's speculative fiction. Schalk asserts Black women's speculative fiction "reimagines the possibilities and meanings of bodyminds, particularly in regard to (disability), race and gender" (Schalk, 2-3). Schalk traces relationships between systems of power in the United States, historically and contemporarily, to analyze how Black women writers of speculative fiction "change the rules of reality in their texts to contest oppressive systems of thought and behavior" (Schalk, 8). Challenging oppressive systems of thought and behavior, especially in regard to disability, then opens up new ways to counter ableist and dehumanizing hierarchies.

Octavia E. Butler, heralded as a foundational practitioner of Afrofuturism, has long used her work to revisit the past to destabilize previous and present encounters with Blackness. Specifically, Butler employed Afrofuturism and neo-slave narratives together to confound linear understandings of time and disrupt dominant progress narratives within the United States. Butler's commitment to questioning the supposed progress of race relations in the United States, then works to unchain our minds collectively from a state driven imaginary that compartmentalizes chattel slavery within the past and denies its ongoing effects on the present and future.

Most of Butler's work confronts US chattel slavery in some way, through a speculative vision of the middle passage in *Wild Seed,* traveling back to the antebellum South in *Kindred*, exploiting a Black woman's reproductive abilities in the *Xenogenesis* series, or imagining how the historical subjection and exploitation of Black people would affect them in the future and alternate political and social systems in the *Parables* series and her novel *Fledging*. Butler has never stopped evaluating US chattel slavery. Butler's work consistently asked readers to confront the ongoing legacy of US chattel slavery, revealing its existence is central to our political modernity. Race, gender, class, reproductive rights, state violence and the production of history cannot be untangled from US chattel slavery. I will define neo-slave narratives and expand on Butler's contributions to neo-slave narratives in the first chapter of the dissertation dedicated to Butler's first neo-slave narrative ever written "Childfinder." However, for now I offer acknowledgement of Butler's neo-slave narratives to emphasize her link to Afro-pessimism, a political theory that centers the ongoing impact of anti-Blackness and the history of Black subjugation in chattel slavery.

Butler's development and complexification of Afrofuturism is also noted by Justin Louis Mann. Justin Louis Mann argues Butler's novel *Dawn* (1987) can help us situate the theory of Afrofuturism in relation to Afro-pessimism. Mann summarizes Afrofuturism as a theory that "emphasizes the capacity to exceed the historical constraints of blackness by imaging its iterations in a potential and often fantastic future." Conversely, Afro-pessimism "conceives of blackness as an ontological and political impossibility." In Afro-pessimism the impossibility of the Black subject and its future is dominated by its proximity to imminent death, due to its foreclosure from humanity in an anti-Black global order. Afro-pessimism complicates futurism as a central problem for Black people. Anti-Blackness constantly adapts to change and refashions itself. Due to the historical and ongoing reproduction of anti-Blackness, futurism becomes a fraught investment with little hope or promise (Mann, 64-65).

Afrofuturism and Afro-pessimism would seem to be polarizing theories. However, Mann argues the concepts are actually very productive when read as complementary. Afrofuturism and Afro-pessimism have points of connection. For instance, Afrofuturism and Afro-pessimism both recognize "how Black women subjectivity and labor create the coming world" (Mann, 61). The forced reproductive labor of Black women in chattel slavery became a foundational pillar in building our present patriarchal, white supremacist, capitalist modernity. In Butler's novel *Dawn*, our present modernity has appeared to end. A nuclear apocalypse has executed the majority of the Earth's population and made most of the land inhabitable. However, the forced reproductive labor of a Black woman named Lilith has been employed by a race of alien beings, called the Oankali, to produce a new version of humanity. The Oankali claim they are offering an opportunity to restart, to make the world and human society without its previous follies and self-destructive tendencies. However, Mann importantly notes "Lilith remains dubious of her ability

to re-make the human social order without patriarchal white supremacy" (Mann, 62). The remaining humans aboard the Oankali ship are still deeply informed by and prone to reproduce the vices of their previous world. Mann's analyzes how Lilith's leadership becomes contested and reviled on the basis of her Black womanhood, while another woman, Allison, is almost raped when she resists the heteronormative pressure to pick a male partner (Mann, 72).

The novel ends with a necessary uncertainty about where humanity will go. Or if humans should even stick around. *Dawn* strongly implies survival and humanity are incompatible, as the Oankali offer a future that "requires humans move beyond their own self-conception" (Mann, 72-73). *Dawn* offers a lot of possibilities and a lot of pessimism. *Dawn* suggests a radical reorganization of society in the destruction of the human category, while also confronting the violent investments that protect and reproduce the human. With the prospects of an unknowable future tempered by an understanding of the past that refuses blind hope, Mann argues Butler brings together Afrofuturism and Afro-pessimism. Butler's blend of Afrofuturism and Afro-pessimism inspires Mann to coin the term Pessimistic futurism. Mann states "Pessimistic futurism emerges from an ambivalent standpoint, one that seeks the future without the blind assurance of hope. In fact, it doubts the possibilities that lie in the future; it nevertheless looks to" (Mann, 63). Pessimistic futurism lacks optimism, but its ambivalence does not stop it from engaging with the future. The Pessimistic futurist speculates future possibilities while accepting no positive outcomes are guaranteed.

Pessimistic futurism demonstrates how Afrofuturism and Afro-pessimism have points of commonality, in the acknowledgement of a historical and ongoing anti-Black global order and a rigorous interrogation of the human category which begs divestment. These aforementioned points of commonality develop both theories further when put in tension with each other. Afro-

pessimism believes the adaptability of anti-Blackness renders hope in futurism and any future political order to be a bleak if not a wholesale misguided pursuit. However, if we employ futurism with the temperament of pessimism we find a new theory, or a supportive meeting point, where futurism is not impossible. The desires and speculations of futurism are just not guaranteed. Moving from a guarantee, or a blind assurance of hope, then can offer what I will later call a suggestion. Suggestions are not solutions or speculated forms of progress I believe undoubtedly can be successful. Suggestions are just that: a suggestion. There is no promise in the futurity or the success of the suggestion. The suggestion also does not constitute the wholesale shift from this ontological order to the next one. The suggestion concerns itself with speculating what conditions might incite a disruption, if not a wholesale destruction, of the human, the citizen, and the nation state with its attendant hierarchical and exclusionary logics.

The suggestion I will argue functions with the ambivalence for the future that does not try to satisfy itself with blind hope. The suggestion instead offers a suggestion to possibly help incite a disruption of this ontological order, not a complete shift from it, although it makes no promise this will be possible or have the desired effects of the original suggestion itself. After the following literature review of Afro-pessimism, I argue in my promotion of Black Anarchism that we can find a tempered futurism where the destruction of the human, the citizen, and the nation state are not offered as guarantees. I offer Black Anarchism as a possible attempt to break from the human, the citizen, and the nation state, but this break cannot be promised. I am suggesting the strategy of Black Anarchism to speculate a possibility that could open a potential disruption, not destruction, of our present ontological order; while simultaneously knowing and accepting the suggestion can be unsuccessful.

Afro-Pessimism

In a collection of essays titled "Forum Consider Afro-Pessimism/Responses by Christopher M. Tinson, Rinaldo Walcott and Elizabeth J. West," several academics come together to define, support and complicate each other's understanding of Afro-pessimism. My central objective, in offering an overview of Afro-pessimism in this series of literature reviews, highlights how Afro-pessimism itself has many perspectives and not all Afro-pessimists are in agreement. The theory of Afro-pessimism represents a culture of thought, which follows the reality of all cultures, which renders the theory to be socially constructed, contested, and emerging. I would like to root my approach to Afro-pessimism from this standpoint as I will proceed to make my own contestation in this theory which only continues to grow, develop, and emerge with further academic research and engagement.

The collection of essays begins with Sebastian Weier's article "Consider Afro-Pessimism," where Weier states Afro-pessimists are centrally invested in challenging current notions of post-racialism and insists politicized Blackness has radical potential. Weier then traces the historical emergence of the theory in Saidiya Hartman's text *Scenes of Subjection* (Weier, 419). Weier describes how Afro-pessimist authors including Jared Sexton and Frank Wilderson used Hartman's insight of an anti-Blackness contained in mundane daily life rather than encounters of speculator violence to build an argument for the central role anti-Blackness has in constituting the United States civil society. Weier states that the theory's core axiom declares that the category of the slave is still synonymous with Black (Weier 420). Weier elaborates on the process which created the reality of slavery synonymous with Blackness through Hortense Spillers' famous article "Mamma's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." Spillers argued slavery transformed Black bodies into Black flesh. The theft of the body rendered captive Africans and their descendants into entities without gender nor history. The flesh,

Blackness has been reduced to, now stands as "mere commodity that is subject to society's whim and will, but has no part in it." Weier continues stating, when referring to the Middle passage, that when people have been reduced to flesh, they become cut off from their culture and history as they are scattered across the globe in a displaced diaspora in the process. Displaced Black flesh became incessantly vulnerable to legal rape which transmuted Black reproduction into the cultivation and accumulation of property, pulverizing kinship networks as families were constantly under siege and separated in the slave market (Weier, 423). The historical impact of chattel slavery works to generate Black social death, as Black subjects have no rights, no history, no humanity, and no legibility to advocate for themselves or seek redress for external antagonisms in civil society. Black ontology in its existential commodification foreclosed Black life, humanity and civil acceptance, to generate an economy from Black life force and politicized nonbeing.

A Black grammar of suffering then reveals how the alienated Black flesh of the slave--exiled from family, history, and humanity, as well its contemporary manifestations, falls in a position outside of standard discourse. Frameworks like materialism, feminism, psychoanalysis or postcolonial studies cannot approach Blackness in the same way it would approach or appraise a position inside of their discourse. For instance, Blackness becomes foreclosed from the category of womanhood, because the Black cannot participate in the full profit of whiteness, which is synonymous with subjectivity and therefore legible gender in civil society. Or contrary to post-colonial subalterns, including Native Americans, Black people cannot claim a redress of land or a rewriting of history in white civil society. (Weier, 423). Another example offered was the realm of the worker. Weier argues workers exist in a symbolic realm structured by recognition of membership, while Blackness struggles with its ability to achieve that very fact:

recognition. Unlike the worker, Black people do not exist in discourse as a subject imbued with specific rights, instead Black people exist in the most vulnerable position, the space below rights or the "place where violence reigns." Workers sell their labor as a commodity, while Black people are the commodity. The final example offered were modern shipments of Black inmates being forcibly captured and farmed by private prisons for their labor and life force (Weier, 422).

Black people are mined for their literal being. Our state of nonbeing produces the metaphysics of being or meaning for everyone who participates in legible subjectivity, humanity, and citizenship. Calvin L. Warren expands on this state of nonbeing further in the essay "Black Nihilism and the Politics of Hope." I will summarize the central argument of the article later in this literature review, but for now Warren offers important insights into the abstraction of Blackness in the Middle passage. Warren argues "meaning itself is an aspect of anti-blackness, such that meaning is lost for the black; blacks live in a world of absurdity, and this existential absurdity *is* meaning for the world." Warren elaborates by offering a quote from the Black writer, musician, and producer Greg Tate. In an interview Tate declared, "the bar between the signifier and the signified could be understood as standing for the Middle passage that separated signification from sign." Therefore, the entire structure of meaning in modernity, which operates through the concepts of signifier, signified, signification, and sign, has been constituted and reproduced through anti-Black violence. The trauma of the Middle Passage works to ruin the signifying process for enslaved Africans and their descendants, while simultaneously personifying a "meaningless" sign as the foundation of language, meaning, and social existence itself. Warren argues meaningless anti-Black violence becomes the "crypt-signifier" that structures modern institutions and the world (Warren, 226). The state of nonbeing for Blackness is defined by endless violence with impunity from an anti-Black global order it sustains. By

operating as a foil for life, the crypt signifier, reconstitutes life for the subjects that exist in contrast to the non-subjectivity of the Black or the slave or the socially dead. A non-Black subject knows themselves to be alive and acknowledged because Black people are born dead and invisible in their constitutive position in civil society. Visibility is provided a frame of reference for self-definition through the assurance of witnessing its opposite: invisibility. Being is made and affirmed through the violent and endless unmaking of Blackness, its constitutive opposite.

Returning to Wier, he states the invisibility of Black humanity is ironically tied to a "hypervisibility of black people as a source of danger." Weier argues the ontological vision of Blackness as unable to participate in civil society manifests itself in a fear of Black people as a central threat to civil society. The fear becomes broadcasted in stereotypes including Black thugs, gangbangers, welfare queens, and other representations of Blackness as parasitic criminals unable to contribute to civil society (Weier, 421). The contemporary delusions of criminality embedded in Blackness then sustains the transition of the Black flesh from a slave within the former structure of chattel slavery to a captive in the criminal justice system. Afro-pessimists argue the invisibility of Black humanity is highly adaptable and persists in spite of historical moments such as Jubilee, the passing of the Civil Rights Act, or the Obama presidency. However, anti-Blackness is not argued to be a static phenomenon but rather described as a continuity "in as and as permutation." An instance of this permutation comes in the transition of the vision of Black flesh as willing slaves into a vision of Black flesh as pathological criminals. The process of birthing modern Black criminality was also aided by the erection of post-Abolition Black Codes which replaced slavery with predominantly Black convict labor and debt peonage, before birthing the current mass incarceration of African Americans. The former

position of the slave then becomes the civic death of the ghetto inhabitant as "prison-slave-in-waiting" (Weier, 420).

The anti-Black violence which constitutes the world and its institutions supports the life and legibility of everyone non-Black including white people and junior partners. Afro-pessimists argue Asians, Latin-Americans, and Native Americans are junior partners in a white civil society and partake, to a significantly lesser degree, of the profits of anti-Blackness. Afro-pessimists assert all non-Black bodies have the ability to sustain themselves existentially from anti-Black violence and Black social death (Weier, 420). Weier offers the theory of people of color blindness to shed more insight on junior partnership. Jared Sexton defined people of color blindness as the "common refusal to admit to significant differences of structural position born of discrepant histories between blacks and their political allies, actual or potential….a form of color blindness inherent to the concept of 'people of color' to the precise extent that it misunderstands the specificity of anti-Blackness and presumes or insists upon the monolithic character of victimization under white supremacy--thinking (the afterlife of) slavery as a form of exploitation or colonization or a species of racial oppression among others." People of color blindness conflate Blackness, Black social death, and Black civic death with legible subjects in discourse who are also experiencing political struggles like the worker, the woman, or the postcolonial subaltern. Afro-pessimists do not deny the existence of non-Black political struggles. However, Afro-pessimists make an intervention in the conversation around political struggle by asserting there can be no accurate consideration of the United States, its culture, and its white civil society without an understanding of anti-Blackness as the matrix through which social, cultural and libidinal issues are framed (Weier, 426).

In a response to Weier's essay, Rinaldo Walcott describes Afro-pessimists as heirs of Frantz Fanon due to their desire to divest from contemporary understandings of the human and their call to destroy the entire world in the pursuit of Black liberation (Walcott, 436). Further, Walcott argues considering civil society's juridical nature is essential to the method in which Afro-pessimists argue contemporary global politics are foundationally anti-Black. Walcott offers his own definition of emancipation as a "legal, legislative, and juridical term and condition that is radically different from freedom." Walcott describes a "long emancipation" spanning from 1834 with the British colonies, 1865 in the United States and so on in Portugal, Spain etc. Walcott argues these series of colonial emancipations were swiftly followed by juridical conditions of imposed white civil society which prevented Black freedom. Understanding the aforementioned history then reveals how "white civil society's juridical conditions continually structure anti-Black conditions and black death from Ferguson to Lampedusa and all the way in between as legal and legitimate on their terms." The global totality of anti-Blackness then presents a problem for Walcott, in terms of how productive the theory of Afro-pessimism can be specifically in the space of the university. Weier argues Afro-pessimism could be beneficial to German academics and understanding European politics. However, Walcott challenges Weier to consider how much traction or ability the theory will have in a white academic space produced from "the spoils of black enslavement and fungibility." Walcott deeply doubts white academic ability to use Afro-pessimism to undermine whiteness or undo its society (Walcott, 437).

In Calvin L. Warren's essay "Black Nihilism and the Politics of Hope" we get a similarly ambivalent perspective about the ability of theory to produce liberation. Returning to Weier for a brief moment, Afro-pessimist Frank Wilderson argues Black liberation is contingent on the destruction of the entire world. Weier quotes Wilderson as he works in dialog with Fanon's

insights, and asserts destruction of Black suffering would necessitate "the end of the world and they (whites and junior partners) would find themselves peering into an abyss (or incomprehensible transition) between epistemes…In other words, they would find themselves suspended between worlds" (Weier, 422). Black freedom contingent upon global destruction then disrupts hope in the political contours of our current society. Speaking to this disrupted hope, Warren offers Black nihilism as a theory to divest from political hope, which also complicates the drive to find solutions in theory. Warren argues "the logic of the Political--linear temporality, biopolitical futurity, perfection, betterment, and redress--sustains black suffering." Warren posits concepts like progress or perfection are cultivated through the suffering of the Black body and any appeal to the political and its discourse of hope ultimately reproduces the metaphysical structures of violence that assaults Black existence. Black nihilism becomes an intervention unraveling the political and its logic of hope. Black nihilism rejects the emancipatory desire that believes it is possible to remove anti-Black violence from the political sphere and instead promotes political apostasy as the sole ethical response to Black suffering (Warren, 218).

Warren first uses the example of voting to argue that faith in politics cannot be divorced from a delusion of liberal progress. By citing the essay "A Fidelity to Politics: Shame and the African American Vote in the 2004 Election" by Grant Farred, Warren highlights how the pursuit of liberal progress in voting has been historically unsuccessful for Black liberation (Warren, 219). Voting has historically been ineffective in achieving "redress, equality, and political subjectivity" for Black flesh. Therefore, Farred and Warren argue African Americans have an "irrational fidelity" to the practice of voting which has never yielded structural or ontological transformations of anti-Blackness (Warren, 220). For Warren, there can be no hope

for Black liberation in a political campaign. Further, Warren challenges the promise of hope in politics by highlighting how these arguments are usually tied to "a promise of possibility that can only be realized in an indefinite future, and this promise is a bond of uncertainty that can never be redeemed, only imagined." Due to this promise that can only be realized in an unbreachable future, Warren declares the true objective of political hope is just that: to hope. Political hope functions to "reproduce its very condition of possibility, never to satiate or bring fulfillment" (Warren, 223). For Warren, political hope is the cruel carrot keeping Black flesh chasing a stick of subjectivity that we will never catch while engaging in the political. The Black nihilist recognizes the ruse of progress and the exploitation of their hope in political engagement (Warren, 233).

Black nihilism offers political apostasy as its answer to anti-Blackness not its solution, for Black nihilism challenges the notion that Black flesh should search for a solution. Warren defines political apostasy as a renouncing of the political itself. Warren describes the position as "an active nihilism when an 'alternative' political arrangement is impossible." When the Black nihilist is confronted with the liberatory future, or the "not-yet-social order," that can never be realized in the present he enlists political apostasy as an "empowered hermeneutical practice" which "interprets the anti-Black Political symbolic as inherently wicked and rejects it both as critique and spiritual practice" (Warren, 233). For Warren, political apostasy becomes simultaneously spiritually sustaining and a practice of resistance. The spiritual experience of faith has not only been rescued from its undeserved and exhausting home in the political present, but also from the constant wagging carrot stick of struggle that professes, much like former President Obama, that justice is innate to the world without having an actual answer for shifting Black ontology (Smith). Political apostasy becomes in tension with many Afrofuturists

immediately. Political apostasy could easily be a response to Afrofuturists that believe we must continue to dream a future of Black liberation, in a not-yet-social order, without having any exact answers for how that future of progress would be achieved from our historical moment to that unknown and unpromised and therefore possibly delusional historical point of view.

Black nihilists want to know how you can have cake and not eat it too? How can you believe we can sink our teeth – with subjectivity – into a new ontology if you don't even know how it tastes? If you have never seen the chicken with the only eggs that can make the cake? If you have not even seen the recipe, can we really believe you know the cake? Can you promise the cake? Why have faith in cake that cannot feed us now and cannot be promised to feed our future Black flesh – now somehow transmuted into an acknowledged body – when we are dead? Anarchism cannot be an acceptable answer to these questions for Warren. Calling upon Fred Moten in "Blackness and Nothingness," Warren argues only a "Blackned" world will end metaphysics, but ending metaphysics also ends the world, and therein lies the nihilism that Black nihilists must theorize through. Warren quickly elaborates that he is not promoting anarchy, stating the Black nihilist has "little faith in the metaphysical reorganization of society through anarchy than he does in traditional forms of political existence" (Warren, 244). In agreement with Afro-pessimist Frank Wilderson, Warren argues, "Black emancipation is world destructive; it is not an aperture or an opening for future possibilities and political reconfigurations" (Warren, 239). A Blackned world requires a point of view I can never have access to because my existence and my understanding of existence will always be governed by the current metaphysics I inherent in an anti-Black world. I do not deny the aforementioned theory nor am I resisting it in my eventual intervention in Afro-pessimism and Black nihilism.

I do not believe Black revolutionary Anarchism can bring Black liberation. I do not promote Black revolutionary Anarchism as an answer or guaranteed solution to the presently unsolvable Black ontology. I have no idea what can solve Black ontology, because when we reach that form of liberation there will be no more humans and therefore no more sentient Black flesh and therefore no more context I can fathom nor begin to understand. Wilderson elaborates on this unknowable world in the interview "The Year Afropessimism Hit the Streets?: A Conversation at the Edge of the World. Aaron Roberston Talks to Frank Wilderson III" (Robertson). Wilderson states explicitly that "getting rid of social death doesn't mean on the other side having Black existence that is whole. On the other side, it means something more catastrophic and renewing, which is having no Black existence because there will be no Black people. And having no Human existence, because there will be no Humans. There will be sentient beings who are on the cusp of a new episteme" (Roberston). There is no way to rescue Blackness from a context that is anti-Black, because to be Black requires anti-Blackness. Blackness, like the human, is a socially constructed position, but its fixture has been constitutive to how we understand the world and the human. Thus, if we engage in a conversation that requires divesting from the world entirely, as we know it, then we are also divesting from Blackness. Following the aforementioned points, it becomes somewhat misleading to discuss "Black liberation" as the goal since our ultimate liberation will mean obliterating Black ontology. When we are liberated, we will not be Black.

Afro-pessimism complicates Afrofuturism's desire to find a solution for Black ontology. Wilderson directly critiques Afrofuturism in the interview by arguing no one can "imagine another world inside of the episteme in which you live. That's where I differ from the Afrofuturists. They're using linguistics and semiotics to say that we're out of the realm of

absolute abjection, and that's just religious thinking. It moves from analysis to idealism without showing the move" (Roberston). I agree with Wilderson, but I am still an Afrofuturist. Butler never wrote a single utopia. Butler never imagined Black liberation. In the *Patternist* series, Butler does imagine our world ending and then entering a new episteme, somewhat, ruled by telepaths where the human category has been subordinated to the new value system of telepathic ability. However, no one in *Patternmaster* is living their best life. The tyrannical world of the telepaths in *Patternmaster* is written to be clearly and highly toxic in its hierarchical logics and political system. Butler never tried to imagine a world beyond this episteme ruled by hierarchy and domination. Instead, Butler wrote novels like *Patternmaster* and *Dawn* to critique and challenge the human category and the logics of hierarchy and domination. Butler never sought to give a solution to these realities, but rather to show how they can and very likely will continue to exist in and as permutation. I am a similar Afrofuturist. In the legacy of Butler, I have never written a utopia and I likely never will.

My short story "What You Pass For" only concerns itself with using speculative fiction to highlight the anti-Black perpetuation of the human category during Jim Crow and thus now. I concentrated on one form of the past permutation while writing in our current historical moment, to show anti-Black social and political repetition and patterns. My interest in Black speculative fiction never focused solely on finding a precise solution to our current political order or Black ontology. I will not deny that in conversations when I was younger, I did earnestly want to find a solution to Black ontology. Fortunately, my desire to find a solution led me to read. In my reading, I am thoroughly convinced there is no solution I will know, see, or understand. I will never be able to comprehend the entire solution, because there will never be a world in which I do not conceive and understand myself to be Black. If I cannot cease an understanding of myself

as Black, then I will never be divorced from anti-Blackness. You cannot rescue Blackness from anti-Blackness. If I am free, then I exist in an intelligible space where my self-concept is nothing I can understand or currently perceive.

I have no solutions. I am not ambitious enough to argue I could ever show, or even fathom, the shift Frank Wilderson critiques some Afrofuturists for attempting. However, I am ambitious enough to make a suggestion. Returning to Wynter, we presently understand the human and therefore the antihuman through an important anchor of the nation state. I believe these constitutive positions, of being and nonbeing, can exist without being centrally conceived in relation to the nation state. Wynter begins her argument by first detailing how the two positions originally emerged in the church. Therefore, anti-Blackness and the human can certainly find a new iteration in any number of social and political formations. Therefore, I have no answer to actually solving Black ontology. I can only make a suggestion to disrupt some of the structures which currently uphold the concepts of the human, the citizen, and the nation state as we currently understand them. Currently, an important anchor to our metaphysical understanding of self is through the human, the nation state, and citizenship. By abolishing the nation state, citizenship, the formal institutions which propel the hierarchical logics inherent to an economy of racial capitalism, etc., I believe we might have an opportunity to disrupt the conception of the human category and therefore its constitutive opposite the antihuman or sentient Black flesh. However, a disruption is not a solution. A disruption does not usher in a new ontology initially nor does it promise to eventually – *but it could. I am suggesting a profound disruption of the world or the literal destruction of the world's immediate organizing structures and institutions, like nation states which centrally govern our lives and notions of existence, might present an opportunity to disrupt or eventually destroy our ontology.*

Calvin L. Warren's text *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism and Emancipation* concludes with the chapter "Coda: Adieu to the Human." In this last section, Warren offers his own suggestion stating, "I am suggesting ultimately that black ~~being~~ begins to get over the human and its humanism fantasies." Warren goes on to state that sentient Black flesh should instead "take a leap of faith, Kierkegaard might say, and reject the terms through which we organize our existence" (Warren Kindle Location 3484 of 5464). To do this, Warren admits yet again that he has a suggestion. Warren declares, "what I am suggesting constitutes an ontological revolution, one that will destroy the world and its institutions (i.e., the "end of the world," as Fanon calls it). But these are our options, since the metaphysical holocaust will continue as long as the world *exists*." Before offering the prior suggestion, Warren states "Black thinking, then, must think what is impossible to think within the constraints of metaphysics and ontology." Warren argues that our pursuit leads to the unknown and a place where we can no longer ask questions. (Warren Kindle Location 3498 of 5464). I agree that at a certain point I cannot be a part of the conversation around solving Black ontology, because I will not exist. Nor will any form of thought I can perceive of will exist either. However, before we reach this new episteme, I believe we can do more than what Warren will argue below: endure.

Warren ultimately offers a dependence on the spirit to overcome or endure the persisting reality of the anti-Black global order everyone presently alive will die within. To live through the current fixture of anti-Blackness, Warren posits "the spirit enables one to endure the metaphysical holocaust; it is not a solution to anti-Blackness. The spirit will not transform an antiblack world into some egalitarian landscape--the antiblack world is irredeemable" (Warren Kindle Location 3506 of 5464). Warren argues that in the absence of having subjectivity or "Being" we have the spirit. Further, to continue to pursue "Being" in our current metaphysical

world perpetuates spiritual violence of Blackness (Warren, Kindle 3514 of 5464). To be invested in the current state of legible "Being" then means an investment in anti-Blackness, because the refusal to allow current Black being perpetuates being for everyone else. I agree with Warren. I am ready to abandon the human category. I want to take the leap of faith to reject the conditions which organize our existence. *However, I argue then a leap of faith also requires just that: faith.* An investment in the unknown. I agree with Warren, that if we are pursuing something ultimately intelligible we have to be okay with not having the answers. In line with Warren and other Afro-pessimists, I accept that we can offer suggestions not solutions. But I do not agree that our suggestions should preclude us from getting as close to imagining the break as much as possible.

A Speculative Knowledge of Freedom

I argue suggestions, for disrupting Black ontology with the intent of hopefully and eventually destroying Black ontology, then become what Saidiya Hartman would call "subjugated knowledge or speculative knowledge of freedom" (Hartman, xxviii). Hartman defines subjugated knowledge or a speculative knowledge of freedom in the new Preface to the twenty-fifth anniversary print of *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. I believe it is important and ironic that Scenes *of Subjection* argues for a speculative knowledge of freedom, as the text has been credited with founding much Afro-pessimist thought. To discuss subjugated knowledge or a speculative knowledge of freedom, Hartman first emphasizes a central point of the text she feels has been overlooked. Hartman argues that in *Scenes,* she wanted to display how, "Black performance and quotidian practice were determined by and exceeded the constraints of domination." Hartman states this aspect of Black performance and practice existing within and beyond domination, has been overlooked in

the reception of the book. Instead, scholars have largely chosen to focus on the text's arguments about subjugation, social death, terror and violence. The focus on the terror, violence and social death then came to overshadow an important intent of the work. Hartman argues *Scenes* "endeavored to illuminate the countless ways in which the enslaved challenged, refused, defied, and resisted the condition of enslavement and its ordering and negation of life, its extraction and destruction of capacity. The everyday practices, the ways of living and dying, of making and doing, were attempts to slip away from the status of commodity and to affirm existence as not chattel, as not property, as not wench." (Hartman, xxvii). *Scenes* acknowledged social death through its constant tension with the resilience and enduring resistance of Black flesh.

Hartman declares the "wild thought and dangerous music of the enslaved gave voice to other visions of the possible and refused captivity as the only horizon, opposed the framework of property and commodity, contested the idea that they were less than human, nurtured acts of vengeance, and anticipated divine retribution." Speculative knowledge of freedom, otherwise known as subjugated knowledge, then manifested as the vision of what could be, even if not attainable within the lifetime of the enslaved sentient Black flesh. Slaves stretched toward the not-yet-social-order as an act of resistance, not a liberal desire to be integrated into this world. Therefore, when commodities described themselves as "human flesh" or a runaway trapped in an attic wrote letters about experiencing a free life in the North, sentient Black flesh lived and asserted self-concept in resistance to the conditions which governed their very ontology (Hartman, xxvii). A speculative knowledge of freedom supported Black flesh in the refusal of their ontology in self-description and/or self-removal from the plantation. A speculative knowledge of freedom demanded gestures that ultimately defy the political system. The world.

Enslaved sentient Black flesh used a speculative knowledge of freedom to sustain themselves amidst the persisting reality of bondage. Hartman describes how the former enslaved abolitionist Olaudah Equiano wrote in *The Interesting Narrative*: "May the time come--at least the speculation is to me pleasing--when the sable people shall gratefully commemorate the auspicious era of extensive freedom." In response to Equiano, Hartman begs the question: "How does one commemorate what has yet to arrive?" (Hartman, xxviii). For in the admitted pleasing speculation of a not-yet-social-order we find investment in hope in a future which could not be guaranteed and was never delivered in Equiano's lifetime. Equiano's pleasure could be considered a temporally independent satisfaction. A pleasure which refuses the boundaries of time to accept foreclosure to celebration. In Equiano's admitted pleasure, his statement begins to somewhat already participate in commemorating or enjoying this unpromised and unarrived future, which leads to Hartman's question: how were slaves sustaining themselves with celebrations for progress they would never perceive or receive themselves? Through a speculative knowledge of freedom, I argue Equiano honored his own life and its mission. I argue Equiano's pleasure, rooted in a speculative knowledge of freedom, reflects his refusal to accept his ontological position in his lifetime. I too celebrate an auspicious era of extensive freedom *today*, because I refuse to relinquish my demand for it.

Scenes describes how slaves used daily practices to resist slavery and demand freedom, and therefore an existence which could never be honored by the current political system. Hartman argues within social death, everyday practices of sentient Black flesh investigated the "possibility of transfigured existence and cultivated an imagination of the otherwise and elsewhere, cartographies of the fantastic utterly antagonistic to slavery." A speculative knowledge of freedom cultivated a thirst for liberation which became combative with the entire

political system. Hartman continues to posit that enslaved sentient Black flesh rejected the "order of values that transformed them into units of currency and capital, beasts and crops, breeders, incubators, lactating machines, and sentient tools." Enslaved Black flesh refused their regulation to the constitutive position of nonbeing in such a manner that was world defying not world acclimating.

Hartman asserts the enslaved vision of liberation wildly surpassed the confines of the liberal imagination. Hartman declares Black flesh speculated alternative forms of existence which necessitated a break from the hierarchical politics of masters and encouraged the demise of the current political order to usher in an "upheaval that would put "the bottom rail on top," nurture a collective vision of what might be possible when no longer enslaved, and sustain belief in the inevitability of slavery's demise" (Hartman, xxviii). The vehement belief in slavery's demise as inevitable, I argue, derived from the habitual resistance which made slavery and social death exist in the enduring storm of slave refusal to acquiesce and accept the terms of their ontology and political order. *I argue the sustained belief in Black liberation came from the sustained commitment to Black liberation.* Perhaps Black nihilism would argue I am idealizing struggle. However, the Black struggle I am discussing is not fixated upon being integrated into the human category or any contemporary political system. When the slave asserts they are "human flesh" they are making an assertion which necessarily obliterates their and our understanding of humanity. If the antihuman has subjectivity, we are discussing a different world order.

I argue a speculative knowledge of freedom and the liberatory dreams of enslaved sentient Black flesh were world defying. Hartman states that in a collection of "minor gestures, ways of sustaining and creating life, caring for one another, undoing slavery by small acts of

stealth and destruction, communal dreaming, sacred transport, acts of redress, and faith in a power greater than master and nation made it possible to survive the unbearable while never acceding to it." Hartman argues slave songs, ritual prayer, encouragement to go fugitive, or discussion of Black maroons living in societies off the plantation in the hills "nourished dreams of a free territory, or an existence without masters, or a plot against the plantation, or reveries of miraculous deliverance" (Hartman, xxix). Hartman offers the aforementioned examples of the desire or intent of Black liberation asserted in daily practice to emphasize how the desires for Black liberation were never aligned with emancipation or integration through liberal and reformist progress. The aspirations of Black liberation existed in desires for social configurations that transcended the hierarchical logics embedded in masters and nation states. *Sentient Black flesh lived for an opportunity to make a world unseen.*

Emancipation did not usher in the dream of the enslaved. Emancipation defined by liberal progress can only sustain this political system and therefore can only perpetuate anti-Blackness. Hartman states, "the recognition of the formerly enslaved as a newly endowed subject of rights was not the entry to the promised land. This should not have been a surprise. Western humanism was born in the context of the Atlantic slave trade and racial slavery. It became apparent that being a subject was not the antidote to being a slave, but rather that these figures were intimate, twinned." Liberal progress and reform are not answers to Black suffering. The liberal subject gains (re)birth and is sustained in self-definition through the dehumanization of Black flesh. Therefore, all liberal progress exists within the adapted permutation of anti-Blackness. Hartman argues, "the restricted vision of freedom offered by the liberal imagination, a vision more attenuated and hollowed out by counterrevolution, economic predation, anti black violence, and white supremacy, would not transform the plantation, or abolish racial slavery and its badges of

indices, or eradicate caste, or negate the legacy and stigma of having been chattel" (Hartman, xxix-xxx). Instead, the anti-Black world self-perpetuates through the maintenance of anti-Black violence, thus ushering in the emergence of the "landless tenant and the indebted worker." "The enslaved were transformed into a new kind of property--alienable labor or property in the self; but in all other ways they were without resources." Hartman goes on to discuss how emancipated Black flesh became newly ensnared in sharecropping and debt peonage through the threat of incarceration in the chain gang or convict leasing. (Hartman, xxx-xxxi). Emancipation through liberal reform has never been aligned with the dreams of the enslaved or Black liberation.

A speculative knowledge of freedom is intentionally world defying. A speculative knowledge of freedom answers Fanon's call for the end of the world, and thus functions with some degree of alignment with the expressed purpose of Warren's suggested ontological revolution. I offer Black Anarchism as my suggestion for disrupting Black ontology within a speculative knowledge of freedom. Black Anarchism is the closest way I can conceive of taking the leap of faith to reject the terms which organize our existence. I honor the fact that I cannot offer an assured solution to Black ontology due to the fact I will never exist within it. Therefore, I offer Black Anarchism as my suggestion to reach a world unseen. In the suggestion, amplified by a speculative knowledge of freedom, we can begin to discuss what could potentially disrupt our global framework enough to renew the world. To refuse the masters and the nations and the liberal violence of adapted anti-Blackness as progress. If a speculative knowledge of freedom seeks an end to masters and nations, Black Anarchism is aligned with that goal. If a speculative knowledge of freedom pursues a way to disrupt what currently organizes our ontology, Black Anarchism is aligned with this goal. I offer Black Anarchism as a suggestion, rooted in a speculative knowledge of freedom, to begin thinking beyond masters, nations, the current world

order, its institutions, and our entire self-concept. I offer Black Anarchism as an endorsement by one of my favorite scholars Saidiya Hartman.

Black Anarchism

The Black Anarchist text *The Nation On No Map* by William C. Anderson contains a foreword by Saidiya Hartman titled "Foreword: Black in Anarchy." Hartman defines Anarchism as a term that "gathers and names the practices of mutual aid and the programs for survival that have sustained us in the face of unimaginable violence. It unfolds with and as Black feminism and Indigenous struggle. It offers a blueprint for radical transformation, for possibilities of existence beyond the world of scarcity and managed depletion, enclosure, and premature death" (Anderson, Kindle Location 31 of 297). In Hartman's definition of Anarchism she describes daily acts of sustaining resistance embodying and striving towards manifesting what could be, or otherwise called the world unseen. A series of acts that are similar to a speculative knowledge of freedom emerge here and I argue demonstrate how Black flesh has been embodying Anarchism as an intentioned disruption of the political order before we decided to adopt this particular word to name it. I want to be clear when I am discussing Black Anarchism or any form of Anarchism I am promoting within this dissertation, it is an Anarchism that is totally unconcerned with any classical European intersections. I am not interested in what is traditionally considered canonical anarchist literature which I am intentionally referring to with a lowercase "a." The Anarchism I am concerned with is rooted in the historical aspirations of sentient Black flesh which speculated a break from hierarchy, master, slave, nation, and domination for an embodied daily practice of voluntary association, autonomy, and self-regulation in stateless socialism.

Hartman asserts the long history of Black Anarchism. Hartman argues Anarchism is the inheritance of "the dispossessed, the legacy of slaves and fugitives, toilers and recalcitrant

domestics, secret orders and fraternal organizations. It is the history that arrives with us--as those who exist outside the nation, as the stateless, as the dead, as property, as objects and tools, as sentient flesh." Hartman describes how Black Anarchism was forged from a battle with colonial violence and the plantation. In the fight to live and survive, Hartman argues Black Anarchism emerged from the daily practices and gestures of resistance sowed within this "protracted war." Throughout the battle with modernity, Black flesh modeled gestures of the world unseen in "networks of mutual aid, maroon communities, survival programs, and circles of care." Therefore, Hartman declares "we are Black in anarchy because of how we have lived and died. We are Black in anarchy." (Anderson, Kindle Location 73 of 297). If Black Anarchism manifests in circles of care, political organizing, conscious raising, and mutual aid, we can see aspects of it in other legacies of Black political organizing.

I argue the beliefs and organizing practices of the Black feminist and lesbian coalition, the Combahee River Collective, are aligned with Black Anarchism. I also want to assert that I am intentionally entering my literature review on Black Anarchism with the Combahee River Collective. I am making this decision in order to continue to emphasize this dissertation is a Black feminist project. In the 1974 statement, the Combahee River Collective declares from the start of their manifesto that they were devoted to challenging hierarchical and exclusionary politics, manifesting in "racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression." The Combahee River Collective further posits they are committed to an analysis which understands the aforementioned political struggles are interlocking and thus "creates the conditions of our lives." I argue the Combahee River Collective organized to defy the conditions that structured their existence, which cannot be untethered from an attempt to move closer to an ontological revolution. Next the collective argued their Black feminism stems from an embodied history of

struggle in the legacy of historical figures including Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E. W., and Ida B. Wells. The Combahee River Collective, like me, is not interested in defining their political struggle in relation to the suffragettes or in a realm beyond the specific bounds of how sentient Black flesh has asserted their own feminism and demand for freedom. I argue it is also important that many members of the Combahee River Collective, like the famous Black Anarchist Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, formerly worked with and then diverged from hierarchical and nationalist forms of Black organizing.

The Combahee River Collective admits that many of its members had been active in civil rights organizations, Black nationalism, and the Black panthers. However, like Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, members of the Combahee River Collective quickly became disillusioned with and saw the errors embedded in organizing around perpetuating hierarchy, patriarchy, and nationalism. Departing from these aforementioned movements, the collective decided to regroup and build a politic that could be sustaining for them. At the start of the section "What We Believe" the Combahee River Collective state their politics initially stemmed "from the shared belief Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's may because our need as human persons for autonomy." For the antihuman to argue for value and subjectivity and autonomy, as its central organizing motivation, is world defying. Returning to Justin Louis Mann, in a brief reminder of Afro-pessimism, we recall "Black women subjectivity and labor create the coming world" historically (Mann, 61). The coming world referenced, of course, is our current anti-Black global framework. For Black women identified sentient flesh to assert their value and a demand for autonomous humanity, in service of and subordinated to no one, would require a new episteme and a break from our present ontology. If the Combahee River Collective were ever to have achieved their goal of

being “human, levelly human,” then we would be in a new world order. For sentient Black flesh to transcend nonbeing, would necessitate the concepts of being and meaning to be remade fundamentally for everyone. The Combahee River Collective did not organize for humanity in a liberal delusion of integration into the nation state. I argue the call for humanity, or a new humanity similar to Fanon, begs the end of the world.

The Combahee River Collective explicitly calls for the end of racial capitalism and for the rise of socialism. The collective declares “the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that the work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources.” The collective clearly intended the end of our political system in the destruction of global capitalism and imperialism and patriarchy. However, the collective did not have a passive commitment to socialist literature or Marxism. The collective immediately critiques contemporary socialism and asserts their desires to manifest a socialism which aligns with Black liberation. The collective states they are not convinced, “a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and anti-racist revolution will guarantee our liberation.” The collective continues to critique socialist organizing by stating that although they are “in essential agreement with Marx’s theory as it applied to the very specific economic relationships he analyzed, we know that his analysis must be extended further in order for us to understand our specific economic situation as Black women.” The Combahee River Collective did not approach Marxism as disciples seeking to be integrated into his political discourse. I argue the collective saw they fell beyond the

discourse of the worker and therefore asserted a desire for a more developed theory to ensure their socialist aspirations. Ultimately, the Combahee River Collective wanted a revolution.

The Combahee River Collective wanted to activate their particular form of subjugation into a catalyst for revolution. The collective argued, "we might use our position at the bottom, however, to make a clear leap into revolutionary action. If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression." If we are discussing a destruction of all oppression as we know it, then we are discussing a new world and a new ontological order for sentient Black flesh. Further, the socialism desired by the Combahee River Collective never discusses any national formation or organized hierarchy. When discussing the world the collective sought to manifest, the Combahee River Collective asserted "as feminists we do not want to mess over people in the name of politics. We believe in the collective process and a non-hierarchical distribution of power within our group and in our vision of a revolutionary society." Here we see another critique of Marxism and the ultimate divergence from dominant contemporary socialist politics located in European canonical literature. The Combahee River Collective was not seeking to make a new nation state founded on top-down socialism forcibly given to the people.

The Combahee River Collective does not assert a desire to establish the Marxist tyranny of the proletariat. Due to the investment in a non-hierarchical distribution of power, the collective defied the aspirations of many white male revolutionaries and did so consciously. The collective offers a quote from the feminist Robin Morgan in her text *Sisterhood is Powerful* to further illustrate their politics. Morgan argued, "I haven't the faintest notion what possible revolutionary role white heterosexual men could fulfill, since they are the very embodiment of reactionary-vested-interest-power." Here we see a clear refusal to root the discussion of

revolution in any political system that would reinscribe power or comfort for dominant positions in the current episteme. Further, the quote emphasizes the former argument the Combahee River Collective gave in earlier portions of the essay about identity politics. The collective has found identity politics deeply helpful to their organizing. The manifesto states focusing on their own oppression embodies a practice of identity politics. Elaborating, the collective argues they "believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression." However, this vested interest to activate the radical potential of their politicized identities, never devolved into biological determinism, or a separatist vision of society monopolized by their direct community.

The Combahee River Collective stated they "reject the stance of Lesbian separatism because it is not a viable political analysis for us. It leaves out far too much and far too many people, particularly Black men, women, and children." The collective reaffirms they are vehemently devoted to destroying patriarchy, but they have never rooted that mission in a rejection of men. The collective stressed society created the ravage of patriarchy and ruined everyone's lives for it. Biology is not the determinant for socialized oppression. On the topic of violent men, the Combahee River Collective argued "we do not have a misguided notion that it is their maleness, per se–i.e. their biological maleness—that makes them what they are." The collective declared, "we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic." The Combahee River Collective was not interested in ending the world to rule it or remove anyone beyond their direct experience from it. I argue the Combahee River Collective dared to activate the radical potential of their politicized identities as Black, lesbian women identified sentient flesh to motivate a revolutionary rupture toward the world unseen.

I argue the Combahee River Collective activated their profound vulnerability into an indictment of the world system. An indictment that was deeply rooted in liberating the entire global population. The collective state during their time organizing, "we have identified and worked on many issues of particular relevance to Black women. The inclusiveness of our politics makes us concerned with any situation that impinges upon the lives of women, Third World and working people. We are of course particularly committed to working on those struggles in which race, sex, and class are simultaneous factors of oppression." The collective believed their particular place of politicized vulnerability could activate ethical solidarity in the pursuit of ending or intervening in a world which murdered multiple types of people. The commitment to ending global oppression for everyone manifested in collective political action. Discussing their history of organizing, the collective stated they have organized at factories that employed Third World women or picketed hospitals refusing adequate care to Third World communities. The collective of course manifested gestures of the world unseen for themselves as well and included a record of creating rape crisis centers in Black neighborhoods. In summary, I argue the Combahee River Collective created circles of care, survival programs, and attempted to establish networks of mutual aid which included organizing with non-Black people. The prior quote provided by Robin Morgan, a white feminist, came after a section of the manifesto that critiqued white women racism. However, that critique does not bar the group from organizing with white women who are anti racist, because the group refuses to be "reactionary." Therefore, Robin Morgan's quote becomes offered as a point to honor where solidarity and understanding can be found.

I argue the collective wanted to activate their particular oppression into revolutionary action intending to disrupt the global order and their ontological position. I argue the Combahee

River Collective's call for a revolution toward stateless socialism and non-hierarchical relations, stems from a desire to usher in a new episteme with subjectivity and autonomy for the antihuman. Further, the organizing of the collective mirrors the legacy of survival programs and mutual aid networks established in the long history of Black Anarchism. The Combahee River Collective conclude their statement with the following final words: "As Black feminists and Lesbians we know that we have a very definite revolutionary task to perform and we are ready for the lifetime of work and struggle before us." Utilizing the radical potential of identity politics, the Combahee River Collective cite the intersections of their identity as Black sentient flesh, lesbian, and women identified to assert their politicized position has radical potential. Similar to Afro-pessimist scholars that argue politicized Blackness has radical potential, the Combahee River Collective activate that potential toward Fanon's end of the world and simultaneously still dream of a future. I argue the collective's organizing represents the Black Anarchist embodiment of the world unseen, otherwise known as a speculative knowledge of freedom through imaging and when possible, manifesting what could be (Blackpast.org).

The revolution is not considered a destination within the lifetime of the collective. I argue when the collective asserts their work is a lifetime struggle, we are entering an assertion similar to the pleasure experienced by the formerly enslaved abolitionist Olaudah Equiano. Who found some modicum of revolutionary sustenance in enjoying a speculation of Black liberation. As I acknowledged prior, Black nihilism argues against idealizing Black political struggle. However, the Collective, like Equiano, are speculating about an auspicious era of extensive freedom. An era of freedom, I argue, defies the world system and seeks the Blackned world which will usher in a new episteme. However, before we reach the valley of the shadow of death, where we can no longer ask questions or comprehend existence, I argue the collective speaks and

embodies their aspirations for liberation now as an attempt to bless and contour the future. The Combahee River Collective offer a detailed and intentional vision of their revolutionary society. The manifesto represents the intention and desire to realize a world with some aspirations they can comprehend currently and in their mutual aid and circles of care they do their best to live within the aspirations of the revolution, even while trapped in lifetime oppression. I argue entering a Black Anarchist politic requires a leap of faith to not only shed modernity, but also to speak our intentions into the world unseen. *Black liberation will be a lifetime struggle for me because I refuse to relinquish my demand for it.*

The desire for revolution in Black Anarchism continues to be detailed further in the text *Anarchism and the Black Revolution: The Definitive Edition.* Written by Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin. Birth name Lorenzo Edward Ervin Jr. was born March 30th 1947. A Black southerner from Chattanooga Tennessee (Ervin, 1). Ervin's father worked as a chauffeur and the mother supported the family as a domestic worker. Through living in the apartheid Jim Crow south with parents employed to well off-white families, Ervin learned quickly about the dangers of anti-Blackness. White neighbors attempted to burn down Ervin's family home when he was five years old. Ervin joined the Vietnam War as a young man which radicalized him into an anti-war activist (Ervin, ix). Ervin started working with SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) during the civil rights movement. Through SNCC Ervin began to sell the *Black Panther* newspaper due to an alliance between the organizations. Ervin then became a member of the Black Panther party where he became frustrated with the organization for many reasons including the leadership structure. When Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated Ervin's life, along with many other Black activists, was also jeopardized. The public execution of King fired uprisings across the nation. To quell the resistance, Tennessee state officials attempted to

investigate and charge Black activists and political groups with felonies. Ervin was accused of "gun running and threatening to bomb a Klan sympathizing judge." Ervin fled to Atlanta and then hijacked a plane to Cuba. The Cuban government did not offer sanctuary but instead imprisoned Ervin in solitary confinement. Other members of the Black Panther Party were also experiencing strained relations with the Cuban government. The conflict between the Black Panthers and Cuban officials led to Lorenzo receiving travel documentation before deportation to Czechoslovakia. Ervin would flee from Czechoslovakia to East Germany before being shipped back to the United States of America. (Ervin, x).

In a Federal Detention Center in New York City Ervin met Martin Sostre. Martin Sostre was an incarcerated jailhouse lawyer and a Black Puerto Rican Anarchist. Ervin recalls how Sostre used to hound him about Anarchism. Sostre explained "self-governing socialism" to Ervin as "free of state bureaucracy, any kind of party or leader dictatorship." Sostre developed Ervin's politics with concepts such as "direct democracy, communitarianism, radical autonomy," and "general assemblies" (Ervin, xi). Due to Sostre's influence Ervin would become a Black Anarchist after leaving a prolonged incarnation. While incarcerated Ervin received aid from Anarchist groups who heard about his case, which led Ervin to write many articles arguing for Black prisoner's rights and an Anarchist press. However, Ervin would become disillusioned with "the North American Anarchist movement's failure to fight white supremacy, the few people of color in Anarchist groups, and its lack of class struggle politics." Ervin's frustration propelled him to write the first iteration of his text in 1979 as a pamphlet called *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*. In 1983 Ervin left prison after a fifteen-year incarceration. Ervin's aforementioned frustrations with the Eurocentric anarchist movement drove him away from the ideology until 1992. After working in his hometown as an antiracist community organizer, Ervin joined the

international Anarchist movement and learned many antiracist Anarchists had been influenced by his pamphlet (Ervin, 45).

I offer Ervin's interpretation of Anarchism in his section of the text titled "What I Believe" as the last brief summary of Black Anarchist politics. Ervin asserts he believes in Black Liberation, making him a Black revolutionary. Ervin argues "Black people are oppressed as both workers and a distinct nationality and will only be freed by a Black revolution, which is an intrinsic part of a social revolution." Continuing, Ervin asserts Black liberation has to be considered autonomously to some degree. Organizing requires being respectful of differences within our community and in relation to other communities. The text argues "Blacks and other oppressed nationalities must have their own agendas, distinct worldview and organizations of struggle." I argue the call for distinct worldviews and organizations, emphasizes Audre Lorde's Black feminist call to embrace organizing with difference as a positive feature in our movements. Next, Black Anarchism requires, "the destruction of the world capitalist system" which is tied to Ervin's commitment to anti-imperialism. Ervin argues, "as long as capitalism is alive on the planet, there will be exploitation, oppression and nation-states." The text credits capitalism with responsibility for major world wars and the mass starvation of the global populace for the benefit of the rich in Western countries. The third central principle of the philosophy is racial justice, and a commitment to antiracism. Ervin argues racial capitalism was created and maintained "by the enslavement and colonial oppression of African, Asian, Latino and other people of color." Due to the mass oppression of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities, Ervin argues the social revolution requires a defeat of white supremacy. Ervin elaborates on the state of specifically Black oppression in the United States. The philosophy argues African Americans are colonized subjects residing in an internal colony

in the United States. Further, the philosophy demands white divestment as Ervin declares "white workers must give up their privileged status, their "white identity," and must support racially oppressed workers in their fights for freedom and national liberation" (Ervin, 46). White people will not exist after the revolution, because white people will have to work toward a new self-concept. Everyone in the new episteme will find themselves in a new self-concept. By accepting whiteness is politicized like Blackness, we see Ervin offer white identified people a way to use their politicized identities for radical potential toward the revolution.

The fourth principle of the philosophy is economic equality. Ervin identifies as a libertarian socialist which means "society and all parties responsible for production should share the economic products of labor." The text then asserts its philosophical intervention in both Marxism and anarchism. Ervin argues, "I accept parts of the economic critique of Marxism, but not its model for political organizing. I accept the anti-authoritarian critique of anarchism, but not its rejection of the class struggle." Ervin does not believe in establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat and rejects the nonpolitical lifestyle focus of many white anarchists. Ervin posits his position as an Anarchist derives from the fact, "I do not believe in government and so I am an *Anarchist*. I believe government is one of the worst forms of modern oppression and must be overthrown." Ervin argues that with Anarchism we would have more economic favor, democracy, and social equality. However, to reach all of the aforementioned goals we must think beyond Western civilization.

Ervin urges us to acknowledge Western civilization has been built upon, "the enslavement, exploitation and genocide of large groups of the oppressed people of color and indigenous peoples of the world" (Ervin, 46). The philosophy supports retiring Western civilization for other possibilities. The fifth principle of the philosophy believes in "a future

society" but intentionally does not provide an exact model. Black Anarchism does not claim to have all of the answers regarding the future, which is why I endorse it as a suggestion for Black liberation. Black Anarchism does not provide guarantees about the entire world unseen, nor does it operate from the blind assurance of hope some Afrofuturist philosophies are critiqued for. Instead, the philosophy pragmatically acknowledges the variables of the future are vast and therefore Ervin admits he "cannot provide any precise model I completely agree with just yet." Ervin also does not believe in Utopia, rather he believes the ideal should be "practopian (i.e., a practical society with utopian features), rather than utopian or unattainable in a practical sense." Black Anarchism does not operate on a fantasy that justice must come eventually, but responds to the immediate fatal terror of the current global system. To resist is no longer a choice. Ervin argues Western civilization "is a polluting, poisoning, deadly, oppressive institution leading us toward planetary catastrophe." Ervin stresses that in the current moment our choices are clear, "We must kill it before it kills us" (Ervin, 47). Further, Ervin states his vision of Anarchism features a mass movement with "perhaps millions of Black, Chicano and other nonwhite workers in it. It will not be a Eurocentric Anarchist movement that Black workers and other oppressed people will just "join." It will be an independent movement with its own social outlook, cultural imperatives and political agenda. It will be Anarchist at its core, but will extend anarchism as no previous European social or cultural group ever has done" (Ervin, 41). Therefore, if the Anarchist movement ultimately goes beyond a vision of Black Anarchism and features many autonomous communities in voluntary association, the future will be a conversation. Ervin's reservation about providing a precise model for the future acknowledges the emergence of the future will come from the collective. The model will never rely on one person or community.

In lieu of a time machine, Ervin urges us to concentrate on the present. The philosophy argues that before we can establish an Anarchist society, we must create a "transitional approach." Ervin cites Latin American "solidarity economies" as an example of poor people creating their own economic institutions and encourages us to create similar survival programs and circles of care, until we reach the revolution (Ervin, 47). Further, Ervin acknowledges feminism, gay rights, and the ecology movement have also informed his notion of Anarchism. The previous influences are important to Ervin, because he believes they will "ensure that social revolution will be as all-encompassing and democratic as possible and that all people will be fully liberated, rather than just affluent, straight, white males steeped in the dogma of the last century alone" (Ervin, 33). Ervin is intentional about his politics because he believes strongly "our practice and the associations we create will reflect the society we seek" (Ervin, 35). Anarchism believes, like the Combahee River Collective, being as intentional as possible in crafting the world unseen. Therefore, although a precise model cannot be offered overall ideals of relation can be.

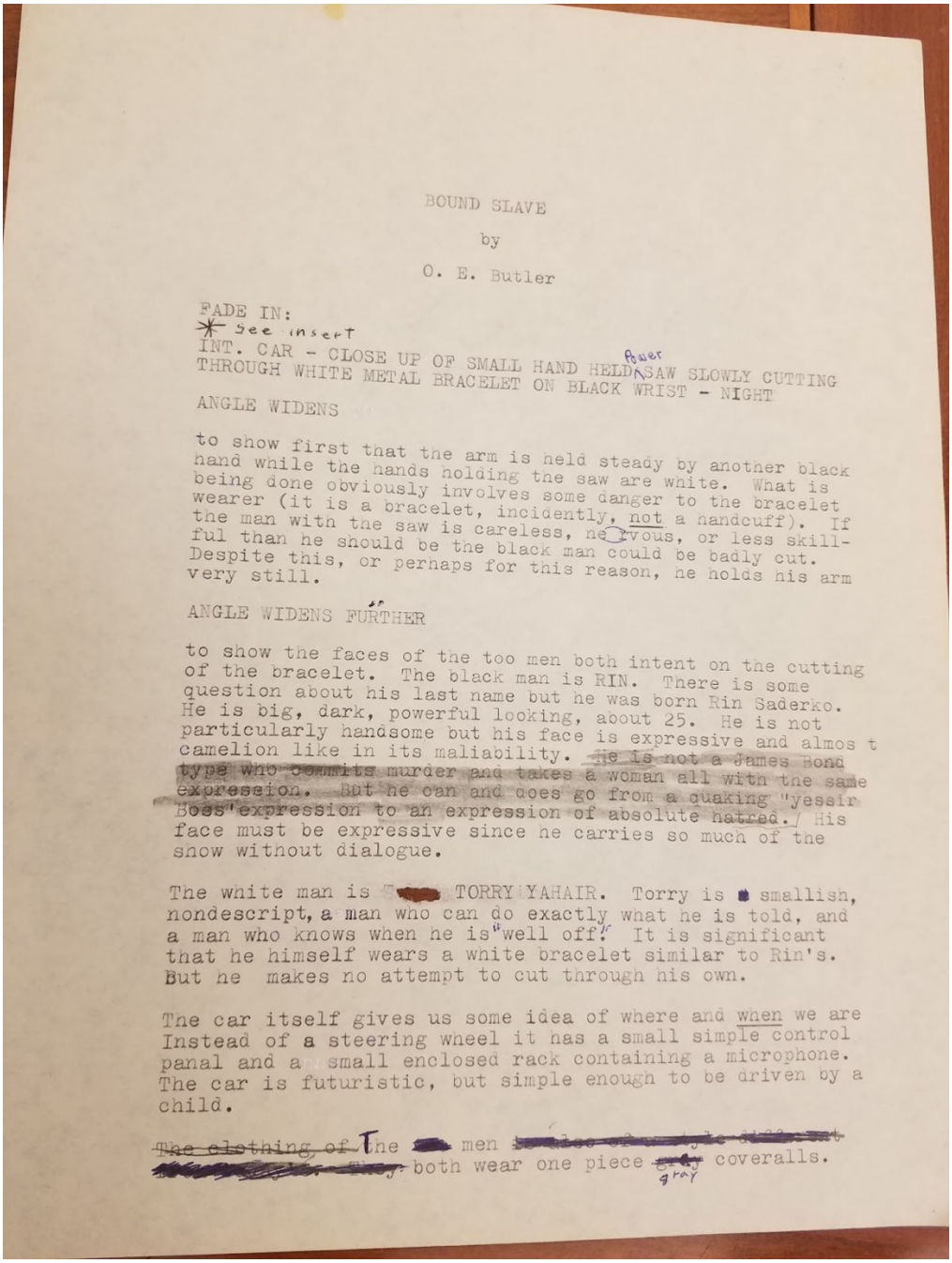
In regard to the economic and social organization of an Anarchist society, there will be no wage system and the institution of private and state property will end. Moving forward, society will operate from the socialist principle "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need" and this philosophy will facilitate the production and distribution of goods. The means of production will be controlled by voluntary associations of consumers and producers and free use of resources will be offered to any voluntary collective, as long as they do not deprive other people or reestablish wage labor. Examples of voluntary associations include various cooperatives facilitating food and housing, factories, schools, hospitals, recreation facilities and other essential social services. The collectives will then "federate" with each

other to achieve mutual goals. Ervin defines Federalism as "a form of social organization in which self-determining groups freely agree to coordinate their activities." Federalism is an essential part of Anarchism but is not a form of Anarchism. The ultimate goal foments solidarity between groups and peoples for economic and political survival and prosperity (Ervin, 35). The arrangement lasts as long the cooperation provides mutual benefit. Any group has the freedom to disassociate (Ervin, 36). Although Anarchism detests hierarchy, the philosophy recognizes some people have a better faculty for communication and leadership. People who display a talent for leading will play "leadership action roles." However, these leadership action roles are not fixed positions of power. Ervin explains leadership action roles are a temporary force that can be removed by the vote of the collective at any time. To abate hierarchy, the philosophy emphasizes the need to routinely rotate responsibilities, while making an effort to teach leadership skills in mass with particular preference given to "women and people of color, who would ordinarily not get the chance" (Ervin, 50). Although no precise answers can be given in how Anarchism can be organized as a global system, that does not stop us from considering the possibilities we would like transferred to the world unseen.

Anarchism, Afro-pessimism and Afrofuturism are all concerned with Black liberation. The three theories are importantly distinct, but in their differences we see a Black feminist opportunity to activate that difference into organizing potential. Afrofuturism reminds us that social and political systems are speculated. However, Afro-pessimism tempers our expectations in the power of speculation. Afro-pessimism reminds us global and ontological change require institutional destruction and transformation to the depth that liberation would require entering a new episteme. Black Anarchism embraces the push for a new episteme and the destruction of Western civilization, reminding us that Black sentient flesh has been historically searching for a

way to enter the world unseen. I argue Black Anarchism employs its own speculative knowledge of freedom that demands we continue to speak and embody our expectation of freedom until the conversation and ultimate potential execution of the project moves beyond us. In the remainder of the paper, I will argue the work of Octavia E. Butler showcases the three theories of Anarchism, Afro-pessimism and Afrofuturism in powerful conversation and tension. Although Butler did not identify as an Afrofuturist, she has been hailed a foundational figure to the movement. Moving forward, I will argue Butler's work is equally important to discussions of Afro-pessimism and Black Anarchism. I argue Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, and Black Anarchism have transformative potential and cultivate important questions when put in conversation and debate.

Butler's unfinished screenplay "Bound Slave" is a work of Black speculative fiction or Afrofuturism that anticipates the Afro-pessimist warning that anti-Blackness exists in and as continued permutation. However, even in a new permutation of anti-Blackness operating on chattel slavery, Butler still makes a demand for Black liberation in a character that practices self-removal from the plantation. The main character Rin, a Black man, escapes in the legacy of many early Black Anarchists Saidiya Hartman described living in forms of fugitivity. "Bound Slave" also represents Butler's interest in visual culture and will be a place where I establish the definition of what Deborah Elizabeth Whaley calls a Black comix. The production of my own Black comixs will be the focus of two dissertation chapters, as I continue to forward the creative and political legacy of Octavia E. Butler. Ultimately, "Bound Slave" represents an Afrofuturist practice or a work of art which generates challenging critiques, questions, and conversations about our historical modernity.



BOUND SLAVE

by

O. E. Butler

FADE IN:
* See insert
INT. CAR - CLOSE UP OF SMALL HAND HELD power SAW SLOWLY CUTTING THROUGH WHITE METAL BRACELET ON BLACK WRIST - NIGHT

ANGLE WIDENS

to show first that the arm is held steady by another black hand while the hands holding the saw are white. What is being done obviously involves some danger to the bracelet wearer (it is a bracelet, incidently, not a handcuff). If the man with the saw is careless, nervous, or less skillful than he should be the black man could be badly cut. Despite this, or perhaps for this reason, he holds his arm very still.

ANGLE WIDENS FURTHER

to show the faces of the too men both intent on the cutting of the bracelet. The black man is RIN. There is some question about his last name but he was born Rin Saderko. He is big, dark, powerful looking, about 25. He is not particularly handsome but his face is expressive and almos t camelion like in its maliability. He is not a James Bond type who commits murder and takes a woman all with the same expression. But he can and does go from a quaking "yessir Boss" expression to an expression of absolute hatred. His face must be expressive since he carries so much of the show without dialogue.

The white man is [redacted] TORRY YAHAIR. Torry is [redacted] smallish, nondescript, a man who can do exactly what he is told, and a man who knows when he is well off. It is significant that he himself wears a white bracelet similar to Rin's. But he makes no attempt to cut through his own.

The car itself gives us some idea of where and when we are Instead of a steering wheel it has a small simple control panal and a small enclosed rack containing a microphone. The car is futuristic, but simple enough to be driven by a child.

~~The clothing of~~ The [redacted] men [redacted] both wear one piece ~~gray~~ gray coveralls.

Figure 2. Octavia E. Butler, Bound Slave: Screenplay: draft, 1975, The Huntington Library (OEB 230). Copyright Estate of Octavia E. Butler

Bound Slave

Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism and Black Anarchism are theories that have a lot to lend one another when developing our analysis of anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and the violence of the nation state. I argue we can read all of the three aforementioned theories in conversation in Butler's incomplete five-page screenplay titled "Bound Slave." I came across "Bound Slave" when conducting my archival research in the Butler Archive at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. "Bound Slave" represents Butler's interest in visual culture, including comics. I will argue Butler's screenplay bridges the theories of Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism and Black Anarchism to create an oppositional superhero logic propelling a Black antihero to fight for his own freedom and self-removal from a future plantation. In "Bound Slave," we find a screenplay that also operates like a medium Deborah Elizabeth Whaley calls a Black comix. Although Butler never wrote any comics in her lifetime, I argue her screenplay "Bound Slave" can be read as a "comix." Deborah Elizabeth Whaley theorizes a comix as the work of Black underground comic makers who call into question the idea of blackness, the process of nation making, and the cultural politics of difference (Whaley, 204). "Bound Slave" with its cinematic intentions, and its scripted format mirroring the textual draft of emerging comics, highlights Butler's commitment to visual mediums, such as comics. The politics of the screenplay bridge Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, and Black Anarchism as they meet the criteria of a "comix" which challenges and complicates depictions of blackness, while highlighting and undermining the organizing practices of the nation state and the construction of difference. Ultimately, then, "Bound Slave" can be understood as an example of my methodology I term Afrofuturism in practice, which utilizes art to generate challenging critiques, questions, and conversations about our historical modernity and the world's that might follow. "Bound Slave" highlight the present

mechanisms of world making in our current society including the nation state, citizenship, anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and humanity.

At an MIT forum, famous science fiction writer Octavia Estelle Butler advocated for the utility of comics, declaring, "I am alarmed by adults who say to little children, 'Oh my God, I don't want my children reading comic books.'" Butler argued canonically sanctioned or "enlightened literature" often "bores the crap out of kids" because the works were not written for them. Butler contended comics were a great recommendation for young people, because what mattered most was supporting "anything that gets them into reading" (Canavan, 256). This was not the first time Butler publicly supported comics. Butler collected comics and advocated for comics throughout her entire life. Butler considered comics and sequential art important forms of cultural production, on the same spectrum with literature as modes of Black speculative imagining and what is now called Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism can be understood as a movement in which Black people use multiple forms of culture to speculate on and reshape interconnections among the future, present and past. Butler's investment in comics and the subsequent impact of comics upon her work are an important and underdeveloped site of study especially in relation to Butler's Afrofuturism.

In the article "Bred to be Superhuman: Comic Books and Afrofuturism in Octavia Butler's Patternist Series" Gerry Canavan argues Butler's Patternist series existed in part as an Afrofuturist and feminist critique of the Marvel and DC superhero comics she collected (Canavan, 259). Canavan argues Butler partially created "a new history of the superhero genre" by centering the perspectives of those "from below." The predominantly Black, and historically marginalized characters in Butler's Patternist series opposed the traditional superhero logics and empowered populations typically excluded from rhetorics of privilege, master races, and special

gifts (Canavan, 271). I read Butler's Afrofuturist refusal and complication of dominant comic book conventions in relation to her incomplete five-page screenplay "Bound Slave" housed in the Butler Archive at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. "Bound Slave" represents Butler's overlooked contributions to visual mediums. Butler embraced visual mediums and had a life-long romance with comics. Butler collected Marvel and DC comics throughout her life and advocated for the medium when reading comics was controversial.

"Bound Slave" was written in 1975 and depicts the escape of a Black slave named Rin in an undisclosed future. The technology surrounding the characters, including a remote-controlled car with no steering wheel, emphasizes an era of scientific advancement frequently associated with social, material, and political progress. However, slavery still persists. The protagonist Rin has fled from a master called Lord Josai.

The narrative begins with a description of an escape. The script states in all capital letters, "FADE IN INT. CAR—CLOSE UP OF SMALL HAND HELD POWER SAW SLOWLY CUTTING THROUGH WHITE METAL BRACELET ON BLACK WRIST—NIGHT."

The man cutting the bracelet, and later revealed to be an overseer, is explicitly identified as white in the description notes for the characters. While the former owner of the bracelet, belongs to the described Black protagonist Rin. Rin is willing to take any risk to receive freedom. The screenplay describes the hazardous process in removing the bracelet, as an experience that "obviously involves some danger to the bracelet wearer." The screenplay notes emphasize in parentheses, "it is a bracelet, incidentally <u>not</u> a handcuff" further if the overseer "is careless, nervous, or less skillful than he should be, the black man could be badly cut." Therefore, the white overseer holds Rin's arm very still. However, the screenplay notes highlight this might be more pragmatic than profound. The overseer quickly turns on Rin with a gun and

refuses to ensure his full escape. When describing the overseer on the first page the notes state, "The white man is Torry Yahair. Torry is a smallish, nondescript man, a man who can do exactly what he is told and a man who knows when he is 'well off.' It is significant that he himself wears a white bracelet similar to Rin's. But he makes no attempt to cut through his own." Here we find a vision of a white man who may be willing to aid in the escape of a Black slave to some extent, but ultimately cannot come into full allyship due to his refusal to divest from his benefits in an anti-Black system. Yahair's makes no move to remove his bracelet and has a sense of his life being "well off." In the aforementioned details we see Yahair is also bound to the system in some manner, however he refuses to take the step to remove his white bracelet like the Black fugitive Rin. I argue Torry's refusal to relinquish his bracelet can be read as a refusal to divest from white identity, and what state recognition Torry feels leaves him "well off" in a liminal space as a simultaneous subordinate and superior in a hierarchy which employs him as an overseer. I argue Torry cannot enter the allyship Ervin has described is required to reach the Anarchist revolution. Therefore, Torry forces Rin from his car and the fugitive runs alone.

Next many of the characters, including Rin, have Japanese names. Yet the explicitly revealed races of the characters focus on those identified with whiteness or Blackness. Perhaps this white/Black binary among the characters is intentional within a power structure ruled by a presumably non-Black and nonwhite character. I speculate these details were included to emphasize how the politics of anti-Blackness and white supremacy can travel, adapt, and reinvent themselves beyond their associated historical origins. Throughout the story, the majority of conventional North American plantation logics and the traditions of anti-Black chattel slavery prevail. Further, I argue an Afro-pessimist insight follows the propagation of a power structure ruled by a nonwhite, non-Black character. Through the concept of junior partners and the theory

of people of color blindness, Afro-pessimism reminds us that anyone non-Black can benefit from an anti-Black political system. The stratification of nonwhite people is not equivalent, even in a white supremacy, when Black people are the antihuman and sustain civil society through social death and exclusion from civil protection.

I argue Lord Josai could be read as a different shade of empire and white supremacy. I argue the emphasis on the white devices maintaining bondage for the characters suggests a new construction of political domination or whiteness, which seeks similar colonial control to its European counterparts in our world. I argue Rin's Japanese name reflects the colonizing practices of overwriting African identities with European names in our history. Further, Lord Josai owns the entire immediate territory in the story. On page three, when Torry removes Rin from the car, helicopters circle overhead and Rin sees a sign that reads "Recreation Area 3, City Josai." In this world the land is even marked according to the central individual and cultural figure in power. Therefore, Rin is Lord Josai's property in a land owned by Lord Josai. The monopolization of territory under a racially oppressive nation state and the dehumanizing domination of Rin, I argue, intentionally depict the ways in which anti-Blackness can continue to exist in permutation in the future. Further, I argue the utilization of a junior partner as the central figure of power comments upon the ways in which anti-Blackness does not require white people and can be deployed by non-white identities in similar violent ways if structural control is available. I argue Lord Josai depicts how anti-Blackness has been structurally global.

The narrative continues to affirm the anti-Black power structure. The white overseer aiding Rin confesses that he will never have a vulnerability to bondage, like Rin on page two. The narrative strongly suggests Rin is marked for slavery on the basis of his Blackness. Again, we get a suggestion that the social construction of whiteness continues to prevail with some level

of structural power, even though reimagined to instate a Japanese figure as the head of the hierarchy. The machination of bondage and state control is again marked as white for every character in the story. For Rin it is a white metal bracelet that must be cut for him to fully escape. For the overseers in the story, it is a white choker on their necks that marks them as the policing property of Lord Josai. After Rin's bracelet is cut, he runs through a park and hides in the bushes. Helicopters hang overhead and several overseers search for him on foot. While hiding Rin listens to the overseers express their frustration. The overseers fear punishment from Lord Josai, but they are also angry Rin has changed his name. All of the active subordinates of Lord Josai must carry his name as their surname. However, now that Rin has escaped, people have been referring to him as Rin Saderko. Rin Saderko appears to be his given name beyond bondage. A birth name beyond the bounds of slave identity. Upon hearing this news one of the overseers becomes furious. The overseer is clearly jealous that Rin, a former slave, has a sense of freedom he does not have with the return of his original surname. This frustration then leads one of the overseers to touch their white metal chokers with visible pain, before quickly removing their hand, and suppressing the expression of their own regretted and fraught bondage.

Rin's refusal to forfeit his freedom in any capacity, through his name or physical bondage, makes him the central heroic figure of the screenplay. But Rin does not follow traditional superhero conventions, particularly those found in the superhero narratives of the dominant, mainstream comic book industry. Canavan states a "passivity marks the traditional superhero as a fundamentally conservative or reactionary figure." Expanding on this analysis, Canavan uses the existence of a Nazi Superman to explain the ultimate conformity of the superhero. Canavan argues the title *Superman: Red Sun* (2003), an alternate timeline in which the Kryptonian baby crashes in the Ukraine and "consequently, fights for truth, justice and the

Soviet Way," reveals "how little the authoritarian figure of the superhero would have to change to be legible within other systems of social organization" (Canavan, 266). Within dominant superhero stories the heroes employ their powers on behalf of the state. Rin has no interest in this pursuit. Rin's freedom defies the order of his current political and social system. For Rin to be free he must defy the state, and this makes his clear heroism oppositional within conventional narratives of the superhero.

Rin's oppositional heroism then displays firsthand how Butler weaved an oppositional superhero logic into her speculative fiction. Canavan argues that Butler, specifically within her Patternist series, cultivated "almost a new history of the superhero genre "from below" from the perspective of those who are disfavored in the usual rhetoric of privilege, "special gifts," and "master races" (Canavan, 271). Canavan argues the character Doro's project, of specifically farming Black telepaths, and empowering "super powered Blackness" challenged "the racial fantasies that have undergirded modernity" (Canavan, 272). The act of escape for Rin, predicated on his remarkable emotional fortitude, physical stamina, and exceptional prowess as a strategist under extreme stress, highlight his special gifts while subverting the placement of whiteness as a master race. Rin deftly evades and outsmarts the overseers. Further, the way Blackness and darkness has been positioned in "Bound Slave," calls into question the power dynamics surrounding conventional notions of Blackness, whiteness, light and darkness.

At the end of the manuscript Rin has a sense of freedom beyond the overseers. Rin's rejection of the nation state, and its organizing plantation logics, has placed him so far outside of the social order that he is able to reclaim his full name. Rin, unlike the overseers still wearing their neck bracelets, cannot entertain any investments within the nation state and his lack of ability to invest allows him to fight for freedom. The overseers continue to drudge through and

acquiesce to the nation state and its plantation logics, even as it destroys them existentially. Removing their original surnames. The juxtaposition between Rin, with his unbound name, and the overseers, still bound with Lord Josai's surname, reveal how the supposed protections of whiteness can also be barbed with violence. Rin's Blackness empowers Rin to refuse their institution, while the tragedy of whiteness resides in its fundamental inability to untangle itself from an inherently unsustainable, dependent, and violent social order. Whiteness, forever a clutching bracelet, clings to dominance and hierarchical binaries to conceive, reproduce, and sustain itself. I argue, the provided rupturing visions of race, nation making, and the cultural politics of difference then allows the screenplay "Bound Slave" to be read as a comix.

In the text *Black Women In Sequence: Re-inking Comics, Graphic Novels, and Anime,* Deborah Elizabeth Whaley states a comix "refers to socially relevant, underground, and independent forms of comics." In the twenty first century, this medium currently has been used by Black women comix artists and writers to "call into question the very idea of blackness, as well as archaic ways of seeing and understanding nation making and its collision with the cultural politics of difference" (Whaley, 201) "Bound Slave" calls into question Blackness, and even bound Blackness, on the basis of its supposed powerlessness, as the runaway slave within the story transforms simultaneously into a vigilante, bending and breaking the law, as he takes it into his own hand to defy the state and liberate himself.

The bracelet, and its differing meanings between the characters in the screenplay, highlights the socio-political hierarchies of power that exist between the different characters. Rin's bracelet binds him as a slave, while the overseer's neck chokers bind them as the policing politic. However, everyone is bound. The binding present among all of the characters then calls into question the ethics of the nation state and its process of nation making. I argue the further

symbolism of light and darkness within the manuscript also questions the process of national formation as well. The light of the helicopters represents a fatal threat to Rin, while the darkness of the park and the surrounding bushes provide protection. The territory of the state, illuminated in harsh light, exists in sharp contrast to the comforting and protective spaces in the dark hanging beyond the state's vision. I argue the darkness beyond the state is Black Anarchism and beyond that hopefully an ontological revolution. Rin hides where the state cannot perceive him and his choice to go fugitive puts him, somewhat, beyond the bounds of the state. Rin's fugitivity and self-removal from the plantation is an act of early Black Anarchism as described in previous sections by Saidiya Hartman. Rin's refusal to concede to slavery then emphasizes his demand for an ontological revolution. Although Rin can never destroy the political system to enter a new episteme, I argue he instead employs a speculative knowledge of freedom. By refusing the plantation, Rin does his best to manifest the world unseen for himself and in his survival. Rin, like the Combahee River Collective, transforms his vulnerability into an indictment of the political system. As the overseers grapple with their own bondage through the return of Rin's surname in fugitivity, I argue "Bound Slave" highlights how Black vulnerability has power. Rin's inability to profit from the system catapults him into self-liberatory action, which reveals to the overseers and the viewers how profoundly unfree and violent their political order is for everyone. Rin's exclusion to the system gives him the courage to reject and reveal the ultimate structural failures of their world in ways people in positions to benefit from the political system often cannot. Positions of power are more likely to perpetuate structural violence, even at their own overall expense. The ways of conceiving identity and possibility, become much more limited for the overseers than they do for Rin. Highlighting the revolutionary potential in politicized Blackness. (Butler, OEB 209-203, Box 20).

Ultimately, “Bound Slave” can be understood as an example of Afrofuturism in practice. I define an Afrofuturist practice as a work of art, whether in a performance or text, to generate critical world making. “Bound Slave” as an emerging script for a screenplay, manifests as both a text and a work of performance art. The script details in “Bound Slave” stress how the ultimate project was supposed to offer forms of embodied knowledge and physical ritual as physical actors were meant to inhabit these characters and bring their conflicts to life. Further, “Bound Slave,” functioning much like a Black comix, interrogates dominant constructs like nation states and the construction of identity. “Bound Slave” showcases how Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, and Black Anarchism are theories which can enhance our analysis of Octavia E. Butler’s work, as they complement and complicate each other. Further, the screenplay “Bound Slave” represents Butler’s interest in visual culture. Although Butler never indicated that she intended to produce any comics in her lifetime, her advocacy for comics throughout her life and her attempt to create a visual narrative in a film produces a strong connection between “Bound Slave” and comic making. Butler was open to multiple mediums and the recent comic adaptation of her novels like *Kindred* and the *Parable* series reads as poetic justice. Butler’s work has been expanded into the world of comics by the artist John Jennings and the writer Damian Duffy. The recirculation of these major titles in comic form is extremely important, as publishers and readers have clearly recognized the power of comics in communicating Butler’s work. Butler’s works have now literally been made into a comix in both the theoretical and traditional sense. I want to continue to show and prove the power of rooting such important political and theoretical work in speculative fiction and particularly comics. My dissertation is dedicated to forwarding Butler’s legacy as I demonstrate with my own creative works, the power and potential of political speculative fiction and comics. Moving forward, I will briefly explain how I will continue to

employ Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, and Black Anarchism in analyzing Butler's Afofuturist practice and my own.

Dissertation Chapters

The first chapter will analyze Butler's first neo-slave narrative "Childfinder " as an oppositional superhero story, revealing connections between Black Anarchism, Afro-pessimism and an Afrofuturist practice in neo-slave narratives. Throughout the narrative of "Childfinder," the main character Barbara is likened to Harriet Tubman. Barbara seeks to liberate herself and several other Black telepaths from the Organization, a group of violently dominating and white supremacist telepaths. "Childfinder" highlights the untenable nature of the migratory plantation logic and the profound demise it generates, as the story begins and ends with the implication that all telepaths died in the fight for Black liberation. The speculative neo-slave narrative of "Childfinder" has inspired few studies, but I argue it represents an essential part of Butler's career. "Childfinder " was the first speculative neo-slave narrative Butler ever wrote, the first story she ever sold and inspired her first novels in the Patternist series. Further, I argue "Childfinder " represents Butler's first finished manuscript that bridged Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism and Black Anarchist thought. "Childfinder" emphasizes how historical production cannot be divorced from power, as the text represents a form of speculative critical historiography. I argue the critical historiography embedded in "Childfinder" speaks to Afro-pessimism and its critical engagements with history, while the story itself reflects the Black autonomous zones which can be found in the organizing practices of Black Anarchists. Ultimately, "Childfinder" can be considered an example of Afrofuturism in practice. "Childfinder" generates challenging critiques, questions, and conversations about our historical

modernity and the world's that might follow. "Childfinder" highlights the present mechanisms of world making in our current society including anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and humanity.

The second chapter will focus on my published speculative short story titled "What You Pass For" that uses magical realism to explore the modern emergence of whiteness in the United States. The story follows the life of an unnamed African American man living in the Jim Crow era who has the power to paint the mixed and ambiguous phenotypes of African Americans white to provide an entrance into passing. The narrative is inspired by the life of the Black ballerina Janet Collins. Upon acceptance into the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Collins was required to paint her skin white to perform. "What You Pass For" explores a timeline where a woman similar to her accepted the conditions through a magic that illustrates the violence and madness that come with being integrated into an innately unethical identity in white supremacy. I developed "What You Pass For" in the Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers workshop, when I became the third Black woman to win the Octavia E. Butler Memorial Scholarship in 2015. "What You Pass For" represents Afrofuturism in its genre of magical realism, while also bridging the theories of Afro-pessimism and Black Anarchism in its politics. I argue "What You Pass For" is written in the legacy of Octavia E. Butler's work, and thus seeks to forward the anti-history I discuss in chapter one analyzing "Childfinder." Therefore, "What You Pass For" represents a form of Afrofuturism in practice. "What You Pass For" generates challenging critiques, questions, and conversations about our historical modernity and the world's that might follow. "What You Pass For" highlights the present mechanisms of world making in our current society including citizenship, the nation state, anti-Blackness, white supremacy, humanity, and the production of history.

The third chapter will focus on my comics. The first comic “Adventures of Selma " expands my investigation of whiteness as a political strategy, while also highlighting the ontological dispossession of Blackness as the price paid for legible humanity and citizenship in modernity. The character Selma also must confront being gaslighted within this surrealist comic where accountability for white supremacy is disavowed and white violence is constantly effaced to uphold and consolidate anti-Blackness. Next, I analyze satirical six-page comic titled “ACAB: a comic,” which investigates generative possibilities for healing, transformation, and rebirth in the wake of dismantling a police department. “ACAB: a comic” is a satirical, largely silent work about a Black magical girl. An unnamed Black woman vigilante stalks the streets in a uniform intentionally parodying the aesthetics of the internationally renowned Japanese manga and animation *Sailor Moon.* I argue “ACAB” continues to work in the legacy of Octavia E. Butler by also bridging Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism and Black Anarchism. Both of my comics represent an Afrofuturist practice that seeks to utilize art to generate challenging critiques, questions, and conversations about our historical modernity and the world’s that might follow. Each of my creative works highlight the present mechanisms of world making in our current society including racial capitalism, the nation state, citizenship, anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and humanity.

In the Conclusion, I will discuss my purpose in moving forward as an artist, writer, and scholar in relation to Japan’s currently best-selling manga *The Promised Neverland*. I argue the *Promised Neverland* is an Anarchist text warning contemporaries about our own world built on ontological terror. The cattle children in The *Promised Neverland* represent a different spin on our current reality of the antihuman. Although I will also argue the manga’s own anti-Blackness participates in reinforcing the very politics it can be argued to critique, I still think the comic has

much positive cultural importance and impact internationally. The character William Minerva seeks to provide clues to the cattle children to help them come into the reality of their ontological betrayal, while also aiding the children in escaping to circles of care in fugitivity beyond the literal plantations that farm the children for demise by age twelve. I argue Octavia E. Butler was my William Minerva and in her work I came to many revelations about modernity, anti-Blackness, and political speculation. I will use this chapter to credit the William Minerva in my life, Butler, while also discussing my artistic process in my Afrofuturist practice further.

Chapter 1: Childfinder: Neo-slave narratives and The Struggle for Black Liberation

I first read “Childfinder” in 2014. The tale had finally found a way to the public in the last published collection of Octavia Estelle Butler’s manuscripts, titled *Unexpected Stories*. The story was originally written in 1971. Butler wrote the story while attending the acclaimed Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers’ Workshop where she began her career. Harlan Ellison, an important mentor to Butler and a teacher at Clarion that year, bought the story. “Childfinder " had been set to debut decades before its actual publication. However, Ellison’s *Dangerous Visions* anthology never went to print (Canavan, 23). Consequently, the manuscript became temporarily lost. The inaccessibility that marked “Childfinder" pushed the tale into obscurity until eight years after Butler's death in 2006. Due to its recent release from the shadows, there is very little scholarship about “Childfinder.”

The lack of scholarship on “Childfinder" has produced a critical gap in the research relating to Butler’s work. I argue that “Childfinder" is a pivotal text for Butler. “Childfinder " represents Butler’s entrance into Afrofuturism. Butler wrote her first completed and sold Black speculative fiction into “Childfinder” by simultaneously entering the genre of a neo-slave narrative. Further, “Childfinder” represents Butler’s first sold oppositional superhero story contending with the afterlife of slavery and critical historiography. I argue the aforementioned elements are narrative staples that would mark Butler’s overall career, making “Childfinder” the bedrock to most of Butler’s cultural production. By writing a neo-slave narrative with an oppositional superhero navigating the afterlife of slavery and critical historiography, I argue “Childfinder " then further intersects with theories of Afro-pessimism and Black Anarchism. Afro-pessimism stresses that due to the afterlife of slavery, even the production of history is inherently about power, domination, and thus exclusion. Afro-pessimism critiques dominant

forms of knowledge production, challenging the record of history and archival research. In the oppositional superhero narrative, Butler's protagonist fights to liberate other Black characters and to create autonomous zones of Black care and survival programs encouraged in Black Anarchist organizing.

"Childfinder " follows two opposing groups of white and Black psi people, during a time period that appears to be the late twentieth century. Psi refers to the "pseudosciences of telepathy and ESP." (Canavan, 19). The presence of psionic powers is the first Afrofuturistic element of the story. Ytasha Womack analyzes Afrofuturism as a framework for critical theory that can employ an artistic aesthetic through music, visual art, and speculative fiction. Afrofuturism often uses storytelling to speculate on the possibilities and limitations of Black liberation, as it redefines culture and notions of Blackness for today and the future. This frequently leads to Afrofuturism offering a historical critique by adapting fantastic elements to investigate the past and speculate on the future (Womack, Location 123).

Afrofuturism also has an investment in challenging linear ideas of time. Afrofuturism complicates the rhetoric that renders slavery as a past event with no relevance in the present or the future. Afrofuturism highlights what Saidiya Hartman calls the afterlife of slavery and its adapting impact over time, thereby entangling the past, the present, and the future to disrupt linear narratives of progress. Hartman argues slavery "established a measure of man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be undone." The measurement Hartman refers to, that produces an anti-Black quantification of value and humanity, then continues to dehumanize and render Black life vulnerable; as she states, "black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago." This political arithmetic then produces the afterlife of slavery, manifesting in "skewed life chances, limited

access to health and education, premature death, incarceration and impoverishment" (Hartman, 2008-01-21T22:58:59). In "Childfinder" the main character, Barbara, experiences the afterlife of slavery as she struggles in a fantastic neo-slave narrative—a genre that is significant for Ethnic Studies theories of race, gender, and sexuality; time and temporality; and memory and critical historiography. Madhu Dubey defines neo-slave narratives as a genre of speculative fiction that draws on non-realistic devices to revisit the history of slavery and highlight its ongoing impact beyond its initial historical enactment (Dubey, 345).

The story of "Childfinder" opens with the escape of Barbara, a Black psi woman. Barbara has run away from an oppressive group of racist, white psi people, referred to as the organization. Conflict enters the story when the organization feels threatened by Barbara's departure and her quest to build a community of Black psi people. The organization fears Barbara's gift. Barbara has the power of a childfinder. She can sense psionic potential in children and nurture their ability into controllable strength. Barbara moves into a low-income Black neighborhood and trains the Black psionic children the organization previously rejected. A decision Barbara knows will bring danger. Barbara's fears are soon realized, and several members of the organization arrive at her home, demanding that Barbara and her children submit to the authority of the white psi community.

In the eyes of the white psi people Black autonomy can only be unacceptable. Barbara's budding psi family can only be a competitor challenging the organization's monopoly on psionic power. In light of this dictatorship, the two communities cannot independently coexist. Eve, a white woman and a representative of the organization, tells Barbara the choices are either war or surrendering Black freedom and labor to the organization. The organization particularly wants to enslave Barbara as their new childfinder. Through Barbara's reproductive labor in psionic

childrearing, they could grow their organization and monitor and control who can develop psionic powers. Eve threatens to kill Barbara's children if she does not comply with their demands. Eve brings three "psionic brawlers" in order to subdue Barbara and drag her back to the organization by force (Butler, 69). However, Barbara's children arrive before she is taken. The children subdue Eve and her henchmen. All of Barbara's children are ready for war, while Barbara reflects on their possible future. The narrative has an eerie end as the reader is given a glimpse into the future at the start and conclusion of the story.

The story begins and ends with a paragraph written by a historian in the future. The historian is speculating about what caused the eventual demise of the psionic community in the past. According to the historian, there are no current traces of any persisting psi community and no one knows how they died out. Further, the historian is under the impression that psionic powers would guarantee universal peace. The historian assumes hierarchies of oppression relating to race, gender, and religion are products of misunderstanding rather than intentionally violent ways of organizing society. The historian is confident that the ability to read people's thoughts and feelings would produce immediate peace and equality. The historian informs the reader that a legend speculates psionic people died due to disease. Without any evidence, the historian then determines only external forces could have killed psi people. The historian cannot fathom there could have been an internal conflict, like racism. It is unthinkable to the historian that a legacy of anti-Blackness and white supremacy would instigate a fatal war.

"Childfinder" represents a rejection of linear progress narratives that began to surge in the United States in the post-civil rights era. According to Dubey, "the end of the civil rights movement was widely seen to mark the completion of the long history of political struggle against state-sanctioned racial inequality that dated back to the antebellum period." In response,

many African American authors, including Butler, began to develop the genre of the fantastic neo-slave narrative. Like Afrofuturism, fantastic neo-slave narratives employ non realist devices to revisit the history of slavery. Dubey argues an analysis of Butler's work reveals she "persistently revisits slavery in order to challenge the redemptive accounts of US racial history that began to gain sway in the decades following the civil rights movement" (Dubey, 345). Butler later selected the bicentennial anniversary of US independence as the day for her character Dana to make a final trip back to slavery in the 1979 novel *Kindred*, in order to disrupt the national discourses of racial progress (Dubey, 349). However, "Childfinder" is where Butler first began to take this stand. "Childfinder" is the precursor to the Afrofuturistic investigation of history and speculation on the legacy of US chattel slavery that would persist and deepen throughout Butler's entire career.

In "Childfinder," we witness Butler making her first subversion of United States linear progress narratives of history. "Childfinder" refuses the dominant historical perspective that renders slavery an event fixed in the past that emancipation and the civil rights movement resolved. "Childfinder" demands that readers grapple with the persisting afterlife of slavery. The narrative asserts that ignoring the ongoing historical legacy of chattel slavery, anti-Blackness, and white supremacy can only bring doom. In the story's resistance, we see Butler's first engagement with critical historiography. As Butler intentionally imagines a historian confidently spreading misinformation, she challenges dominant histories, the limitations of archival research, and traditional methodologies. Butler highlights the inevitable holes in history that power and disenfranchisement produce. Gone are the voices of the Black psi community that could have explained their apparent demise. It appears these voices were never recorded.

Butler is a transformative and vital historical figure within a critical ethnic studies project. Chandan Reddy defines critical ethnic studies as an interdisciplinary field of study that "offers us access to an oppositional understanding of political modernity, the politics of knowledge, and the persistent re-emergence of racialized cruelty and extreme violence" (Reddy, 146). Butler's Afrofuturistic investigation of the afterlife of slavery and the impact, possibilities, and limitations found in historical narratives is an ethnic studies project. Butler's exploration of these concepts offers an oppositional understanding of modern histories and institutions, challenges hegemonic knowledge production, and examines persistent white investments in patterns of racialized violence and extreme cruelty.

In the following chapter, I will analyze Butler's first neo-slave narrative "Childfinder " as an oppositional superhero story, revealing connections between Afrofurutuist cultural production and Afro-pessimism and Black Anarchism. Throughout the narrative of "Childfinder," the main character Barbara is likened to Harriet Tubman. Barbara seeks to liberate herself and several other Black telepaths from the organization, a group of violently dominating and white supremacist telepaths. "Childfinder " highlights the untenable nature of the afterlife of slavery through an analysis of the migratory plantation logic and the profound demise it generates, as the story begins and ends with the implication that all telepaths died in the fight for Black liberation. The speculative neo-slave narrative of "Childfinder " has inspired few studies, but I argue it represents an essential part of Butler's career. "Childfinder " was the first neo-slave narrative Butler ever wrote and the first story she ever sold. Further, I argue "Childfinder " represents Butler's first manuscript that bridged Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism and Black Anarchist thought. "Childfinder " emphasizes how historical production cannot be divorced from power, as the text represents a form of speculative critical historiography. No one knows how the telepaths

died or what possible conflict instigated their demise. The lack of archival knowledge, in particular a record of the white supremacist violence embedded in the culture and the ultimate conflict of the telepaths, speaks to the ways historical records have failed to mark the struggles of the marginalized and the violence of dominant institutions of power. I argue the critical historiography embedded in “Childfinder " speaks to Afro-pessimism and its critical engagements with history, while the oppositional super heroine builds Black autonomous zones and circles of care found in Black Anarchist organizing. Ultimately, “Childfinder” can be considered an example of Afrofuturism in practice. “Childfinder” generates challenging critiques, questions, and conversations about our historical modernity and the world’s that might follow. “Childfinder” highlights the present mechanisms of world making in our current society including anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and humanity.

Neo-slave Narratives and a Migratory Plantation Logic

Most of Butler’s work confronts US chattel slavery in some way. Through a speculative vision of the middle passage in *Wild Seed,* traveling back to the antebellum South in *Kindred*, exploiting a Black woman’s reproductive abilities in the Xenogenesis series, or imagining how the historical subjection and exploitation of Black people would affect them in the future and alternate political and social systems in the *Parables* series and her novel *Fledging*, Butler has never stopped evaluating US chattel slavery. Butler’s work consistently asks readers to confront the ongoing legacy of US chattel slavery, revealing its existence is central to our political modernity. Race, gender, class, reproductive rights, state violence and the production of history cannot be untangled from US chattel slavery.

In the article “Plantation Futures" Katherine McKittrick analyzes George Beckford’s “plantation thesis.” The plantation thesis is an argument that posits that the plantations of transatlantic slavery founded our contemporary global economy, generated North Atlantic metropolitan wealth, intensified dispossession among the unfree and indentured, established a greedy racialized economy that has persisted past emancipation and independence movements in the Americas, and last generated a persisting colonial logic of the plantation that still defines post slave life (McKittrick, 3). Through Beckford’s plantation thesis, McKittrick argues the plantation is not bound by time or one specific manifestation. Since the plantation is essential and foundational to modernity and our current uneven racial geographies, the plantation then by nature must be transformative and migratory. McKittrick states, “thus in agriculture, banking, and mining, in trade and tourism, and across other colonial and post-colonial spaces—the prison, the city, the resort—a plantation logic characteristic of (but not identical to) slavery emerges in the present both ideologically and materially” (McKittrick, 3). Following McKittrick’s insights, we find the plantation and the legacy of US chattel slavery are not simply aspects of our political modernity. The logic of the plantation system is the central force configuring modern life.

Butler’s work illustrates the transformative and migratory power of the plantation. Specifically, Butler demonstrates the adaptive nature of the plantation through the genre of fantastic neo-slave narratives. Mahu Dubey defines fantastic neo-slave narratives as stories which “draw on non-realist devices such as time travel and supernatural possession to revisit the history of slavery.” According to Dubey, the genre began emerging in the 1970s and Butler, like many African American writers at the time, persistently focused on slavery in order to reveal connections between the past and the present. Dubey states Butler approached the topic of slavery with a mission. Dubey argues Butler’s stories with their “realist historical reference to

slavery disclose continuities between past and present" (Dubey, 345). Butler's disruption of linear time through the fantastic neo-slave narrative was crucial during the post-civil rights era. In the 1970s and 1980s a willful national amnesia emerged with regard to the impact of slavery.

Sara Clarke Kaplan states the neo-slave narrative developed during an intense global ideological, political, and economic shift, characterized by increased state violence. The New Right began appropriating the rhetoric of the civil rights movement "using the 'content of your character' to justify deliberate national amnesia around centuries of state-sanctioned violence" (Kaplan, 114). Further, the approaching bicentennial anniversary of US independence in the 1970s was framed by these effacing assertions of racial progress that denied ongoing legacies of slavery and discrimination. Butler's work subverted this conservative amnesia while also calling attention to it (Dubey, 349).

Butler's neo-slave narratives often painted the various ways a plantation logic is reproduced and adapted across multiple temporalities and environments, while being simultaneously denied by institutions in order to preserve a linear progress narrative of history. The aforementioned ideas that would define Butler's writing, first manifested in the first short story she ever sold: "Childfinder." In many ways "Childfinder" is the rose bud for Butler's career. "Childfinder" is the first iteration of the telepathic focused Patternist series, which includes Butler's first novel *Patternmaster*. "Childfinder " was also the first neo-slave narrative Butler finished. After writing "Childfinder," Butler would continue to write more neo-slave narratives and eventually create one of her most critically acclaimed novels, *Kindred*. The major themes in *Kindred*, like persisting plantation logics, the refusal of linear progress, and the critical evaluation of how history is presented and produced, can be traced back to "Childfinder."

The legacy of chattel slavery marks “Childfinder" from the opening of the story. In the late twentieth century, Barbara a Black psi woman, takes refuge in a low income predominantly Black neighborhood. Barbara decides to root herself to the location, despite its decline and extreme poverty, in order to find and support as many Black child telepaths she can locate in the area. Barbara’s surroundings first mark the afterlife of slavery. Saidiya Hartman argues the afterlife of slavery manifests in disparities in life opportunities, reduced access to health and education, untimely death, poverty, and incarceration (Hartman, Location 178). In the immediate environment of the story, we witness a ghetto enmeshed in the afterlife of slavery. Barbara describes her arrival on the first page stating, “855 South Madison. An unfurnished three-room house for $60 a month. Rain through the roof in the winter, insects through the walls in the summer. Most of the electrical outlets not working. Most of the faucets working all the time whether they were turned off or not. Tenant pays utilities. My house. And there were seven more just like it. All set in a straggly row and called a court” (Butler, 63). Barbara has come to the court purposefully to hunt for Black telepathic children struggling with the ghetto’s accompanying disparities in life chances, reduced access to health and education, risk of untimely death, abject poverty, and risk of incarceration due to a lack of resources to defend themselves against a judicial system embedded in a state that has condemned them. The neglected urbanscape of the court Butler describes reflects the conditions associated with spaces McKittrick terms uninhabitable and thus devoid of associations with human life.

In the essay “Plantation Futures,” McKittrick argues the concept of uninhabitable spaces first emerged through the violence of colonialism as “past colonial encounters created material and imaginative geographies that reified segregation through “damning” the spaces long occupied by Man’s human others.” The damning process McKittrick refers to happens in two

interlocking ways “as a fencing in and as a condemnation of racial-sexual difference” (McKittrick, 5-6). McKittrick elaborates, explaining in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries uninhabitable spaces arose first from the perception of landmasses populated by people thought to be “unimaginable, both spatially and corporeally” and this perception was the “geographic (non)location through which the plantation emerged” as one manifestation of an uninhabitable space. The article stresses the importance of this history, because “the lands of no one” came to be bound to a geographic language of racial condemnation.” McKittrick argues Europeans believed the Americas and Africa were considered geographically inferior in a white supremacist delusion that posited a Eurocentric temporal vision of itself as ancient and deemed the Americas and Africa to be nascent in comparison. Europe believed itself to be the birth of life and man, and therefore the soil, earth, air, and water of the Americas and Africa were considered “newer” than the same elements in Europe. Following the previous logic, the populations of the Americas and Africa were also perceived to have primordial worldviews. The impact of the aforementioned history generated a world demarcated by a racial logic that required new geographies to organize people and maintain European power. McKittrick argues plantations, indigenous reservations, and multiple methods of segregation were “just some of the ways the lands of no one were carved up to distinguish between and regulate the relations of indigenous, nonindigenous, African, and colonial communities, with some geographies still being cast as uninhabitable for particular groups; sites such as reservations, slave quarters, and auction blocks were considered alongside racial specificities.” The racial specificity of who was enclosed in the reservation or bound on the auction block drew borders around identity and access to humanity. Mckittrick acknowledges the divisions were not perfect. There were overlapping people and geographic experiences which challenged division, however within this tangle of spaces “black

geographies--were designated as incongruous with humanness" (McKittrick, 6). A Black geography becomes a nonhuman geography.

The predominantly Black landscape of a ghetto or the city then becomes a vital geography to Black studies and considerations of anti-Blackness. The case study central to McKittirck's "Plantation Futures" article centers the uncovering of the New York African Burial Ground found at 290 Broadway in Lower Manhattan. The cemetery was used between the late 1600s and 1796, and held about ten thousand to twenty thousand corpses of the formerly enslaved. The land was then filled in and built upon in 1827, alongside the continuing emergence of the city (McKittrick, 1). McKittrick makes the cityscape that held the burial ground her primary focus, because "the burial ground tells us that the legacy of slavery and the labor of the unfree both shape and are part of the environment we presently inhabit" (McKittrick, 2). Further, McKittrick argues she intentionally wants to emphasize connections between the plantation and the city because while historical specificity matters, the article emphasizes the importance of "addressing the ways the plantation--precisely because it housed and historicizes racial violences that demanded innovative resistances--stands as a meaningful conceptual palimpsest to contemporary cityscapes that continue to harbor the lives of the most marginalized" (McKittrick, 5). The city has become a shelter for better or worse, for many of the descents of the enslaved. The city then becomes, much like the plantation, a site to witness operations of empire and Black resistance.

The Black cityscape as an uninhabitable geography reveals the processes of racial condemnation conceptually and materially. McKittrick argues our colonial history generated "geographic knowledge" which "mapped a "normal way of life" through measuring different degrees of humanness and attaching different versions of the human to different places." The

normal way of life works to preserve the abandonment of the nonhuman. McKittrick declares daily normality cannot be divorced from "racial condemnation" which become displayed spatially "in the sites of toxicity, environmental decay, pollution, and militarized action that are inhabited by impoverished communities--geographies described as battlegrounds or as burned, horrific, occupied, sieged, unhealthy, incarcerated, extinct, starved, torn, endangered" (McKittrick, 7). The conditions of environmental decay, pollution, and an impoverished community experiencing militarized violence are reflected in the location of "Childfinder." The decaying court that houses Barbara and the Black telepathic children she instructs represents a site of the racially condemned, where environmental degradation and vulnerability to organized violence via the literal white psi organization can be allowed. I argue Barbara refuses this racial condemnation in Black geographies choosing to live among and help the children condemned in the court by the state and the white psi organization that initially rejected their inclusion in the telepathic community. Barbara's reasons for moving into her current home are due to a young ten-year-old girl named Valerie. Barbara reflects on her new home stating, "Not that I minded the place really. I'd lived in worse. And I killed every damn rat and roach on the premises before I moved in. Besides, there was this kid next door. Young, educable, with the beginnings of a talent she presently used for shoplifting. A pre-telepath" (Butler, 63). I argue Barbara's desire to live in the court represents the reality that, alongside the vulnerability to violence in the city, like in the plantation, there also arises the demand for innovative resistance. Barbara chooses to go into the physical space of the court and the mental landscape of her students. Barbara's Black resistance refuses to leave the Black children in the court abandoned and her necessary intervention further highlights how Black geographies are considered inhuman.

I argue the rejection of the Black telepathic children by the white psi community, reflects how Black geographies are inhuman geographies. The mental landscapes of Barbara's children were considered inferior and outright uninhabitable. When Barbra has an argument later in the story with Eve, a representative of the white psi community, she reminds Eve how the organization treated her students as uninhabitable. Barbara states, “These are the same kids you wouldn’t even consider before I left. You took one look into them and you couldn’t get out fast enough” (Butler, 67). The description of the white telepaths racing to leave the mental landscape of the Black psi children reveal racial geographies become mapped onto minds. Barabara resists the power dynamic of our racial geography by prioritizing Black psi children. Further, Barbara’s commitment to her students leads her to reveal the decolonial thought that can be found in studying the plantation and Black resistance.

At the beginning we meet Barbara’s student Valerie. Barbara lends Valerie a book and encourages the ten-year-old to read about Harriet Tubman. In an internal monologue, Barbara reflects on the importance of Valerie reading about slavery. Referring to the book, Barbara states “there were a lot of reasons for Valerie to get more than a couple of evenings of entertainment out of it. Reasons beyond the ones usually given for making a black kid read that kind of book” (Butler, 65). The unique reasons Barbara has for teaching Valerie about slavery are then revealed in the next scene.

When Barbara tries to talk to Valerie about the book, the girl’s mind begins to wander, distracted by children playing outside. To regain Valerie’s attention, Barbara uses her telepathic powers to transport Valerie into the book. A bout of psionic mind-bending puts Valerie in Harriet’s place, forcing Valerie to live a simulation of early US chattel slavery and the harrowing escape to freedom. Barbara describes the condition as a sort of dream. She admits this sort of

traumatic dream is “not the kind of dream someone her age ought to be having.” However, Barbara feels justified in forcing Valerie to confront this trauma because she believes Valerie will have no choice but to “grow up pretty fast” (Butler, 65). It becomes evident, as the story progresses, that Barbara is referring to the upcoming battle with the organization.

The organization, a racist and hostile white psionic community, represents the adaptive and migratory power of white supremacy in a plantation logic. The organization illustrates how identification and investment in whiteness is produced by a violent interdependent relationship with nonwhite people, particularly Black people. In the article “How Race is Made in America” Natalia Molina describes the historical emergence of whiteness. Molina argues the concept of whiteness is innately hierarchical and at one time there were stratified shades of whiteness. In the past Anglo-Saxons were situated at the top of the whiteness hierarchy, with “Celts, Slavs, Jews and Mediterraneans” situated as lesser whites. Below these shades of whiteness was everyone else, with Blackness existing as the ultimate foil, as the concept of whiteness or the Anglo-Saxon could only exist relationally. Molina states “Anglo-Saxons were defined by what they were not: black, Indian…” (Molina).

Sylvia Wynter expands on the distinctions within this hierarchy by pointing out, “it was to be the peoples of Black African descent who would be constructed as the ultimate referent of the ‘racially inferior’ Human Other…” Ultimately, an anti-Black hierarchy was constructed with the attendant emergence of whiteness and the notions that informed the idea of the modern human, producing a central relationship with Blackness for everyone non-Black. For although “Indians’ were portrayed as the very acme of the savage, irrational Other, the ‘Negroes’ were assimilated to…the most extreme form and as the ostensible missing link between rational humans and irrational animals” (Wynter, 266). Wynter states that as this early hierarchy was

understood in North America, newly incoming white and non-Black people then put "visible distance between themselves and the Black population group (in effect, claiming 'normal' human status by distancing themselves from the group that is still made to occupy the nadir, 'nigger' rung of being human within the terms of our present ethnoclass" (262, Wynter). This racial geography, distinction from, and domination of Blackness produced a spectrum of humanity and at times, whiteness, structured on the production of Black social death, inhumanity and tangled consanguinity.

Orlando Patterson argues that Black social death emerged in the institution of chattel slavery as Black slaves were dishonored, dehumanized, excluded from kinship, and made completely unable to participate in generational inheritance. However, Grace Kyungwon Hong stresses that the work of Black feminists revealed that something did get transferred generationally. Black slaves received a matriarchal inheritance instead of a patriarchal one through the enslaved Black woman, who passed down the status of enslavement (Hong, 99). In this expanded understanding of social death, tangled consanguinity, then, is the ability to bequeath genetic life and social death simultaneously. The power of social death, and tangled consanguinity, which rips the Black body from subject into subjection from generation to generation, then becomes the grounds upon which whiteness argues for its identity and existence, asserting the relational nature of white humanity on the basis of its violent juxtaposition to Black inhumanity.

Walter Johnson also argues that whiteness and ideas of normative humanity, with its attendant constructions of proper masculinity and femininity, were produced through the institution of chattel slavery. In the chapter "Making a World Out of Slaves," Johnson uses several diaries, letters, and other primary sources to reveal how the "the slave market held

dreams of transformative possibilities" that could ultimately cultivate and solidify a claim to whiteness (Johnson, 78). Johnson states "one of the many miraculous things a slave could do was to make a household white" (Johnson, 90). Slaves made homes white by transforming the roles of labor and status for its residents.

The presence of slaves gave male slaveholders a "fantasy of economic independence and bourgeois self-control" (Johnson, 82). For slaveholding women, slaves released white women from the gendered taboo of fieldwork. Working in the field was considered unsuitable for a woman, as it marred expectations of feminine domesticity (Johnson, 90). Slaves could transform a woman into a "proper white lady," as they assumed responsibility for all of the gardening, drawing water, and chopping wood, which allowed their mistresses to stay inside (Johnson, 91). Slave women also released white women from the strain of reproductive labor by assuming responsibility for nursing and child rearing (Johnson, 95). However, the power of slaveholding went beyond a relief of menial labor. Ultimately, slaves "held the promise that slaveholders could buy their way into the master class…" (Johnson, 80). People who occupied the "master class" existed in a space of full citizenship through the domination of Black bodies.

Johnson illustrates the power of this space, and the inherent anti-Black violence that produces it, with the case of John Tibeats. In 1842 John Tibeats bought a man who would later be known as Solomon Northup when he recorded the experiences of his life in the memoir *Twelve Years a Slave.* One day, Northup was ordered to work on a building on the plantation and an overseer gave them the wrong type of nails for the labor. Tibeats decided to whip Northup for the error. However, Northup refused to be beaten. Tibeats attempted to attack Northup, but he overpowered Tibeats, ripped the whip from his hand, and flogged Tibeats until his arm ached. When Tibeats could stand again, he rode off and rounded up a gang of other white men to lynch

Northup. Johnson states the murder of Northup was essential, because in Northup's death Tibeats could "reassert his authority, his property right…" The ability to kill a slave meant "full participation in the regime of racial slavery," and thus full participation in the privileges and entitlements of whiteness. However, Tibeats could not complete the murder, because Northup was mortgaged to another man. Johnson describes Tibeats' inability to murder Northup as Tibeats' "incomplete transition" into the full position of slaveholder or the complete white citizen with its attendant entitlements to Black dominion and Black death (Johnson, 81). The story of Tibeats' incomplete transition showcases how whiteness is a mode of life whose existential maintenance demands the subservience of Black bodies and the ability to kill them with impunity. Constraining Black bodies in constant vulnerability to death then upholds a white monopoly on life and its accompanying claim to humanity and citizenship in white supremacy.

The violent relational enactment of white identity at the expense of Blackness is showcased prominently in "Childfinder." The racist, white psi organization represents the ongoing reproduction of whiteness born out of an adaptive plantation logic. The white organization cannot accept a strong and autonomous Black psi community. Barbara knows this and thus she prepares her students, like Valerie, to fight for their freedom. She encourages Valerie to read about Harriet Tubman for more than a historical education. Barbara projects a vision from the book into Valerie's mind and makes her live upon the precipice of escape and possible capture. When Valerie responds with disappointment toward the fearful slaves that consider halting their escape to turn back to the plantation, Barbara is pleased. Barbara calls Valerie's perspective a "breakthrough" (Butler, Kindle Location 771). Through the liberatory focus of her work, Gerry Canavan argues Barbara becomes a Harriet Tubman figure herself

(Canavan, 24). The liberatory resistance she inspires in Valerie, producing a commitment to freedom at any cost, then becomes vital when the organization arrives.

When Eve, a white woman and representative of the organization, visits Barbara she accuses the emerging Black psi enclave of building an opposing group and Barbara instantly objects. Barbara states "We won't oppose you unless we have to" (Butler, Kindle Location 800). However, this answer is not satisfying for Eve. Black independence can only be processed as oppositional, since whiteness functions on a fundamental need for Black submission. The organization cannot fathom a landscape of race relations where forms of engagement can be equitable and not antagonistic. Eve charges Barbara with bringing methods of racial segregation and apartheid among non-psi people, referred to as the "normals," into the psi community. Barbara invalidates this false comparison by reminding Eve the organization initially refused membership to her Black students (Butler, 67). Further, Eve's vision of the psi world, as an entity that exists beyond the bounds of historical race relations in the United States, is contradicted by her own actions.

When Eve arrives at Barbara's home, she meets Valerie on the porch. Barbara states Eve speaks to the ten-year-old in a "first grade language" that Valerie had already come to know as belittling. Eve promptly insults Valerie's intelligence and states she does not believe Valerie is capable of reading the entire book she has borrowed from Barbara. Eve's racist, infantile, and dehumanizing perception of Valerie reveals supernatural powers do not remove psi people from being conditioned and impacted by histories of racism and anti-Blackness in the United States. Eve is not above the "normals"; rather, she is a subject embedded in the white supremacy that informs their world. Ironically, Eve's argument, absurdly comparing Black independence with the violent history of anti-Black segregation, reveals more about the paranoid and parasitic

nature of whiteness. Any framework that does not center whiteness, and allows for white domination, is an existential, social and political affront--a belittling or negation of whiteness that it cannot cope with. Thus Eve, on behalf of the organization, demands that Barbara return to a life under their authority, with her children, or the organization will murder them all.

The organization would rather engage in a fatalistic war than allow Black autonomy, a decision that produces an eerie conclusion. The story's final historical record, proclaiming that all psi people have gone extinct in the present, strongly encourages readers to assume the war brought about the mutual demise of both conflicting factions. Although the ending can appear tragic, I argue it serves an important analytical function. Much can be learned from the hubris of the white psi community. Watching the chaotic results of the organization's refusal to divest from whiteness, a political and social identity predicated on relational violence and Black death, does the work of deciphering a plantation logic. McKittrick argues that deciphering a plantation logic first, "identifies the normalizing mechanics of the plantation, wherein black subjugation and land exploitation go hand in hand and shepherd in certain (present) death;" second, it "notices our collective participation in and rhetorical commitment to reproducing this system as though it is natural, inevitable, and a normal way of life;" and last, "it imagines the plot-and - plantation as a new analytical ground that puts forth a knowledge system, produced outside of the realms of normalcy, thus rejecting the very rules of the system that profits from racial violence, and in this envisions not a purely oppositional narrative but rather a future where a correlated human species perspective is honored" (McKittrick, 11). I argue "Childfinder " enacts all three of McKittrick's described processes.

First, the disrupting space of the fantastic neo-slave narrative highlights the normalizing mechanics of the plantation. It teases out the conditioned banality and horror of white

supremacy, as we watch the white psi community fail to manifest its own self-image of exceeding histories of racial violence in the United States. The organization believes it is beyond the racial vices that plague the "normals," while simultaneously reproducing a dominating, anti-Black, white supremacist plantation logic in the psi subculture. The organization has no awareness, because of how immersed it is in the normalizing mechanics of the plantation. The domination of Black bodies and the consequential conquest of the psionic terrain it seeks, functions as an entitlement they are too immersed in to question and their absurd blind greed identifies the normalizing mechanics of the plantation logic to the reader. Second, Barbara refuses a comparison to segregation, although it is perceived the Black and white positions are now reversed. In this moment she almost says, "how does it feel to be on the downside for a change" (Butler, Kindle Location 806). This passage could allow "Childfinder" to be interpreted within the category of the "revenge mode of Afrofuturist science fiction" as Canavan has argued (Canavan, 26). However, I believe this analysis proves limited when considering that Barbara states she does not seek to go to war with the organization. Rather Barbara's children are being prepared to defend themselves. The inevitable war that Barbara knows will be brought to her and her children is not unavoidable because she wills it. Barbara knows her children will have the chance to "settle a lot of scores for a few million people…" because of the ongoing legacy of white violence that compels the organization to see any disruption of white dominance as a threat.

Within this context, it is a disservice to compare Black liberation to "revenge," as no character in the Black psi community expressed an interest in upholding and redirecting the current brutal system of ontological disenfranchisement and social death toward white people. When Barbara says their positions are reversed and that whiteness is on the downside, I argue

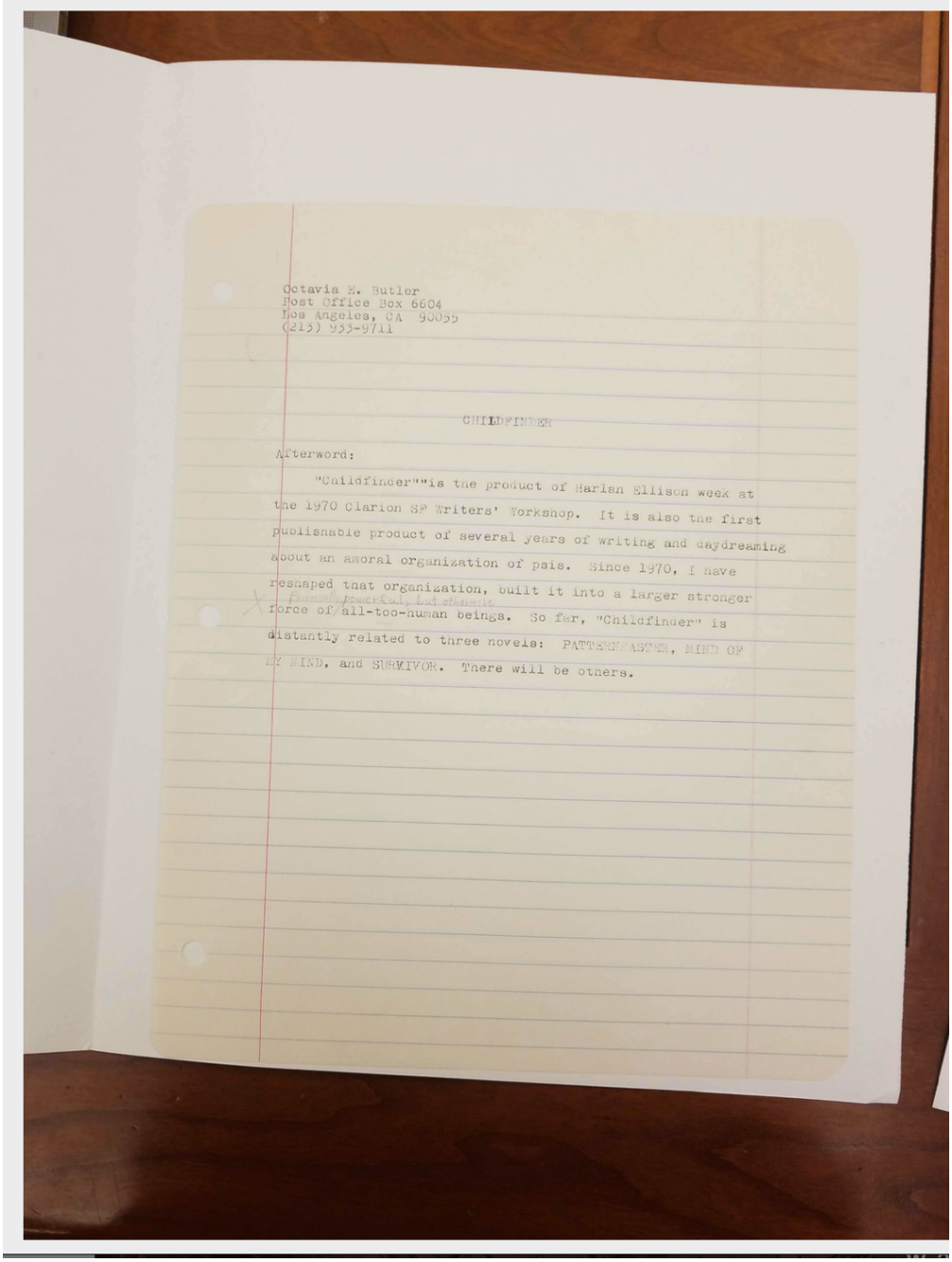
this is due to the rigid relational binaries that organize whiteness. Whiteness cannot share power, because its very existence would not endure the independence and empowerment of its subjugated foil, whose dehumanized position propagates white stability. In this framework whiteness only knows relational violence. Whiteness, as a historical and political concept, cannot fathom a mode of life outside of an abusive racial binary. This then inspires the assumption from the character Eve and the scholar Canavan that an empowered Black community would seek revenge or to "inflict upon whites some fraction of the horrors that whites have inflicted upon everyone else across modern history" (Canavan, 26). The assumptions of Eve and Canavan suggest they understand racialized binaries of abuse as natural, inevitable, and a normal way of life. It is a perception that cannot comprehend the possibility of Black liberation. The position can only fathom the re-ordering of the same hierarchical model, and so it cannot engage with how Black liberation and revolt could breach the binary in search of new dynamics.

"Childfinder " manifests the last process of deciphering a plantation logic through its ominous but ultimately indeterminate ending. Although the story implies a war over racism destroyed the entire psi population, the truth is unclear. The story concludes with the unreliable narration of a historian. The historian assumes, with no evidence, that psionic powers would produce universal peace and protect the population from conflicts relating to racism, religion, nationality, or any other form of social and/or political difference. Due to this unfounded belief the historian concludes an external force, most likely a disease, killed psionic people. However, the readers know the historian is misinformed. The disruption of the historian's credibility then raises questions about the future. How did psionic people die? Are all psionic people dead? A fatal war could have decimated everyone, or perhaps a revolution took place that the historian cannot comprehend. If readers want to believe in the latter conclusion, or at least to avoid the

first conclusion, then what would revolution necessitate? Through these questions, and the ominous threat at the conclusion of the story, Butler encourages readers to engage in working through deciphering the violence of the plantation, not to create a purely oppositional solution or narrative, but one that confronts the mechanisms of the plantation and works with and through them to find a future where a correlated human species perspective is honored. Or in other words a society committed to the mutual and symbiotic benefit of its members rather than a hierarchical binary where life is always derived at the expense of another. This dynamic should not be confused with a prioritizing of the human category above other forms of life, but rather addresses the disparity inherent in the construction of the human, the violent monopolizing of the human, and the hierarchical reproduction of the human in a white supremacist plantation logic.

A correlated human species perspective addresses the inherent racial differentiation of human value within the political and historical construction of the human and seeks to challenge and dismantle the hierarchical relationships which have created so much violence. A correlated human species perspective challenges the dynamic of the plantation by considering how life can be reordered in such a way where the human is not predicated on the domination of another, or the inhuman or the less than human. I argue a correlated human species perspective would then be interested in other forms of humanity, like Frantz Fanon. An interest in a radical and new form of humanity, or an alternate episteme, would then necessitate terraforming our present political and material landscape into a space that could be inhabitable for more than a fraction of the population. The investigation of human value and the production of the inhuman cannot be untethered from history. “Childfinder " also uses the genre of the fantastic neo-slave narrative and a critical confrontation with the afterlife of slavery to critique the institution and construction of history. In the following section I will argue that the offered historical critique found in

"Childfinder" addresses concerns Afro-pessimist scholars have about the production and pursuit of history.



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CHILDFINDER

Afterword:

"Childfinder""is the product of Harlan Ellison week at the 1970 Clarion SF Writers' Workshop. It is also the first publishable product of several years of writing and daydreaming about an amoral organization of psis. Since 1970, I have reshaped that organization, built it into a larger stronger (more powerful, but otherwise) force of all-too-human beings. So far, "Childfinder" is distantly related to three novels: PATTERNMASTER, MIND OF MY MIND, and SURVIVOR. There will be others.

Figure 3. Octavia E. Butler, Childfinder: Short Story Afterword, 1978, The Huntington Library (OEB 294). Copyright Estate of Octavia E. Butler.

Critical Historiography and Afro-pessimism

In the Butler Papers at the Huntington Library, there are several drafts of the unpublished afterword for “Childfinder.” Each of the drafts of the afterword, which was written to accompany the story’s expected publication, mentions the Clarion workshop and the mentorship of Harlan Ellison. Unfortunately, Ellison’s *Dangerous Visions* anthology was never published and none of the afterwords ever appeared until the eventual debut of “Childfinder” in the 2014 ebook *Unexpected Stories*. Fortunately, Butler was enthusiastically committed to maintaining a sophisticated archive of her drafts, journals, research and notes throughout the years. In Butler’s consistent devotion to archiving, she saved all of the original afterwards for “Childfinder.”

In one of the afterwards, a shorter draft that appears unfinished, Butler declares “Childfinder" the precursor to the coming work in her career. Butler states “Childfinder" is the “first publishable product of several years of writing and daydreaming about an amoral organization of psis. Since 1970, I have reshaped that organization, built it into a larger stronger force of all-too-human beings. So far, 'Childfinder’ is distantly related to three novels: PATTERNMASTER, MIND OF MY MIND, and SURVIVOR. There will be others” (Butler, OEB 293). Here we see Butler name “Childfinder" as the first execution of the ideas that would shape her later work. In the works that would follow “Childfinder,” Butler would make a living by challenging readers with stories that centered around fantastic neo-slave narratives and Afrofuturistic science fiction. However, the proof that “Childfinder" was the catalyst for this journey would have been lost if Butler had not recorded this statement in her papers. Butler would not mention “Childfinder” as the explicit start to her career again. I emphasize this point, because I argue in the following section that the Butler archive and “Childfinder" represent vital

historical and political work in the documentation of marginalized voices. Butler, a Black woman, knew she needed to do the historical work of archiving herself. Butler knew she needed to document her own voice and maintain a record of her experiences, research, and ideas, because it was unlikely they would be given much historical consideration elsewhere. Butler was aware that marginalized identities are rarely recorded. Butler's simultaneous frustration with formal historical production, lived alongside a devotion to her own historical documentation due to a theory she created called Histofuturism. I argue Butler's Histofuturism represents a method of critical historiography that highlights Afro-pessimistic concerns with the discipline of history.

At the end of "Childfinder" the protagonist Barbara decides she must erase all of her memories. Specifically, she must forget all of the Black psi children whose powers she worked to develop and the network she had come to know as family. In desperation, Barbara believes amnesia is the only condition that can protect her students. After a fight where Barbara's students successfully overpower and temporarily incapacitate Eve and her telepathic brawlers, Barbara decides to surrender herself to the white psi community. Barbara hopes if she departs with the organization willingly, the concession might buy her children enough time to develop their powers and ultimately avenge her and many more people later. After committing to the decision to induce amnesia, Barbara states, "But afraid or not, I was going to do it. I had started something that I wasn't going to let the organization stop. Partly because my kids deserved a chance. And partly because they were going to settle a lot of scores for me and a few million other people…someday." However, in the initial moment when Barbara decides to wipe her memories, she describes the act as suicide. Barbara states, "Thinking about it, thinking about forgetting, about erasing the thing that had become as important to me as breathing, brought my

fear back full force. It was like saying I was going to kill myself" (Butler, 73). In this omission of dying through one's erasure of and from history, we see Butler emphasize the importance of having historical autonomy. Further, Barbara's sacrifice comes with the explicit intent of trying to save any possible historical autonomy for her students. Barbara's vehement belief in her student's deserving a chance to avenge her and a few million other people, reflect the ways in which Barbara wants her students to have historical possibility she and many others cannot. Barbara hopes her students will be able to fight for Black autonomy among the wider psi community, and possibly right the some of the structural wrongs reflected in the white supremacist domination, oppression, and policing. Barbara believes her students have the possibility to alter the power dynamic and therefore the hopeful historical record. Unfortunately, readers are unsure if Barbara's sacrifice ensured her political desires.

The violent erasure of Barbara connects to Saidiya Hartman's argument about the historical violence Black people have experienced in their erasure from dominant archives. In the essay, "A Venus in Two Acts," Hartman investigates the presence of a captured African Woman referred to as Venus in the archive of Atlantic slavery. Hartman describes how she appears as a "dead girl" in a case against a slave ship captain tried for the murder of two Negro girls. Hartman emphasizes how Venus' presence in the archive could have easily manifested in an array of many other dehumanized and silenced circumstances. Venus could have also been an object in the ship's ledger, a mention in an overseer's journal, and/or a sexually exploited object in a brothel or a nineteenth century pornography novel (Hartman, 1). Venus represents a very specific fate of Black non-subjectivity in the archive. Hartman states, "…no one remembered her name or recorded the things she said, or observed that she refused to say anything at all. Hers is an

untimely story told by a failed witness" (Hartman, 2). I argue Butler reveals how historians and canonical historical thought has often failed to witness Black life.

The start of "Childfinder" opens with a historian speculating about the assumed inevitable benefits and societal progression telepathy would provide humanity. The passage states, "Standardization of psionic ability through large segments of the population must have given different peoples wonderful opportunities to understand each other. Such abilities could bridge-old age divisions of race, religion, nationality etc. as could nothing else. Psi could have put the human race on the road to utopia" (Butler, 63). The historian betrays an assumption of politics where discrimination and violent power dynamics stem from misunderstanding. In the perception of the fictive historian, structural oppression would be obliterated if humans had more invasive access to each other. The incredibly invasive phenomenon of telepathy is never considered as a method that could possibly extend rather than end violent relations. At the story's conclusion, the historian returns. Providing no evidence upon which to base the following claims, the historian instead sustains their thesis upon the assumptions of other recognized historical records. The final passage of "Childfinder" states, "Historians believe that an atmosphere of tolerance and peace would be a natural outgrowth of a psionic society. Records of the fate of the psis are sketchy. Legend tells us that they were all victims of a disease to which they were particularly vulnerable. Whatever the cause, we may be sure that this is one civilization that was destroyed by purely external forces" (Butler, 73-74). The historian does not know what caused the extinction of the psi community. A "disease" has been dreamed up by historians to erase any discussion of an internal conflict. Historians cannot believe racism would be the disease to destroy a group of people with such a profound gift. Further, within the historical record offered in "Childfinder" the members of the Black psi community, whose

autonomous voices were already being threatened with suppression by the white psi organization, are silenced.

The erasure of the Black psi community is a literal illustration of Butler's frustrations with formal history. In the Butler papers in the Huntington Library, Butler wrote about a historical theory she called Histofuturism. In the article "Time Lapse and Time Capsules: The Chronopolitics of Octavia E. Butler's Fiction" Jennifer Terry discussed Butler's preoccupation with time and history in the Butler archive. Terry displays the Commonplace Book notebook in which Butler wrote the theory of Histofuturism on November fourth, 1981. Butler begins her discussion of her theory by first reflecting on the role of futurists and historians. Butler states a futurist, "studies the present and the past and attempts to forecast the future. Futurists frequently know more about technology than about humanity. They frequently have axes to grind, desires to be "positive" or "negative" or vindicate this or that political system, or economic system. People become puppets or get left out entirely" (Terry, 11). Butler's vision of futurism includes people interested in temporal studies to speculate about the future. However, these speculations are rarely rooted, in Butler's perspective, within a concern for the collective. The overall focus on political and economic systems becomes a detached way to follow the current of technology more than its impact on people.

Next, Butler describes her understanding of recognized historians. Butler posits a historian "studies the past, records it, interprets it. Historians, too, may have axes to grind. Religions are maligned, races, ethnicities, nationalities, tribes, economic systems, etc., etc. Groups are ignored--their contributions co-opted, their deficiencies magnified and added to, their humanity denied, the crimes against them ignored. In America, women, Indians, Blacks, have had long-standing harm done them. Every new group to come to the U.S. has been abused in

turn--the Irish, the Chinese, the Mexicans etc" (Terry, 11). In Butler's recorded observations, historians are not impartial judges of events, people, traditions or political systems. Historians are agents of culture and are impacted by the culture, with personal investments that cannot be divorced from their historical production. History becomes an inherently political subject and thus a landscape where often conflicting narratives fight for recognition. Butler's critique of history as a force of social, political, and cultural power, often used to the detriment of marginalized people further reveals her interest in critical historiography. Butler then brought together both her reflections on futurism and history to create her theory Histofurturism.

Butler defines Histofuturism at the bottom of the page after her discussion of futurism and history. Butler declares, "a Histofuturist is my invention. An historian who extrapolates from the Human past and present as well as the technological past and present" (Terry, 11). I find Butler capitalizing and underlying the word human in her notebook very exciting. I interpret Butler's underlying and capitalizing of the word human as a political assertion taking intentional departure from the futurists and the historians Butler felt removed, ignored, or neglected certain populations of people. I argue Butler enters the concept of the human much like Sylvia Wynter, and Frantz Fanon. In the Introduction chapter of the dissertation, I discussed how Black scholars have argued the world needs to enter a new concept of the human, and/or completely shed our present investment in the category human, in order to make Black liberation and life possible. The discussion of humanity here then departs from our hegemonic understandings of the human, which has been monopolized by a cis-heteronormative, white supremacist, settler colonial figure with an attendant hierarchy producing a gradation of the human and the outright antihuman. In the spirit of Sylvia Wynter and Frantz Fanon, I argue Butler's engagement with the human category emphasizes the human histories that are often denied or outright obliterated from the

recognized historical record. Further, I argue that the capitalized and underlined "Human" Butler wrote is a reference to herself. Butler's interest in humanity, I believe, stems from her recognition of Black inhumanity.

Afro-pessimist scholars argue Black inhumanity complicates the discipline of history which at its core seeks only to document redemptive accounts of the human in a linear progress mythology. In the article "Afropessimist, Antidisciplinary Rejoinder to History, Its Human, and Its Anti-Blackness" David Ponton III argues the subject of gender, humanity, and therefore history does not include Black life. Ponton III enters his argument by analyzing the police siege on the male dormitories at Texas Southern University (TSU) in May 1967 (Ponton III, 232). The story of the police attack has been usurped to silence the voices of the Black young men who were impacted by the violence, in order to re-contextualize the disaster as an event leading to the desegregation of Houston. The police attack at TSU has been disgracefully recorded as a riot by many historians, which reveals how the documentation of the violence has been purposefully obfuscated to muddle the power dynamic and rescue the recognized human subjects, in this instance the white police officers and their wider white supremacist public, from accountability. Ponton III explains how the dominant historical account of the TSU police attack follows the "ontological convention" (Ponton III, 234). To explain the ontological convention, Ponton III offers an essential analysis from Sylvia Wynter. Following the work of Wynter, Ponton III argues gender has been the property of the human, the human category does not exist to receive Black people, but history's subject in modernity has always been the human. Therefore, Ponton III posits "to assume gender when writing about the Black is to commit an epistemological error that does not appear to be an error, because the Human is treated as an ontological fact rather than as a political and historical construction, and thus its attendant features, including gender,

are assumed to be ontologically real and universal" (Ponton III, 233). Assuming everyone has access to humanity, or rather refusing to engage in the reality that the human construction was born from the unfree and the inhuman, creates a paradox when writing about Blackness. Black flesh disrupts the ontological convention.

The ontological convention becomes clear in dominant accounts of the TSU police attack. Ponton III explains the ontological convention in the structure of his argument. The ontological convention reveals itself in "an overview of how historians have written about the violent night at TSU, demonstrating how the spectacularism of the event allows it to serve as a touchpoint in a straightforward linear narrative that is primarily and sometimes solely about Houston's process of desegregation rather than about the victims of the police violence" (Ponton III, 234). The ontological convention produces histories focused on the recognized humanity of the dominators in modernity and repurposes the violent struggles impacted by the marginalized as accessories complimenting and literally propagating the ultimate mythology of human resilience and growth. The inhuman are stairs stacked in a history that uses their subordination to construct the trail of deluded human progression. "History is a part of the ongoing practice of r(e)constituting the Human as *the* liberal, sovereign, and redeemable subject" argues Ponton III (Ponton III, 239). The objective to (re)write the human into existence, then overwrites Black reality. The desire to preserve the notion that humanity is a biological fact rather than a sociopolitical construction with borders and various points of denial, then produces a compulsion of history to overwrite Black existence. Ponton argues, "commitment to the Human as an originary fact prior to historical research and writing requires the instantiation of this "fact" as the basis of all history and allows for Black people--who were never afforded ontological standing as humans--to be bludgeoned, dismembered, and reassembled so they appear as human,

too" (Ponton III, 239-240) Black inhumanity becomes denied in order to preserve the liberal and redeemable script of the human. History must follow the aforementioned rules or risk toppling the principles and self-concepts which frame the discipline itself. Ponton III declares, "History must reconstitute Black people as Human or else admit that they were not and therefore concede that the Human is political, not biological, and that it is not universal but was constructed against the people on whom it imposed the label and identity "Black"(Ponton III, 240). The ontological convention demands an effacing of the anti-human in order to preserve the universality and accessibility associated with the human concept.

The ontological convention then produces assumptions of the future. Ponton III declares history "all too often gestures toward a future in which the "race problem" is resolved rather than into the abyss of not knowing how the world of the Human can be abolished or what a world that follows it could bring, for better or worse" (Ponton III, 235). The ontological convention, invested in preserving a fantasy of human ethics and persistent progression, then cannot enter honest and difficult discussions about racism. The race problem must work itself out somehow, in the vision of the ontological convention, rather than be an issue we must confront directly and with the understanding that its engagement could completely obliterate the structure of the world and everyone's self-concept.

The ontological convention becomes an important way to understand the misinformation shared by the historian in "Childfinder." If the discipline of history must concern itself with the documentation of certain people, with the expressed purpose of rescuing certain populations from their own decisions, to produce a fantasy of humanity as universally accessible, respected and recognized by all, while born from the contradiction of this assumed fact, then history will always fail to recognize reality. The historian in "Childfinder" cannot comprehend the reality

that the race problem genocided the psi population. Butler heavily implies the psi might have all been killed in the afterward included in the e-book *Unexpected Stories.* In the afterward, Butler states the story "Childfinder" came from "my generally pessimistic outlook. After a few years of watching the human species make things unnecessarily difficult for itself I have little hope that it will do anything more than survive and continue its cycle of error." Butler uses an anecdote from her childhood to elaborate on her argument. Butler recalls how when her mother had to work long hours she was entrusted to the care of her grandmother or one of her aunts. During the babysitting, Butler and her cousins often had conflicts. When the disagreements created enough ruckus for recognition her grandmother or aunt would come outside and order the children to cease fighting. However, Butler assures the reader the conflict continued in private and her grandmother or aunt would always be surprised when one of the children came back into the house bloody. Butler states after her childhood experience, "I am surprised to find myself writing the same kind of warning in "Childfinder." "Get along out there! No fighting!" But in at least one way I'm different from my aunts and grandmother. I know no one's listening" (Butler, 75). I argue, Butler wrote "Childfinder " and invented her theory of Histofuturism to contend with the fact Black voices and insights often remain unheard on a structural scale. I argue and interpret "Childfinder" as the first expression of "Histofuturism" which would not be coined until 1981, ten years after the story's initial completion. I argue Histofuturism is a method of critical historiography which tells an anti-history by focusing on the anti-human and all of the attendant holes that its silence will produce in the dominant historical archive.

Butler defines a Histofuturist as a historian "who extrapolates from the Human past and present as well as the technological past and present" (Terry, 11). "Childfinder " extrapolates from the human past and present. "Childfinder" references the history of the civil rights

movement and thus the legacy of North American chattel slavery. By extrapolating from the past and then infusing a new present technology with supernatural advancement in telepathy, “Childfinder" highlights the cycle of error Butler felt the human population was doomed to repeat. For the United States exists as a technological superpower whose advancements have not yet deterred it from reproducing and adapting anti-Blackness. I argue “Childfinder” employs Histofuturism but extrapolates from a particular position which transforms the story into an anti-history because the focus of “Childfinder” is the antihuman. Although “Childfinder” concerns itself with the ultimate demise of the entire psi community, the story privileges Barbara as the protagonist, while the reader knows investment in the white psi organization is immoral and racist. “Childfinder” denies readers the ontological convention, as the narrative actively refuses to rescue the human category as a universal thread for community or moral progress. “Childfinder” becomes a Histofuturist anti-history as it denies the ontological convention and emphasizes the cycle of error present in a white supremacy which will not be necessarily transformed for the better by new technology.

Eve and the organization are violent antagonists only interested in domination, control, and specifically racial subordination. To achieve the aforementioned goals, the organization is not above murdering Barbara and her children. Although Barbara and her children are also capable of violence, they execute harm very differently from the white psi community. Black psi violence manifests in defense and with mercy. Barbara admits in the narrative that she was able to locate white children with psi potential. However, Barbara emphasizes where she chose to sabotage their psionic abilities painlessly, so they could not be recruited by the organization, Barbara knows the organization would not thwart her pupils similarly. When discussing their different approaches, Barbara states, “Where I’d cripple kids painlessly, they would kill them”

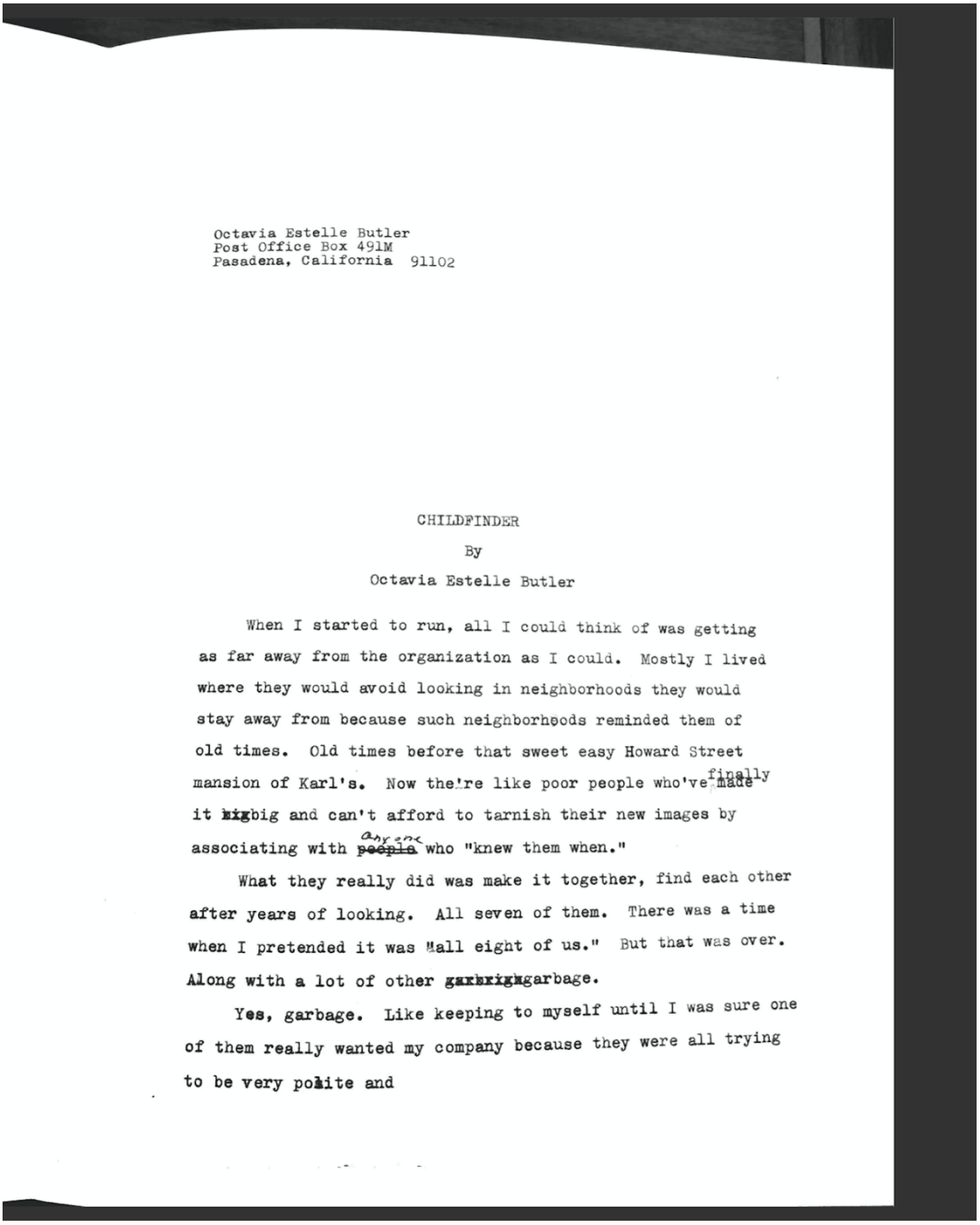
(Butler, 68). I argue the narrative makes it known to the reader that the narrative's conflict does not stem from a juvenile struggle, beyond the inane mundanity of racism. The white supremacist obsession with control and domination ultimately drives the unnecessary genocide of the entire psi community. However, Butler also writes her story as a political protest, emphasizing the impotence of her own warning. The removal of the necessary information that ultimately informs the psi slaughter, makes known how an investigation of these politics would not deter the ultimate end of the story. Butler asserts that knowing racism is the problem will not suddenly stop racism from being a problem nor will it encourage a further investigation of racism as the ultimate factor in a conflict. Further, Butler's depiction of racism emphasizes how the social phenomenon is not about a misunderstanding, as the historian heavily implies in "Childfinder." I argue the antihistory of Histofuturim again rejects the ontological convention by refusing to engage in the delusion that the race problem will somehow work itself out in the future and be inevitably aided by future technologies or supernatural advancements.

I argue Histofuturism does not assume advances in technology, like telepathy, would breed immediate and inevitable progress in society. I argue Histofuturism extrapolates from the anti-human past and present to reject the ontological convention and showcase how intimate knowledge of racism will not root out this socio-political reality nor motivate people to find solutions through new technologies. Histofuturism further makes known the history we do receive is often failed, messy, and motivated by the ontological convention, which works to reproduce the human category, thus simultaneously producing and silencing the antihuman. Histofuturism as an antihistory then illustrates how Ponton III argues, "Black history is not quite the same as history in Black. The former's commitment is to the constant reconstitution of the Human and its liberal tale of progress; the latter's commitment is to the Human's demise"

(Ponton III, 243). Histofuturism as antihistory executes our liberal expectations of the human category in "Childfinder." The human category becomes incredibly interrogated as a concept that does not welcome everyone equally nor provide innate protections. "Childfinder" highlights how the human category has historically been a sociopolitical construction founded upon violence and domination, not collective progress. "Childfinder" refuses the liberal tale of the Human construct, and thus obliterates the human category in many regards, by challenging its biological fact, which complicates its history through emphasizing its unfair and uneven realities.

Due to the messy nature of Histofuturism as an antihistory it is fitting as a work of speculative fiction. "Childfinder" recognizes most accounts of history will fail to record the anti-human. Thus, the archive becomes inventive, because it must be creative to shed light on all the conflicting and thus necessarily important stories. Therefore, the Histofuturist can no longer pursue the historical badge of absolute truth. Ponton III argues, "Archives, wherein both truths and falsehoods easily cohabitate, become a resource for inventiveness rather than the ground for absolute truth" (Ponton III, 234). I read "Childfinder" as an archive of the conflict that destroyed the psi community. In the inventive speculative archive, readers receive the direct narrative and threat which likely destroyed the psi community, while also gaining a glimpse of the ontological convention which ultimately overwrites the history of the psi community to fit within the canon of historical production. The historian believes a legend that claims the psi community was destroyed by an external disease, since he explicitly admits he cannot believe racism would be the cause of their demise. The race problem is explained away as an external disease, rather than engaged with as a fatal internal threat. "Childfinder" as a manifestation of Histofuturism represents an essential product of critical historiography as it engages with Afro-pessimist concerns about the production of history and its canonical necessity to silence the anti-human.

However, the speculative archive of the Histofuturist story "Childfinder" also records moments of Black survival and care which are often removed from dominant archives, as well. Ponton III argues archives which have recorded the violent night at TSU have failed to account for circles of care and modes of survival enacted by the male students who experienced the police attack. Further, the archive does not account for how the young Black men at TSU were already experiencing prior trauma before the police attack on campus and how they created circles of care and modes of survival to contend with that, as well (Ponton III, 232). "Childfinder" makes sure to record the care and camaraderie shared among the emerging Black psi community. All of Barbara's children come to her aid when Eve and the telepathetic brawlers from the organization arrive. Barbara experiences a cacophony of voices in her mind, as each of her children extend their psionic abilities to fight Barbara's attackers and support her from within. A chatter of conversation reveals how Barabara created a family vehemently committed to its survival and who were engaging in circles of care in the narrative and prior to its events. In the final section of this chapter, I will argue Barbara, as an oppositional superhero, created a Black autonomous zone that provided circles of care and survival which are encouraged in Black Anarchist organizing.



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CHILDFINDER

By

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When I started to run, all I could think of was getting as far away from the organization as I could. Mostly I lived where they would avoid looking in neighborhoods they would stay away from because such neighborhoods reminded them of old times. Old times before that sweet easy Howard Street mansion of Karl's. Now they're like poor people who've finally made it big and can't afford to tarnish their new images by associating with anyone who "knew them when."

What they really did was make it together, find each other after years of looking. All seven of them. There was a time when I pretended it was "all eight of us." But that was over. Along with a lot of other garbage.

Yes, garbage. Like keeping to myself until I was sure one of them really wanted my company because they were all trying to be very polite and

Figure 4. Octavia E. Butler, Childfinder short story: fragment, 1970. The Huntington Library (OEB 284). Copyright Estate Octavia E. Butler.

Oppositional Superheroism and Black Anarchism

I found several drafts of "Childfinder" in the Butler papers at the Huntington Library. An early draft of "Childfinder" begins with Barbara asserting her departure from the white psi organization was purposefully informed by a search for a separate and autonomous space. Barbara's narration first began with a description of running. Barbara states, "When I started to run, all I could think about was getting as far away from the organization as I could." Barbara elaborates on how her desire for distance produced her drive to settle in a struggling neighborhood. Barbara admits, "Mostly I lived where they would avoid looking in neighborhoods they would stay away from because such neighborhoods reminded them of old times." The old times Barbara refers to are before the white psi community had control of its collective power and were stable enough to organize. "Childfinder" emphasizes how telepathy would not innately empower someone. The story resists the notion that future technologies or advancements in abilities would automatically create a positive outcome, as the historian claims. In the early draft of "Childfinder," Barbara describes the hapless and tortured nature of telepaths from the first page. Barbara states the "old times" were, "before that sweet easy Howard Street mansion of Karl's. Now they're like poor people who've finally made it big and can't afford to tarnish their new image by associating with anyone who 'knew them when'" (OEB 284). In the final draft of "Childfinder," the past condition of the telepaths that would tarnish their current reputations are described in detail.

Barbara states the psi community were "solitary misfits" and "human trash" until they were able to collectively harness their abilities. Barbara's narration states,

> "I was one of them. I know just how low they were before someone with the talent to reach out and call them together matured. That led to the organization and the organization led me to find out that I hadn't been as mature as I thought. Led me to discover that I was the other thing they needed. Somebody who could recognize normal-appearing kids who had psi potential before they got too old and the potential in them died from lack of use. Originally the organization was a group of

> exceptions. Most pre-psi kids don't mature without help. That's why the organization had stayed the same size since the day I left it"

(Butler, 68). The organization required a telepath strong enough to bring them together and develop their individual abilities. According to the draft, perhaps the telepath who brought the organization together was Karl, who provided the mansion on Howard Street. The aforementioned details are not mentioned in the final draft of "Childfinder." The additional information provided in the early draft then sheds more light on why Barbara could not stay in the organization. After discussing how the telepath's fled to a member's mansion to begin anew, Babara states "What they really did was make it together, find each other after years of looking. All seven of them. There was a time when I pretended it was 'all eight of us.' But that was over. Along with a lot of other garbage. Yes, garbage. Like keeping to myself until I was sure one of them really wanted my company because they were all trying to be polite..." (OEB, 284). Through the draft, readers are told Barbara left due to alienation. Although Barbara argues they were all considered misfits, the element of her Blackness has clearly made her distinct from the group. Barbara's isolation within the psi community, then becomes an important catalyst to depart. In Barbara's separation from the white psi community, she pursues the creation of her own organization.

Barbara's decision to commit her powers to supporting Black psi children, who are experiencing multiple vulnerabilities in their poverty and their Blackness, produces a supernatural mission for Barbara. I argue Barbara uses her supernatural abilities as a "Childfinder" for oppositional super-heroism. Barbara's mission resists conventional expectations of superheroes. In the Introduction chapter of the dissertation, I discussed the article "Bred to be Superhuman: Comic Books and Afrofuturism in Octavia Butler's Patternist Series"

by Gerry Canavan. Canavan argues Butler's Patternist series existed in part as an Afrofuturist and feminist critique of the Marvel and DC superhero comics she collected (Canavan, 259). Canavan argues Butler partially created "a new history of the superhero genre" by centering the perspectives of those "from below." The predominantly Black, and historically marginalized characters in Butler's Patternist series opposed the traditional superhero logics and empowered populations typically excluded from rhetorics of privilege, master races, and special gifts (Canavan, 271). Canavan argues the character Doro's project, of specifically farming Black telepaths, and empowering "super powered Blackness" challenged "the racial fantasies that have undergirded modernity." Within Doro's centuries long Black telepath project, Canavan argues America itself "becomes retold here as an African story, in an Africanist re-centering of history that serves as a strongly anti-colonialist provocation, even if the results are mostly anti-utopian" (Canavan, 272).

Further, Canavan argues a "passivity marks the traditional superhero as a fundamentally conservative or reactionary figure." Expanding on this analysis, Canavan uses the existence of a Nazi Superman to explain the ultimate conformity of the superhero. Canavan argues the title *Superman: Red Sun* (2003), an alternate timeline in which the Kryptonian baby crashes in the Ukraine and "consequently, fights for truth, justice and the Soviet Way," reveals "how little the authoritarian figure of the superhero would have to change to be legible within other systems of social organization" (Canavan, 266). Within dominant superhero stories the heroes employ their powers on behalf of the state. The motive of the superhero rests in upholding the current criminal justice system and the ideals of truth and order lauded by dominant institutions. "Childfinder" as an explicitly admitted precursor to the Patternist series, by Butler, then becomes the first place where Butler enacted a vision of a psionic powered Black oppositional superhero.

Barbara refuses to use her powers for the dominant psi institution, otherwise known as the organization. Barbara sets out to create her own institution and psi community. Barbara's education of her students is also rooted in an opposition to the institutions and histories of the United States. Readers are first introduced to Barbara's instruction of Valerie, a ten-year Black neighborhood girl who lives in the declining string of houses referred to as the "court" (Butler, 63). Valerie returns Barbara a loaned book about Harriet Tubman. Barbara pushes the child to think critically about the book and Black liberation. Barbara immediately drills the child with questions when she returns the text. Specifically seeking to know what Valerie enjoyed the most. After some prodding, Valerie admits, "I liked the parts where Harriet helped those slaves to get away" (Butler, 64). Barbara wants Valerie to contend with the weight of the escape and so she instantly responds, "She could have been killed every time she helped them." Valerie agrees. Barbara then asks Valerie to consider why Harriet Tubman would continue to endanger her own life. Valerie gives a dismissive response, nonchalantly suggesting Harriet Tubman wanted to aid the enslaved for no particular or profound reason. Barbara cannot accept Valerie's answer. To push the child to think more critically, Barbara forces Valerie to live a vision of fugitive escape through her psionic powers. Barbara transports Valerie into a harrowing run from a plantation and the fear that propelled some of the enslaved to turn back. Barbara becomes pleased when Valerie responds to the vision with a frown. Displeased, Valerie states, "They always got halfway up north and then somebody would get scared and want to go back. How come they were so scared to just go ahead and be free?" Barbara is ecstatic to receive Valerie's question. The narrative implies the two discuss Valerie's question and the book at length before Valerie's older brother comes to collect her (Butler, 66).

I argue Barbara's push to make Valerie think critically about the history of chattel slavery was in preparation to resist white supremacy. White supremacy informs Barbara and Valerie's life within and without the psi community. However, within the psi community there is an immediate and fatal threat through the white psi organization. The organization's sudden and aggressive desire to incorporate Barbara and her students, after previously rejecting the children, appears sinister. Barbara believes Eve and the wider organization will harm her students. Eve, an organization representative, comes to Barbara's house to take her captive. It quickly becomes clear that if the Black psi community concedes to the wishes of the white organization, Black telepaths will be their prisoners and their powers, if allowed, will be under white supremacist control. Barbara states that the organization considers themselves "the next step for mankind" and therefore will not accept being inferior--in perception or reality-- to any other group. Thus, the emerging Black psi organization, with rapidly increasing membership through Barbara's childfinder abilities, makes the white organization worry their power will not match (Butler, 67). The obsession with having a monopoly on the strongest telepaths and/or the group with the most telepaths, speaks to how white identity operates from external and self-destructive tendencies to maintain and reproduce itself through control and subordination. Constant control and subordination are not sustainable desires and therefore resistance arises. Barbara, as an oppositional Black superhero, uses her abilities to build a Black resistance group prepared to fight for their survival and freedom. Barbara has many students. Toward the end of the story, most of Barbara's students emerge and fight the organization. Together innumerous children come to Barbara's aid. There are so many children Barbara has cared for that only two of the older children are given names: Jordan and Jessie Mae. Valerie is entrusted to Jordan and Jessie Mae after Barbara sacrifices herself to the organization to save her students and preserve their

freedom (Butler, 70-73). I argue the Black resistance found in "Childfinder" cannot be untethered from Black Anarchist organizing.

In the Black Anarchist text, *The Nation on No Map*, William C. Anderson argues "the Black freedom struggle is a struggle because the idea of a free Black population is not acceptable to a white supremacist state. Achieving Black liberation means a complete rejection of white supremacist society in its entirety." Anderson expands on his argument explaining how freedom has been defined in liberal terms which have only ushered in "another hideous institution" as anti-Blackness exists in and as permutation throughout the project of the state (Anderson, 36). In moments of extreme optimism, I read the ending of "Childfinder" as a success for the Black psi community. Perhaps historians can no longer record a persisting Black psi population due their refusal to be found? Did the Black psi population realize they would not have autonomy in modernity if governed and recognized by its dominant institutions? For the narrative suggests the world continues to be governed by white supremacy due to the ontological convention of the liberal human script continuing to overwrite the true struggle of the telepaths. However, due to my belief that "Childfinder" is an intentioned, messy, anti-history–readers will never truly know what happened to the Black psi population. However, in the absence of that information, Butler offers another important reality. Butler's speculative archive of the psi community in "Childfinder" still records the circles of care and survival programs that allowed the Black telepaths to persist and at least have a chance to fight. I argue the care Barbara gives her students and the care her students mutually invest in Barbara, are a reflection of the circles of care and survival programs found in the history of Black Anarchist organizing.

Barbara sought to provide circles of care and survival programs otherwise beyond the reach of her students. The narrative describes the student Valerie as a "filthy" ten-year-old Black

girl whose afro has been matted with neglect and pulled into a linty ponytail she combs herself. Barbara acknowledges that Valerie's mother is an overworked woman employed by constant night shifts to support her multiple children while Valerie's older sister has struggled and failed to parent Valerie in her mother's absence (Butler, 63). Valerie has an unnamed older brother and a much younger brother named Larry. Larry becomes introduced to the narrative, by vandalizing the book about Harriet Tubman. The story implies that due to limited toys inside of Valerie's home, her mother made Valerie share the text with a toddler that cannot read and would inevitably damage the book (Butler, 64). Barbara extends a home to Valerie and resources she would not otherwise receive. Barbara's support of Valerie, and all of her students, are a reflection of the survival programs and circles of care Black radicals have historically enacted. Saidiya Hartman reminds us in the foreword to *The Nation No Map* that in the "protracted war" of anti-Blackness and the afterlife of slavery, "we have created networks of mutual aid, maroon communities, survival programs, and circles of care" (Hartman, 6). In so many ways, the Black psi community are fugitives in a maroon society, as the organization's violent imposition has communicated the Black telepaths are considered astray from the organization's plantation and control. Black fugitivity and resilience, produced circles of care and survival programs to overcome the violence of white supremacy and to generate spaces that could support Black life.

The history of these survival programs then continued to manifest in other forms of Black radical organizing. One of the best manifestations of the aforementioned ongoing history was found in the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. Anderson provides a historical overview detailing how the Panthers "established community service programs that were there to address the shortcomings and neglect of institutions that were not living up to their supposed purposes."

The Black Panther Party knew the state had long failed and been a consistent antagonist to the Black community. Therefore, the group's operations were informed by leader Huey P. Newton's theory of "intercommunalism." Intercommunalism meant "thinking outside the logic of the states and governments that neglected (or worsened the conditions of) oppressed communities, while at the same time stepping up to meet the basic needs left unattended by that disregard." Anderson also acknowledges that in the enactment of intercommunalism "countering neglect was very gendered labor." Much of the mutual aid was facilitated by Black women who organized for the sake of the party and their homes. Anderson elaborates on the efforts of Black women in the Black Panther Party through Joy James' essay "Framing the Panther: Assata Shakur and Black Female Agency." James argues hundreds of Black women, including Shakur, worked in the Panther Party and facilitated education, free breakfast, medical, and housing programs. James posits women identified members manifested an agency which transformed American politics, while their histories are unfortunately neglected due to popular culture concentrating on icons and elites in the party. Anderson encourages us to acknowledge what substance can be found in studying the survival programs of the Panthers comes from the work enacted by Black women (Anderson, 39). I argue "Childfinder" honors the history of Black women often being the core facilitators of Black survival programs. Barbara creates a mutual aid network for her children that allows even her youngest and most vulnerable pupil Valerie, to still have protection and community after Barbara departs. Further, Barbara also receives mutual aid from her students.

When Barbara decides to leave with the organization, her attackers are supernaturally bludgeoned. All of the organization members fall to the floor unconscious. Barbara uses her psionic abilities to determine her hero was her student, Jordan. Jordan jumps into Barbara's mind to give the following message: "*Hey*. His thought was easy, like his voice. *Why don't you let*

somebody know you in trouble? If we hadn't felt you closing yourself off a minute ago they would have had you and gone before we could do anything." At first Barbara does not respond to Jordan. The teacher becomes paralyzed trying to mask her own fear while also struggling to communicate that her sacrifice is necessary. Jordan speaks in Barbara's mind again, stating, "*You better get out of there now. The organization must know what we did to their pigs. They'll be sending twenty people after you instead of four!"* (Butler, 70). Jordan, a seventeen-year-old Black boy, refuses to allow Barbara to be taken. Although a minor, like the rest of the children, Jordan considers himself mutually responsible for Barbara and struggles to understand her sacrifice. Jordan is joined by Jessie Mae and several other students as a spirited debate breaks out in Barbara's mind. Barbara tells her children that running would be futile. Barbara is already a fugitive that ran away before and the organization will always find her. Jordan insists, "*You don't have to hide from them. There's enough of us to stop them*" (Butler, 71). Barbara gently reveals that Jordan's passion cannot produce the outcome he desires. The children are not strong enough yet. Barbara tells her students, "*I thought I had taught you to look out for yourselves. To do what you had to keep yourselves alive and together and hidden until you're too strong for the organization to touch*" (Butler, 72). Barbara cannot accept the demise of her community. If Barbara remains among the children, they will be endangered. The organization does not know the identities of all Barbara's students, and therefore cannot locate all of the children.

Due to Barbara being the only childfinder, the organization could use her to find the children by force. In order to save the children, Barbara wipes her memories. After surrendering to the organization, Barbara hopes her amnesia and appeasement will buy her pupils enough time to evolve into self-sustaining warriors. I argue the self-sustaining drive Barbara sought to instill in her students, responds to the history of how "Black people have always had to implement

survival programs, which shows quite clearly that we are not supposed to reap even the standard benefits of citizenship" (Anderson, 39). Anderson's argument that survival programs are a reflection of how Black life remains disenfranchised and therefore cannot depend on dominant institutions speaks to the importance of Black autonomous spaces in Black Anarchist organizing. In the text *Anarchism and the Black Revolution: The Definitive Edition,* author Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin argues for "Black Autonomous Politics" or "Black Autonomy." Lorenzo begins explaining Black Autonomy through the history of nonwhite oppression. Lorenzo argues the desperation produced by dual forms of oppression impacting nonwhite workers generates a need for nonwhite radicals to spearhead the revolution. Lorenzo declares BIPOC ("Black, Indigenous, People of Color") communities are living through an aggressive legacy of state violence, and although the white empire may be declining in some regards, the desperation to maintain state power manifests itself in "mass imprisonment of youth of color, racial profiling, degrading poverty and unemployment, repressive anti-terrorist legislation and new wars of conquest" and yet Lorenzo does not feel we have a movement that centers BIPOC needs. Instead, Lorenzo argues BIPOC communities are usually tagged on to external agendas and organizations, which are unconcerned with our specific histories and antiracism. (Lorenzo, 85). Lorenzo asserts in the emerging argument for Black Autonomy that we must "not only demand our "rights" in a Western capitalist society, but fight to build a new world." Lorenzo believes some shared histories of racism, genocide, exploitation, and colonialism across the world could potentially unite people of color on a local level and internationally. Therefore, Lorenzo posits that although Anarchists do not support vanguard political parties, "the reality is that because of the peculiarities of the United States of America's social development and especially racial slavery, African Americans and other peoples of color with a shared history are predisposed to lead at

least the beginning states of a social revolution, thereafter enlisting or being joined by potential allies in the white working class" (Lorenzo, 86). In summary, Lorenzo's frustration with white dominated leadership in political movements, have led him to advocate for autonomous spaces of political organizing lead by and with an agenda that centers the needs of BIPOC communities.

I argue Barbara created a Black autonomous space in "Childfinder" that actively centered the needs of the Black children and empowered them to take responsibility for their political freedom and future. However, before I expand on the aforementioned argument, I would like to discuss Black Autonomy further. Lorenzo expands on his definition of Black Autonomy to clarify the concept should not be confused with Black nationalism. Lorenzo states the term Black Autonomy refers to "all existing peoples of color and not just Africans or the descendants of Africans all over the world" (Lorenzo, 88). I take profound issue with this aspect of Lorenzo's definition. I vehemently disagree with it. I have made a fervent effort throughout this dissertation to emphasize how Blackness has come to be incongruent with humanity to a degree that is not experienced by other communities ontologically. Blackness has a specific distinction in its title, existential utility, and the political consequences that have followed. I will never believe it could be mutually helpful to wholesale collapse Blackness with other identities. I do not believe a diminishment of differences will build better solidarity across the complexity of various communities within and beyond the purview of Blackness.

I acknowledge Blackness has variance and my argument should not be confused with a promotion of organizing on the basis of racial purity. Arguments which support racial purity cannot be untethered from the violent logics which organize and have been forwarded by white supremacist, cis-hetero-partriarchal empire. In the text *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*, Siobhan B. Somerville discusses how the

invention of race, and thus the invention of racial purity, cannot be untethered from the construction of categorical sexuality. Somerville explains how late nineteenth century and early twentieth century European scientists constructed the concepts of whiteness, Blackness, and various other identities through pseudoscience. “Methodologies and iconographies of comparative anatomy attempted to locate discrete physiological markers of difference by which to classify and separate races,” Somerville argues in the chapter “Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body.” Sexologists then appropriated these techniques to argue the homosexual body was anatomically distinct from the “normal body” which was synonymous with the construction of heterosexuality. The medical discourses about sexuality then came to be mired in “cultural anxieties about “mixed” bodies, particularly the mulatto, whose symbolic position as a mixture of black and white bodies was literalized in scientific accounts" (Somerville, 37). Pseudoscience introduced the idea of distinct racial categories and therefore the construction of mixed racial identity. I acknowledge the aforementioned history and political legacy to elaborate on my intentions for honoring and understanding the distinct socio-political construction of Blackness. Black identity as a political reality can absolutely intersect with other non-Black identities. Further, Blackness in the diaspora necessarily demands an understanding of Blackness as chimeric due to legacies of mixing through forced or consensual conditions in histories of colonialism, displacement, chattel slavery, and travel. Therefore, as a diasporic Black American, I do not even consider myself purely Black. However, I do recognize my identity renders me vulnerable to the reality of anti-humanity regardless, as it does for all identifiable Black folx. With that reality in mind, I think we would do a disservice to not acknowledge distinction. I have advocated for organizing around differences in this dissertation. We must honor the differences Blackness presents within and beyond the purview of Blackness.

Therefore, I do believe in organizing in ethical solidarity and building autonomous spaces when dominant groups and institutions are not meeting BIPOC needs. However, I would not call all of these autonomous spaces Black, if all members are not Black identified. In "Childfinder" Barbara happens to build an autonomous zone where all the members are coincidentally Black identified, thus allowing for an opportunity when I am comfortable asserting the reality of a Black autonomous zone.

In "Childfinder" the white psi organization, the dominant and longest institution in the psi community, is outright antagonistic to the aspirations and freedom of the Black telepaths. Therefore, Barbara does not continue to rot in the mansion on Howard Street. Barbara flees from the organization to create a network that can truly meet her needs and provide a mutually enriching community. Barbara's refusal to remain the organization's token childfinder and Black telepath, emphasizes the radical potential that manifests for the Black community when we are organizing for ourselves. Barbara is able to provide education, care, and support to Black children who are otherwise neglected due the overworked schedule of a low-income wage economy stealing their parents while sustaining their families on the barest resources. "Childfinder" resists white supremacy on multiple levels. There is the speculator resistance to the organization when their direct aggression manifests itself. However, "Childfinder" resists white supremacy by also asserting we can build worlds and communities beyond its authority and support. I argue "Childfinder" records the survival programs and circles of care among the Black psi community to further assert the power of Black resistance and the Black liberation struggle. "Childfinder" as a Black radical work of fiction directly impacts me as a Black speculative fiction writer. Ultimately, "Childfinder" can be considered an example of Afrofuturism in practice. "Childfinder" generates challenging critiques, questions, and conversations about our

historical modernity and the world's that might follow. "Childfinder" highlights the present mechanisms of world making in our current society including anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and humanity.

Throughout this chapter I have worked to showcase how Octavia E. Butler's work has the radical potential to bridge the concepts of Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, and Black Anarchism. I will continue to forward Butler's legacy in my own creative projects which will be the subsequent focus of this dissertation. The following chapter will focus on my short story "What You Pass For." Just like how Butler first began to write "Childfinder" in the Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Workshop, I first began "What You Pass For" in Clarion, as well. I won the Octavia E. Butler Memorial Scholarship in 2015 to attend Clarion. "What You Pass For" uses magical realism to explore the modern emergence of whiteness in the United States. The story follows the life of an unnamed African American man living in the Jim Crow era who has the power to paint the mixed and ambiguous phenotypes of African Americans white to provide an entrance into passing. Passing was a political practice for survival, in which some African Americans who appeared to be of European descent passed themselves off as white citizens in order to achieve social mobility, access to education, housing, and often basic resources for Black family members that could not access the privileges of whiteness. The narrative centers on a magical painting brush that can make some African Americans racially white and is inspired by the life of the Black ballerina Janet Collins. Upon acceptance into the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Collins was required to paint her skin white to perform. "What You Pass For" explores a timeline where a woman similar to her accepted the conditions through a magic that illustrates the violence and madness that come with being integrated into an innately unethical identity in white supremacy. I developed "What You Pass For" in the Clarion Science

Fiction and Fantasy Writers workshop, when I became the third Black woman to win the Octavia E. Butler Memorial Scholarship in 2015. “What You Pass For” represents Afrofuturism in its genre of magical realism, while also bridging the theories of Afro-pessimism and Black Anarchism in its politics. I argue “What You Pass For” is written in the legacy of Octavia E. Butler’s work.

Chapter 2: "What You Pass For" an Anti-History

I wrote "What You Pass For" in the Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Workshop in 2015, after winning the Octavia E. Butler Memorial Scholarship. The Octavia E. Butler Memorial Scholarship, enacted after Butler's death in 2006, funds the attendance of one non-white person a year to attend the workshop. The intention behind the fellowship was to ensure the presence of someone writing not only racially diverse fiction, but also critically engaged fiction. The Carl Brandon Society founded in 1999 at the feminist science fiction convention WisCon in Madison, Wisconsin, chooses the winners and is populated by past recipients of the scholarship, including myself (carlbrandon.org). The expensive and exclusive workshop is one the most highly esteemed experiences in the literary world. Cohorts are often composed of international students. The original title of "What You Pass For" was initially "What the Ivory Fiction Makes Us Forget." However, I believe the current title matches my political intentions far more. "What You Pass For" was published in 2018 in the magazine of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*. The story then received a notable mention from esteemed anthologists and editor Ellen Datlow on her 2019 list of Best Horror of the Year. In the following chapter, I will argue "What You Pass For" represents an anti-history which reveals how both Blackness and whiteness, in important anti-related ways, are structural positions attached to violence. Therefore, "What You Pass For" represents a form of Afrofuturism in practice. "What You Pass For" generates challenging critiques, questions, and conversations about our historical modernity and the world's that might follow. "What You Pass For" highlights the present mechanisms of world making in our current society including citizenship, the nation state, anti-Blackness, white supremacy, humanity, and the production of history.

"What You Pass For" follows an unnamed Black male elder living in the Jim Crow era of the United States. The central plot revolves around magical realism in the form of a fence painting brush that can be activated by the unnamed Black elder into a device which can paint mixed race and ambiguous phenotypes of Black descent into an appearance that passes for whiteness. The act of racial passing has a long history in the United States. Passing was a political practice for survival, usually occurring when some African Americans who appeared to be of European descent passed themselves off as white citizens in order to achieve social mobility, access to housing, education and often resources for Black community members that could not access the privileges of whiteness. In the *The Boston Revie*w article "The Burdened Virtue of Passing" writer Meena Krishnamurthy recounts the historical and fatal pressures which pushed people to pass. Krishnamurthy details how during 1906 in Atlanta Black American Walter White's home was set on fire. In the midst of a race riot, Walter was able to escape unharmed due to the fact "he was light skinned, with blonde hair and blue eyes; people mistook him for white." The plot of White's passing would continue to thicken as he became the secretary of the national NAACP in 1931 and served in his position until his death in 1955. Later, White released his own autobiography *A Man Called White* in 1948 and chose to reveal his Blackness. White's choice would continue to be an extension of his activism as "publicizing this information--in W.E.B. Du Bois' magazine, *Crisis*, for example, where White's story was a "mini-sensation"--became essential to the NAAP's campaign against lynching." Over the course of his life, White would use white passing privilege to interview white people about lynching. White's ability to pass allowed him to gather inside information and to "develop theories of mob psychology and mob violence" (bostonreview.net). White's story highlights how passing was at

once an act of assimilation and a performance of personhood which could yield radical results, when approached with the intention of subverting the political system.

"What You Pass For" centers on the power of a Black man with a magical fence painting brush that can make visibly mixed African Americans white and is inspired by the life of the Black ballerina Janet Collins. Upon acceptance into the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Collins was required to paint her skin white to perform (mobballet.org) "What You Pass For" explores a timeline where a Black ballerina named Dacey accepted the conditions Collins denied. Dacey, in an act of defiance, desperation and rage, chooses to paint herself white with a magic that illustrates the violence and madness that comes with being integrated into an innately unethical position in white supremacy.

Dacey, like Walter White, seeks to be subversive in her act of racial passing to some extent. When Dacey's Black descent becomes known through the knowledge of her African American father, her ballet company orders Dacey to paint her skin white to perform. A condition that is compounded with further humiliation, because Dacey already passes for white. The story is told first person, through the Black painter's perspective. On the first page the painter declares, "Dacey Jones already looked white, at least to me." He goes on to further describe her as a "faded seashell with the color sucked out." The painter first discovers Dacey dancing in a nightclub and he recounts how she "was a faint flapper near the rich, warm, mocha sistas that two-stepped with her, and she had none of the thick roundness common to our people. Her hair was flat and her face was simple like a marble Roman at a museum" (West, 1-2). At first, the painter refuses to do his magic on Dacey because he does not believe it will work. The painter tells Dacey, "But you already white." He goes on to say, "This brush only paints out blackness, and it can't do that if there's no blackness to be seen." However, Dacey still demands

to be painted. Dacey explains how performing in the ballet has been a fundamental dream throughout her life. Dacey's impassioned dedication to her art, impacts the painter as he admits, "the passion flaming in her eyes was so bright and steady that it reminded me of my painted black angels and the fact I knew what it was like to have art you'd even live in an old shack on cans of beans for" (West, 6). Further, Dacey elaborates on why she wants to appear even whiter. Dacey confesses painful awareness of the company's pursuit to dehumanize her. Dacey argues, when discussing the greasepaint the company asked her to wear, "You don't understand, sir. Now I'm an outsider. Part of the stage but not part of the company, and that greasepaint is just an insult, there to remind me of my place, far, far, far below everyone else--even the stagehands." Dacey cannot accept this, perhaps because in her passing privilege she was so close to not experiencing this rejection at all, but now that she has Dacey decides to wage war. On the ballet company and herself. The narrative states, "Now Dacey's voice went low like she had her own magic and she was whispering a hex over herself. She said, "I want something harsher than greasepaint. I want to cut they eyes with the whiteness. I want to smack it in they face" (West, 5). Dacey's determination to beat white people at their own game then comes with ruinous consequences that also highlights the subversive nature of passing narratives.

Dacey's whiteness ultimately has violent consequences for her life even as she gets to maintain her occupation within the ballet. However, the story goes beyond Dacey's own personal tragedy and highlights the overall tragedy of whiteness and white supremacy. The revelations "What You Pass For" provides about the historical construction of whiteness, through a speculative vehicle, then connects the work to both Afrofuturism and Afro-pessimism. Afrofuturists are practitioners who "redefine culture and notions of blackness for today and the future. Both an artistic aesthetic and a framework for critical theory, Afrofuturism combines

elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magical realism with non-Western beliefs. In some cases, it's a total reenvisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques" (Womanck, Kindle Location 119). "What You Pass for" is a speculative story, operating specifically within the genre of magical realism and historical fiction, that re-envisions the past to redefine culture and notions of Blackness for today and the future. "What You Pass For" then intersects with Afro-pessimism as it offers an anti-history of white construction from the perspective of the anti-human, challenging notions of both Blackness and whiteness with its cultural critique.

In the article "An Afropessimist, Antidisciplinary Rejoinder to History, Its Human, and Its Anti-Blackness" David Ponton III argues "Black history is not quite the same as history in Black. The former's commitment is to the constant reconstitution of the Human and its liberal tale of progress; the latter's commitment is to the Human's demise" (Ponton, 243). In the last chapter of the dissertation about Octavia E. Butler's short story "Childfinder," I detailed how Afro-pessimists argue history has been an instrument to propagate the myth of the human category as a biological fact, rather than an excluding socio-political construction, which denies the existence of the anti-human in order to forward the idea that humanity is all encompassing and fixed for salient progress. Afro-pessimists challenge the aforementioned legacy and reveal its operations in the discipline of history. Afro-pessimists argue Blackness as a structural position, not an identity, remains effaced from history in important manners. "History, limited as it is by its commitment to the Human, traffics in language like resistance and agency and is made coherent by relying on assumptions of abstract liberalism--we are all created equally; we all have gender; we, indeed, are an indivisible *we*" posits Ponton III. (Ponton III, 249). History must pretend all subjects in a liberal civil society are able to access civil liberties and legible

subjectivity with attendant agency to some extent. The aforementioned elements are the lie the human category conceals itself with to cover how it chews on the antihuman for its true subsentence. Ponton III argues, "Afropessimism is not making an ontological claim that the people who have been made Black through racist violence are themselves inert, invaluable, without life, and without vibrancy. Instead, it identifies that within the ontology of this world the Black was inaugurated by the process and institution of racial slavery. Therefore, as a structural position, not an identity or culture, the Black remains locked in an unabating antagonism with the Human. This antagonism is not a matter of choice, and to impute agency to the Black would be to ignore that the antagonism is an antirelation, allowing for the redemption of the Human because it is viewed as merely in conflict with rather than vampiric of the Slave" (Ponton, III). The human (re)constitutes itself through the violent (re)production of the anti-human. Therefore, Ponton declares the discipline of history refuses to face "the full extent of the Human's depravity and parasitism" (Ponton III, 251). "What You Pass For" highlights the depravity and parasitism of the human, particularly in its violent relationship to the anti-human. In this regard, "What You Pass For" begins its process as an anti-history as it seeks to execute the notion of the human category as biological fact and inclusive liberal personhood.

The anti-history of "What You Pass for" draws our attention to the fact "violence did not just compel Black subjectivity into existence, it constituted the Black body itself" (Ponton III, 248). Blackness as a structural position is fundamentally defined by its vulnerability to violence with impunity from the liberal subjects that can access the human category and by the violent basis of its existence as a structural exemption to the human condition. However, I will argue "What You Pass For" also reveals that whiteness itself is importantly compelled into existence through violence, as well. Through its subject position as an existential parasite to the anti-

human and any reality that could be articulated as a successful, inclusive, democracy. “What You Pass For” begins redefining perceptions of whiteness and Blackness through its descriptions of the painter’s work, particularly in the juxtaposition of the people he paints and the black angels he illustrates. When the painter paints Dacey white he states, “I didn’t know the unnaturalness this could do.” He goes on to say, “it near blinded me when I dragged the white paint from my magic brush through her strands and made the yella color come up and swallow her head in an unimaginable, unseeable shade. More harsh than the fire from the sun. Then as I globbed the paint on her eyes, it did the same thing, making her sight more blue than the fearful depths of the horizon. And last, after she shimmied out of her dress, I smeared it on her naked skin, and it ate all her pinkness out till she was empty” (West, 6). The descriptions of whiteness and specifically being compelled into white identity gets aggressively more violent as the story progresses. When the painter begins painting Europeans, who at the historial time had an ambivalent relationship to whiteness, the descriptions become more dire. When the painter works on an Italian janitor employed by Dacey’s company the story states, “he came out even whiter than Dacey. So white he vomited for an hour after I was done. Spewed colorful, textured, mosaic waves all over my shack so violently it shook his poor little ghost body all round like a fire hose. And it wasn’t Christian, so it was only right that it killed all my black angels, like acid, ‘sides the fresh ones drying outdoors” (West, 10). Whiteness as an induction is highly corrosive within the narrative, to both the subject becoming white and to the relations that whiteness is acted upon.

Continuing to elaborate on the aforementioned violent white imagery, the story expands on this vision with the painting of further clients. After the Italian janitor visits the painter, many more particularly Eastern European immigrants visit the painter. The next clients include, “Another Italian janitor, a Lithuanian stagehand, a Czechoslovakian dancer, a Ukrainian face

painter, and then they friends following in a long tide of funny-speaking, fresh-faced immigrants right off the boat and with stories about hellish factories, horrible living conditions, and little hope for the future." The painter feels comfortable painting his Eastern European clients due to a crumb of sympathy, a large dose of material need, and a knowledge that racial passing did not have the same impact on their communities as it did to African Americans. It is important the painter asserts he feels these clients are already white and that the process "doesn't usually break they families like it do with us. They whole lots can be painter together." Next, the narrative describes the apprehension the painter feels after working on the immigrant children. The painter admits "after I was told to paint the children with extra-thick coats, I couldn't deny the violence it was doing. After I finished the five-year-old son of my first Italian man, the child was so blond he was bleeding. His forehead peeling off under the weight of his new gold hair. Causing a peep of his wet, red brain to show as his pappy was so just so happy his hair wasn't brown anymore" (West, 10). The painter describes a child bleeding almost fatally from the transition into whiteness. The scene is fundamentally anti-Black as the parent would even risk his child's own life to remove his brown hair. A trait not associated with hyper idealized Anglo-Saxon visions of whiteness. The anti-Black violence, of disavowing all associations with Blackness or anything dark, here be the child's brown hair, in order to enter whiteness displays how ascension into whiteness is also defined by violence. Why do we always attribute the violence to the one that is bludgeoned and not the one with blood on their hands? I wrote the aforementioned section of "What You Pass For" to try to illustrate the following analysis from the article "Irish-American Workers and White Racial Formation in the Antebellum United States" by David Roediger. Roediger offers an historical overview which details the Irish American induction into whiteness. A transition paid for with the blood of Black flesh murdered with impunity. Roedigers's article

tells a violent story of white emergence as the article details how Irish white racial formation cannot be untethered from anti-Black violence, as its intended antagonism and anti-relation with Blackness bought the Irish-American ticket to whiteness. A story which reflects the larger narrative of human parasitism and white racial formation.

In the following section, I will argue Roediger's article demonstrates how "whites gain their coherence by knowing what they are not." In the article and interview "The Position of the Unthought" by Saidiay V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson, Wilderson argues, "There is tremendous diversity on the side of whiteness and tremendous conflict between white men and white women, between Jews and gentiles, and between classes, but that conflict, even in its articulation, has a certain solidarity. And I think that solidarity comes from a near or far relation to the black body or bodies. We give the nation its coherence because we're its underbelly" (Hartman, Wilderson, 187). I argue Roediger's case study on Irish-American white racial formation sheds an important light on the overall history of white racial formation, the white tensions and ultimate white unification Wilderson describes. As an act of seeking white coherence, the emerging would-be white subject must enact flamboyant violence on the Black body in order to bring itself successfully into white self-concept. To ensure whiteness, Roediger argues that Irish Americans went on a brutal campaign to specifically sever any connection between Irish Americans and Blackness. Roediger states, the connection between Blackness and Irish-American communities stemmed in part from "good reasons--environmental and historical, not biological--for comparing African-Americans and the Irish. The two groups often lived side by side in the teeming slums of American cities of the 1830s. They both did America's hard work, especially in domestic service and the transportation industry. Both groups were poor and often vilified. Both had experienced oppression and been wrenched from a homeland" (Roediger,

134). However, the connections did not breed solidarity, as Roediger details how Irish immigrants took a leading role in "the unprecedentedly murderous attacks on Blacks during the 1863 Draft Riot in New York City, Irishmen had developed a terrible record of mobbing free Blacks on and off the job--so much so that Blacks called the brickbats often hurled at them 'Irish confetti.'" Roediger next quotes a statement from 1865 from British worker James D. Burn. Roediger states, "Burn observed, "As a general rule, the people in the North have a lively feeling of dislike to men of colour, but it is in the Irish residents that they have, and will continue to have, their most formidable enemies: between these two races there can exist no bond of union except such as exists between the hind [deer] and the panther" (Roediger, 136). I believe Burn's quote is incredibly important due to the binary being presented as a relationship between a predator and prey. Irish Americans began their feast on the anti-human, through physical slaughter, due to it being difficult to "to get out from under the burden of doing unskilled work in a society that identified such work and (some craft jobs) as 'nigger work.' If they were to sever this connection, the Irish could not just achieve a favorable labor market position vis-a-vis Blacks. They had to drive all Blacks, and if possible their memories, from the places where the Irish labored" (Roediger, 150). To generate white self concept, Irish Americans had to disavow all associations with Blackness even to a massacring pitch.

Therefore, it has been a longstanding historical myth that the Black and Irish-American tension came from labor competition. Roediger argues, "to go from the fact that Irish workers really fought with Blacks over jobs on occasion to the proposition that Irish racism was really a cover for job competition is an economic determinist misstep that cuts off important parts of the past." Roediger declares, "By and large, free Blacks were not effective competitors for jobs with the Irish." Before Roediger makes this omission, he elaborates stating, "In most cities, even

when we consider only unskilled work, the Irish had far more German American competitors than Black ones" (Roediger, 147). Therefore, Irish Americans practiced extreme anti-Black violence not due to some kind of potentially equal job market struggle, but as an intended existential hierarchical assertion of subjectivity and value not inherent to the Black. Roediger argues "Irish Americans instead treasured their whiteness, as entitling them to both political rights and to jobs" (Roediger, 136). By investing in whiteness, Irish immigrants ultimately sped up their assimilation into whiteness. Roediger notes historians have observed, "The emphasis of Irish-Americans on the common whiteness they wished to be recognized as sharing with other Americans may, as Frank Murray argues, have sped up their assimilation" (Roediger, 138). Therefore, reductionist arguments about economic competition, which simultaneously disrespects Black flesh by assuming and illogically projecting the subjectivity of the worker onto Black flesh, do not retain coherence when analyzing Irish-American anti-Black violence. To become white means to disavow Blackness, thus demanding a ritual of violence to generate the anti-human. But also the human category itself.

The emphasis on the violence which defines the human category's emergence manifests in the aggressively violent descriptions of becoming or just being white in "What You Pass For." When the painter encounters Dacey for the last time the narrative states, "The night wind blew hair out of her bun and the yella strands whipped her face mercilessly" (West, 11). I made this thematic decision because we often lose our focus on whiteness, when the ritual of anti-Black violence is enacted. The violence becomes attributed solely to the Black as its existential scaffolding, because it does not attach itself to whiteness with enough hyper visibility in our analyses. Again, I ask: Why do we always attribute the violence to the one that is bludgeoned and not the one with blood on their hands? Therefore, I decided not to depict too much explicitly

anti-Black violence. I did that because, I also refuse to be a member of the Black torture porn mill. I am not interested morally, mentally, or intellectually in forwarding this ongoing legacy across much art and media. I also believe, like Afro-pessimists, these images actively serve to sustain white and nonblack psychic health in manners that are too disturbing for me to encourage, although I think they are important to analyze. However, I do include one scene that alludes to the mundane and yet fantastic anti-Black violence which is required to come into white self concept or proximity with it.

Intentionally taking place during the fourth of July, the painter encounters his first ambivalently white client, the Italian janitor. The painter accidentally tripped into the janitor and his son while walking home from the theater. The narrative states, "They reeked of earth and their blond curls was tangled with blades of grass. But the boy's hairline had healed up and they wore muddy clothes like an all-American pair. Complete with a catcher's mitt in the boy's hand and a whopping bat in the father's grip." The painter states he is unable to speak as he didn't know what to say and because the only indication he had of their former selves manifested in an instinctual feeling. However, the janitor reacts first. The narrative states, "He pushed the bat in my chest. It bore down on me with the weight of his new fist. He cut his used-to-be-brown eyes at me and said: "Get out of my way, nigger." His boy watched like he was still getting coached on the game. I stumbled away. 'Cause for this to work, I know they can't know me as a man" (West, 12). The previously quoted scene is the only scene I allow of historically conventional and direct anti-Black violence enacted to generate white self-concept. I did this to acknowledge the ongoing and traditional mundane hyper violence humans must do to the antihuman to conceive of their self-concept. Which is why the painter states in regards to his clients transition into whiteness, "I know they can't know me as a man." However, that disavow which generates

the social and political construct of personhood for the subjects which kill for and are made legibly white through anti-Black violence, therefore frames the white, and the attendant position of personhood, as a structural position born from and sustained by violence. I also purposefully situated the narrative at a historical point in which the Irish, specifically, had already transitioned into comfortable whiteness. The end of the narrative states, "Them Irish blended in nicely before I even started painting. And the rest gonna keep blending, too. They have to. It's the only way to keep this place up. 'Cause you see they had to blend to kill for this country and then do it again to build everything off our backs. You know what I'm saying, you know what I mean. Putting on whiteface is a way of life to get things as you unsee people and then unsee and unsee" (West, 13). The white structural position is born and sustained by violence. This is why the white structural position is described as vampiric to the Black. However, the white structural position must at once stab and then efface the violence from their own direct self-concept, otherwise the liberal script of inclusive and progressive personhood would disintegrate.

The blending described by the painter works to illustrate the ultimate white solidarity discussed by Frank B. Wilderson III in the article and interview "The Position of the Unthought." As stated before, Wilderson argues whiteness has a particular solidarity which derives from "a near or far relation to the black body or bodies" (Hartman, Wilderson, 187). The ability to exploit and then "unsee" the impact of that violence was written to convey how the activation of white racial formation necessitates wanton violence, along with a simultaneous disavow of the dynamic. Saidya Hartman argues that the notion that racism is a misunderstanding operates "as if once Americans know how the wealth of the country was acquired, they'll decide that black people are owed something. My God! Why would you assume that! Like housing segregation is an accident! I think that logic of "if they only knew otherwise"

is about the disavowal of political will" (Hartman, Wilderson, 198). I used the phrase "unsee" to simultaneously illustrate the violent liberal amnesia which also sustains the human category.

Further, the line describing a need to blend to kill for the country and then build everything off the implied backs of Black flesh can be used to understand the violence of white racial formation in the essay "After the Frontier: Separation and Absorption in US Indian Policy" by Patrick Wolfe. Wolfe argues techniques including allotment and blood quanta were ultimately seeking native elimination and further supremacy of the settler colonial populace. Wolfe argues, "as a technique of elimination, assimilation is more effective than either homicide or a spatial device. Unlike homicide, it does not jeopardize settler colonial order, since the policy is invariably presented, in philanthropic terms, as offering Natives the same opportunities as are available to Whites" (Wolfe, 34). The supposed philanthropic terms were highly imposing and oppressive as they ultimately sought to wrest bodies into whiteness to further disrupt native sovereignty and claim to land in order to clear it for the settler colonial project. Coercive and corrosive white racial formation has demanded the elimination of identity to important degrees in order to pass into the solidarity of personhood. The solidarity of personhood of course also hoards all access to functional civil liberties and civil legibility thus ushering in the continued perpetuation of anti-Blackness. Sylvia Wytner reminds us that in the emergence of the North American settler colonial project newly incoming white and non-Black people would need to put "visible distance between themselves and the Black population group (in effect, claiming 'normal' human status by distancing themselves from the group that is still made to occupy the nadir, 'nigger' rung of being human within the terms of our present ethnoclass" (262, Wynter). Therefore, white identity creates a profoundly nightmarish hierarchy in which all identities are

pressured to feast upon and disavow the anti-human in order to have proximity to personhood and therefore citizenship.

In the text *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, Ian Haney Lopez provides an important historical overview about how whiteness became synonymous with citizenship. Lopez details how incoming populations sought citizenship in the United States through the basis of white identity in prerequisite cases, two of which reached the Supreme Court in the early 1920s. White identity became essential to citizenship due to naturalization laws which only truly recognized white citizenry. Although Black Americans would be recognized as citizens after the *Dred Scott* decision was nullified by the Civil Rights Act of 1866, after the Civil War, incoming populations would not argue for their citizenship on the basis of Blackness (Lopez, 29). Black Americans were clearly disenfranchised within the national hierarchy and thus whiteness became the only clear vehicle for nationally recognized protection and personhood. Lopez argues the prerequisite cases, "produced illuminating published decisions that document the efforts of would-be citizens from around the world to establish their Whiteness at law. Applicants from Hawaii, China, Japan, Burma and the Philippines, as well as all mixed-race applicants, failed in their arguments. Conversely, courts ruled that applicants from Mexico and Armenia were "white," but vacillated over the Whiteness of petitioners from Syria, India, and Arabia" (Lopez, 1). The history of whiteness gatekeeping civil liberties and civil resources, while purposefully leaving life beyond these borders of protection within the nation, then reveals for Lopez a necessity for whiteness to recognize its self-concept operates as antagonistic to the overall collective and breeds antagonism throughout it. "Whiteness is the source and maintaining force of the systems of meaning that position some as superior and others as subordinate. In this violent context, Whites should renounce their privileged racial status" agues Lopez. Further,

Lopez posits white self-concept should choose its own termination "not simply out of guilt or any sense of self-deprecation, but because the edifice of Whiteness stands at the heart of racial inequality in America." Therefore, Lopez declares, "To move from society's present injustices to any future of racial equality will require the disassembly of Whiteness" in the interest of social justice (Lopez, 23). Whiteness as a violent and antagonistic structural position then is duly called demonic at the end of "What You Pass For."

"What You Pass For" operates an anti-history seeking the demise of the mythic biological and progressive human category, to reveal the vampiric parasite, otherwise known as white personhood and citizenship, disrupting all collective relations due to its existential need to subsist on violent hierarchy. "What You Pass For" employs thematic language to emphasize that if the foundational basis for the anti-human is violence, therefore the same basis applies for the human. As the human category itself requires violent antagonism with those that fall beyond the purview of the human category, in degrees or absolutes, in order to exist. Whiteness, as detailed by Lopez, has an ongoing history of actively undermining and contradicting its own supposed desires for inclusive, liberal, democracy and must do so to sustain self-concept. Therefore whiteness is a threat to the ideals it espouses and all that come into its orbit, even white people. Toni Morrison once famously said in regards to white self-concept, "...if you can only be tall because somebody is on their knees, then you have a serious problem. And my feeling is that white people have a very, very serious problem and they should start thinking about what they can do about it. Take me out of it." In so many regards, "What You Pass For" seeks to illustrate Morrison's quote and displays the fact that white people do indeed have a problem at the core of their racial formation, structural position, and self-concept. I agree with Morrison, in that I am not convinced the race issue is about me. It's not about the Black, so much as it's about the

human; the parasite. I'm just the host. In the words of my character, "if we weren't here, brotha, they woulda invented us" (West, 12). When discussing the anti-human and the human, we often discuss one as the catalyst and the other as the crime, when they are both crimes. Therefore to illustrate the crime of whiteness, the human, and the citizen I wrote "What You Pass For." I sought to display Morrison's observation of whiteness that if "I take your race away, and there you are, all strung out. And all you got is your little self, what is that? What are you without racism?" (esquire.com). "What You Pass For" proves, as we know historically, that white self-concept creates a catastrophically interdependent identity. An inherent fragility due to its core axiom being domination. Whiteness is the opposite of self-sufficient as it is obsessed with generating and being affirmed by its conceptual opposites to prove its own self-definition. "What You Pass For" strings whiteness out revealing a deeply frayed and unsustainable self-concept.

"What You Pass For" then proves citizenship is not a faithful place to lay investments for the distribution of rights or the enactment of justice. "Citizenship, easily granted and easily withheld, is a tenuous concept on which to hang social privileges such as the right to attend school or to receive medical care" argues Lopez. Further, Lopez posits citizenship "is made even more untenable as a basis for social distinctions when one understands, as the prerequisite cases powerfully demonstrate, that citizenship easily serves as a proxy for race" (Lopez, 26). The mixed-race characters who are painted white in "What You Pass For" then "sat at any lunch counter they wanted and drank from any water fountain they wished" represented how functional citizenship has always been intimately linked to race (West, 7). Therefore, I argue "What Pass For" also represents a Black Anarchist text which interrogates the practices of the nation state to reveal how citizenship cannot be untethered from white supremacy in the United States. "What You Pass For" deeply encourages readers to divest from investments in the demonic category of

personhood and legible civil inclusion. Further, Black Anarchist Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin reminds us that in North America, "the white government and political system were created for the enslavement and exploitation of the labor of Africans, the destruction of the Native peoples already on the land, and domination of other peoples of color. It was a colonial regime for white supremacy from inception" (Ervin, 79). Citizenship exists as an anti-relation to so many communities in the United States, particularly when they fall beyond the white settler colonial populace. However, even within the white settler colonial populace we know citizenship does not provide people a stable existence or any means to erect a successful democracy and a community truly concerned with collective care. Therefore, "What You Pass For" represents a form of Afrofuturism in practice. "What You Pass For" generates challenging critiques, questions, and conversations about our historical modernity and the world's that might follow. "What You Pass For" highlights the present mechanisms of world making in our current society including citizenship, the nation state, anti-Blackness, white supremacy, humanity, and the production of history.

"What You Pass For" then begins to foreshadow the work I will continue to forward in the next chapter of this dissertation through the production of my Black comixs. In the Introduction Chapter, I explained how Deborah Elizabeth Whaley theorizes a comix as the work of Black underground comic makers who call into question the idea of blackness, the process of nation making, and the cultural politics of difference (Whaley, 204). I first argued that Octavia E. Butler's unfinished screenplay "Bound Slave" could be read as a Black comix. In the following chapter, I continue to forward Butler's legacy as I analyze my last two creative projects. The Black comixs "Misadventures of Selma" and "ACAB: a comic" represent my forwarding of Butler's legacy as I continue to interrogate the politics of race, nation building, civil society, and

the elusive protection of the human category. I also argue in the following chapter that "Misadventures of Selma" and "ACAB" continue to bridge the concepts of Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism and Black Anarchism as both works critically engage with Blackness, the process of nation making, and how the cultural politics of difference can simultaneously be nefarious and radical when we are willing to consider the transformation of society.

Chapter 3: Afrofuturism in Practice

Few people know Octavia Estelle Butler, famed Black speculative fiction writer, loved comics. Comic books were controversial in Butler's childhood. In an interview Butler revealed as a kid she "lived on comics." Until one day, when Butler wasn't home, her mother ripped all of the books in half. However, Butler held no animosity toward her mom. She emphasized her mother's conduct had been expected and socially encouraged. Butler said she suspected her experience would be familiar to anyone growing up when she did, because the social consensus was that comic books were "supposed to rot your mind" (Canavan, 253). But Butler resisted this vision of comics throughout her entire life, because she considered comics and sequential art important forms of cultural production, on the same spectrum with literature as modes of Black speculative imagining and what is now called Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism has been an ongoing movement in which Black people use multiple forms of culture to speculate on and reshape interconnections among the future, present and past.

Butler championed comics and sequential art as principal influences on her early imagination, on par with the impact of sf film and prose. As I discussed in the Introduction chapter of the dissertation, Butler publicly advocated for comics, even at high profile universities like MIT. At an MIT forum, Butler advocated for the utility of comics, declaring, "I am alarmed by adults who say to little children, "Oh my God, I don't want my children reading comic books." Butler argued canonically sanctioned or "enlightened literature" often "bores the crap out of kids" because the works were not written for them. Butler contended comics were a great recommendation for young people, because what mattered most was supporting "anything that gets them into reading" (Canavan, 256). Butler's investment in comics and the subsequent impact of comics upon her work are an important and underdeveloped site of study especially in relation to Butler's Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism as a genre challenges traditional notions of

knowledge production and Butler's advocacy of comics falls in line with what I call an Afrofuturist practice. As I discussed in the introduction chapter, I define an Afrofuturist practice as a performance or text which uses art, in mediums of literature or visual works, to generate critical world making. Both my comics and my literature seek to utilize art to generate challenging critiques, questions, and conversations about our historical modernity and the world's that might follow. Each of my creative works highlight the present mechanisms of world making in our current society including racial capitalism, the nation state, citizenship, anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and humanity.

My definition of an Afrofuturist practice, as I discussed in the Introduction chapter, has been informed by Diana Taylor and Jose Munoz's definitions of performance. Diana Taylor argues performance "functions as a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis" (xvii, Taylor). Put another way, Taylor states, "by taking performance seriously as a system of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge, performance studies allows us to expand what we understand by "knowledge." By seeing performance as knowledge Taylor "decenters the historic role of writing introduced by Conquest" (16-17, Taylor). Historically, colonizers intentionally made a hierarchy in which existence, humanity, and modernity were framed through the privilege of writing. Further, practices of institutional racism in the Americas sought to keep the privilege of writing from people of color. By challenging the merit of writing in our studies of knowledge, Taylor argues we can resist this ongoing colonial practice and recognize multiple forms of other knowledge production, particularly in the Americas.

I argue Butler's advocacy of comics was an Afrofuturist practice acknowledging knowledge production outside of the traditional text. Although comics do incorporate text, comic making is a predominantly visual performance or practice. Butler's advocacy of comics in part

expresses an Afrofuturist practice, as many Afrofuturists have used comics, music, theater, and other embodied, performative, and extra-literary mediums to generate knowledge production about Blackness, history, and time. Butler recognized comics as a generative place for education, advocacy, and expression. Afrofuturist comic artists, including myself, have acted upon the ripe potential in the medium of comics as a way to promote Black education, advocacy, and expression. However, an Afrofuturist practice does not end here, at merely challenging the written literary text or the ideological and historical structures that privileged canonical literary knowledge production in the first place. An Afrofuturist practice also opens up new possibilities for what Jose Munoz calls world making.

Jose Munoz argues, "minoritarian performance labors to make worlds—worlds of transformative politics and possibilities. Such performance engenders worlds of ideological potentiality that alter the present and map out a future." Munoz posits that performance has tremendous power. Power that allows performance, in both theatrical and everyday rituals, to produce alternate views of the world (Munoz, 320). The power of a world making practice can be found at the site of a disidentificatory performance. A disidentificatory performance intentionally refuses what the majoritarian culture has defined as "real." Disidentificatory performances embody strategies of "iteration and reiteration" as they "deform and re-form the world." The process of reiteration then generates worlds by engaging with the canonical definition of the "real" or the accepted world, to establish the foundation for "oppositional counter publics" (Munoz, 322). Further, in Munoz's study of disidentificatory identity performances, Munoz concentrates on "identities-in-difference." Munoz argues "identities-in-difference emerge from a failed interpellation within the dominant sphere. Their emergence is predicated on their ability to disidentify with the mass public and instead, through this

disidentification, contribute to the function of a counterpublic sphere." Munoz considers "minoritarian subjects" and "people of color/queers of color" to be identities-in-difference (Munoz, 33). I argue Butler as a Black speculative fiction practitioner has operated as one of many identities-in-difference to advocate for comics. Butler's engagement with comics produces a disidentificatory performance. A literal act, ritual, in the committed advocacy of comics, even publicly, at a time when their support was controversial. Butler's advocacy of comics demands an oppositional counter public where comics can be a generative way to invite young people into reading and education, rather than a process that only rots the mind. Butler's refusal to discount comics as a site barren of knowledge production, challenges or deforms canonical sites of knowledge production in its challenge of them, while also reforming the concept by including comics as a new or another site for knowledge production.

Butler's engagement with superhero logics in her fiction also embodies an Afrofuturist practice that encourages a disidentificatory performance. Butler engages in and refuses traditional superhero logics in order to generate an oppositional counter public centering Afrofuturist superheroes. As I argued in the second chapter of the dissertation about Butler's short story "Childfinder," Butler has made an effort to include visions of oppositional superheroism in her work. The predominantly black, and historically marginalized characters in Butler's Patternist series opposed the traditional superhero logics and empowered populations typically excluded from rhetorics of privilege, master races, and special gifts (Canavan, 271). I argue Butler's Afrofuturist practice, manifesting in Afrofuturist stories, that refuse dominant comic book conventions, are central to my dissertation and to me as a scholar and practitioner of speculative fiction and comics.

Further, in the Introduction chapter, I explained how Deborah Elizabeth Whaley theorizes a comix as the work of Black underground comic makers who call into question the idea of blackness, the process of nation making, and the cultural politics of difference (Whaley, 204). I first argued that Octavia E. Butler's unfinished screenplay "Bound Slave" could be read as a Black comix and thus an Afrofuturist practice which uses art to generate critical world making. In this chapter, I continue to forward Butler's legacy as I analyze my last two creative projects. The Black comixs "Misadventures of Selma" and "ACAB: a comic" represent my forwarding of Butler's legacy, in my own Afrofuturist practice where I use art to continue Butler's legacy of interrogating the politics of race, nation building, civil society, and the elusive protection of the human category.

My dissertation has focused on Black speculative knowledge production as a way of rethinking linear notions of time and as a method of producing anti-histories through multiple cultural forms, including speculative short stories and comics. In this chapter I will continue to forward Butler's legacy through my own creative projects which also bridge discussions of Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism and Black Anarchism. I argue comics are political theory in their own right as a performative text which produces a counterpublic, or an alternate world, in which a speculative ethnography can emerge. In this speculative ethnography a Black character can have a conversation with a human embodiment of the United States, or the moon can weep as it witnesses the mundane massacre of Black flesh. A dead dog calls our attention to multiple histories in multiple Anthrophenes while also conjuring anxieties about the inhuman. In the following chapter we will embark on deciphering a creation I call illustrated scholarship, which purposefully opens itself up to multiple interpretations. I am not the complete arbiter of truth for my work nor do I seek to be. I seek to offer the points of clarity I found most interesting in these

projects and then offer the work up to the world and the reader for further knowledge production beyond my perception. I will analyze my comics "Misadventures of Selma" and "ACAB: a comic" in two respective sections in this chapter.

Misadventures of Selma

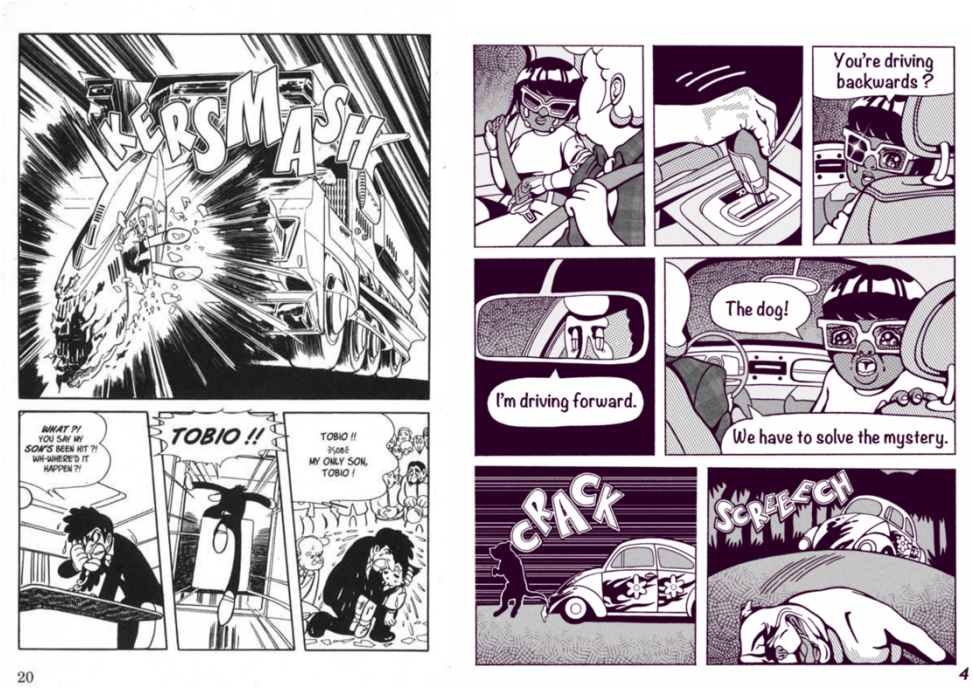


Figure 5. Page 20 of *Astro Boy* next to Page 4 of "Misadventures of Selma."

The comic "Misadventures of Selma" is a surreal work that refuses a precise narrative. I purposefully made "Misadventures of Selma" a surreal satire that resists even a clear historical time stamp as the two main characters are driving a 1967 Volkswagen Beetle. I made the car mirror the motif of flowers and psychedelic colors, reminiscent of the van drawn in the 1969 show "Scooby-Doo, Where are you!" I am a 90's kid and I grew up watching reruns and further iterations of the franchise on Cartoon Network. In many regards, "Scooby-Doo, Where are you!" represented a blending of the 60's and the 70's. Flower power meets disco aesthetics to blossom

the iconic team driving the mystery machine. The title itself "Misadventures of Selma" intentionally calls upon my favorite character Velma. However, Selma offers another layer of haunting as it also recalls the 1965 voting rights march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. The day has since been called "Bloody Sunday" due to the gruesome police attack against hundreds of African Americans (Yang, 83).

I meant for "Misadventures of Selma" to take place in a non-linear space. A fractured temporal landscape that acknowledges the afterlife of slavery more honestly by refusing to engage with the idea of linear and temporal progress. Rather "Misadventures of Selma" lives in a time loop of modernity in which the constant reproduction of anti-Blackness in and as permutation is more recognized by its refusal to root itself in time. The reader cannot pin-point where the characters are throughout the contradictory elements like the classic car and current mentions of the former Trump administration. The attire of the characters also mirrors elements of the costumes found in the Scooby-Doo cartoon, and therefore make the characters at once familiar, vintage, and contemporary. The cover of the comic states the work is issue six within a "USA Series" of books. USA Series functions as a fictive publishing house that sells the ten cent Amerimanga "MisAdventures of Selma." The price of the comic, under a dollar, recalls a drastically different economy which persisted during a time when my mother collected some of the first Archie Comics. I based the presentation of the publishing house on the vintage Archie Comics my mother collected throughout her life and shared with me. The comic manifests as a clear Amerimanga as it weds American cartooning with Japanese manga aesthetics. Throughout the production of Selma I used pages from Osamu Tezuka's manga *Astro Boy* for inspiration. Specifically, page twenty where the emerging astro boy has a fatal accident, became pivotal to how I drew expressive sounds throughout the comic. The "KERMASH" on page twenty,

displayed in Figure 4, bewitched me. The way the letters flex with the force of the crash and how the sizing varies to emphasize the explosion was mesmerizing upon my first read. I sought to bring the energy around the letters in Tezuka's manga to "Misadventures of Selma" starting on page four with the crack of the dog's bones as the character Ted fatally drives over the unfortunate creature once again.

Ted, a play on Scooby-Doo protagonist and leader Fred, represents the entirety of the United States. Ted is meant to be a sort of sad Homer Simpson play on the All American Hero. Ted represents the fantasy of white masculinity as it collides with the reality of toxic, violent, imperial white masculinity which ushered in the national project and continues to be lorded as the identity with the most valor and value in our society. I made Ted blonde, brawny, plaid like a blue collar, but ascot wearing like a white collar: a total Yankee Doodle Dandy Contradiction. He is every man and he is no man. He is the white lie of universality. He too, like the overall narrative, exists more conceptually than concretely. Ted is an idea fighting for the constant (re)production of his existence, which is fraught with lies and contradictions. Ted is sustained by social death and therefore the ability to wield fatal power with impunity. However, Ted's neoliberal disavowal of his own self-sustaining violence allows him to continue to operate as a hero, or a victim, in his own fantasy.

Selma on the other hand operates as Ted's foil. Willfully and due to having nowhere else to go as Ted attacks her and the world around her with abandon. Selma blends Velma's position as the insightful detective with the sardonic rage I first witnessed in the 1990's cartoon *Daria*. Selma manifests as perpetual Black resistance, but also simultaneously exists as a Black captive whose ability to opt out of the North American project is no more under their control than their ushering into it. Selma's captivity then produces moments in which the madness of modernity

makes her feral. Selma screams, cries, and struggles to assert her voice and her reality even as they are perpetually disregarded by Ted, or acknowledged mockingly in humiliating domination. To me Selma's glasses, and her ultimate vision, represent triple consciousness. W.E.B. Dubois first coined double consciousness as a way to discuss the multiple layers of self-awareness and self-policing one becomes forced to travel with when they are Black in America. However, I take triple consciousness from the poem "Fake Deep" by Cecile Emeke, who states, "What abuse will I suffer in a male dominated world if I do a, b, or c? Triple consciousness, and don't forget that melanin, so definitely can't do x, y, or z" (madamemegamouth.wordpress.com). Triple consciousness therefore speaks to the added layer of being femme in a patriarchy. I believe Selma knows debating Ted is pointless. Ted cannot access mutual understanding or negotiate because he does not have a self-accountable conscience and cannot have a self-accountable conscience in order to perpetuate his self-concept. At the end Selma screams and asserts the injustice of her death to what could be described as a sentient brick wall. Ted feasts wantonly on the antihuman, therefore smiling in the face of the ritual which reproduces his self-concept, through constantly antagonizing and ultimately destroying Selma at the end of the comic. A demise Selma protests even as she knows her protest is toward a sentient wall, otherwise known as Ted or the United States, whose self-concept depends on the denial of her reality and its ultimate betrayal.

The comic opens upon the death of a dog. Revealing where the blood on the car comes from in the comic's cover page. Selma immediately expresses concern for the dog and asks Ted who they should call to begin accounting for this horrific death. I have shown "MisAdventures of Selma" to several Black professors I deeply respect from several different institutions in the UC system. I will not name anyone here, nor provide any identifying information, because I respect

the time they contributed in giving me a critique in the first place. However, there was a trending response to the first page that I believe begs attention, especially after discussing my experience with my longest academic mentor Professor Yamuna Sangarasivam. On a phone call, I discussed with Yamuna how multiple professors were deeply uncomfortable with the demise of the dog and Selma's reaction. These professors were outright against having Black death be connected, even by implication or empathy, to inhuman death due to the ongoing historical associations Blackness has with inhumanity. I did not have the courage to challenge these professors in these meetings. Each one of them asked me directly what I felt the dog represented. I decided to give them half the truth in order to hopefully meet halfway in the theory I will ultimately argue here. The dog does represent Blackness, but it also does not. The dog represents inhumanity and the vulnerability to wanton violence, exploitation, betrayal, and disregard all life that falls outside of the human category endures in modernity to an important degree.

When responding to each of these professors I brought up the text *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* by Kathryn Yusoff. I began to think critically about the Anthropocene while teaching in a writing course in John Muir College. After I read student papers which involved a central discussion about the Anthropocene, I was inspired to read Yusoff's text. The UCSD ecology debate felt inheritably racist and ahistorical. Yusoff argues, "If the Anthropocene proclaims a sudden concern with the exposures of environmental harm to white liberal communities, it does so in the wake of histories in which these harms have been knowingly exported to black and brown communities under the rubric of civilization, progress, modernization, and capitalism. The Anthropocene might seem to offer a dystopic future that laments the end of the world, but imperialism and ongoing (settler) colonialisms have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence. The Anthropocene as a politically

infused geology and scientific/popular discourse is just now noticing the extinction it has chosen to continually overlook in the making of its modernity and freedom" (Yusoff, xiii). The empire of the United States, as a global superpower, has a large responsibility in the ongoing demise of the planet and the attack against all life on Earth. I established in previous chapters throughout the dissertation that the concepts of personhood and freedom, and along with other attendant notions of civil liberties and citizenship, are employed to propagate the planetary death machine of the anti-Black, white supremacist, resource hoarding, environmentally destructive, cis-heteronormative, patriarchal, settler colonial empire of the United States. All life that falls beyond the purview of protection within the socially and politically constructed categories of humanity and citizenry, which are exclusionary by nature, are then at purposeful risk of death. Which is why Ted responds to Selma by telling her the dog is none of their business.

Truly, Ted means the dog has no business with him. As the narrative reveals he purposefully killed the creature because it did not move out of the road in time as he was driving on an open street where he had plenty of room to swerve or switch lanes to avoid impacting the dog. Instead, Ted chooses to kill the dog while also ignoring Selma's screams. Selma and her connection to the dog reminds me of Yusoff's argument about Blackness. Yusoff argues "Blackness is understood as a state of relation (in Glissant's sense of the word) that is assigned to difference through a material colonial inscription, which simultaneously enacted the cutting of geographical ties to land and attachments to ecologies" (Yusoff, xi). Elaborating on the aforementioned point Yusoff states, "Another way to conceive of this would be to understand Blackness as a historically constituted and intentionally enacted deformation in the formation of subjectivity, a deformation that presses an inhuman categorization and the inhuman earth into intimacy. This contact point of geographical proximity with the earth was constructed

specifically as a node of extraction of properties and personhood." (Yusoff, xi-xii). Although the intimacy Yusoff discusses arose to extract properties and personhood for further exploitation, by creating inhuman people to perish or be further exploited with the inhuman environment, I find this passage exciting. Inspiring. This intimacy then produces a chance for radical solidarity if we allow it and if we are not afraid to be included within the inhuman. I am not scared to be associated with the inhuman. I am scared to be associated with the human. The human kills a dog and cannot process its death because it falls beyond the purview of recognized death monopolized by humanity and because inhuman death also affirms the human's protection from death with impunity. The inhuman, here being Selma, can then instead honor far more than the human and recognize all life as valuable.

Figure 6. Death of the Pitbull in the film *Fruitvale Station*

Selma's defense of the dog and the assertion of his horrific murder was based on a scene from Ryan Coogler's 2013 film *Fruitvale Station*. My partner has been a cinephile his entire life. Ryan Coogler is one of his favorite directors. Upon my partner's suggestion, we watched the film together and I was blown away. In the multiple article forum "Consider Afro-Pessimism,"

Sebastian Weier summarizes the tragedy the film was based on. Weier states, “Oscar Grant was shot in the back, while lying on the ground, by a police officer at the Fruitvale Rapid Transit Station on New Year’s Day 2009. The event was filmed on digital video and cell phone cameras and disseminated on the Internet as well as through the media” (Weier, 425). The film inserts a speculative scene, that did not actually happen, in which Oscar witnesses the death of a pitbull at a gas station. Oscar responds similarly to Selma and seeks to mourn and support the dog. The scene works to foreshadow Oscar’s eventual death and reminds me of a statement my mother has often said after hearing reports about fatal anti-Black violence: they kill us like dogs in the street. In an interview Coogler revealed he included the scene because those actual events happened to his brother. Coogler’s brother interacted with a dog he witnessed hit by a car at a gas station. Further, Coogler argues, “You never hear about a pit bull doing anything good in the media. And they have a stigma to them…in many ways, pitbulls are like young African-American males. Whenever you see us in the news, it's for getting shot and killed or shooting and killing somebody--for being a stereotype” (the-take.com). By offering empathy, comfort, and a supportive witness to the dog’s demise, I argue Coogler has Oscar make an intervention in the disregard of the inhuman. By having Oscar call the pitbull “bruh,” meaning brother, Oscar offers a familial bond to the dog which suggests they are kin. Connected in important ways. To elaborate on this point, I purposefully drew the dead dog as a pitbull in “Misadventures of Selma.” Selma’s refusal to ignore the pitbull’s death then allows her to enter radical solidarity with all life vulnerable to Ted’s violence. By refusing to privilege a desperation to be associated with the human, Selma denounces the human, the most conventional representation being Ted, and asserts her solidarity with the dog. Selma’s advocacy for the dog therefore opens up further possibilities for the interpretation of the first James Baldwin quote I include in the comic.

Selma becomes so enraged the steam from her ears and nose become her word bubbles. In the bubbles carrying Selma's text, she states one of the most iconic quotes from Baldwin's collection of essays *Native Son*. Selma declares, "this is the crime of which I accuse my country and countrymen, and for which neither I nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it. But it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime" (West, 6). Selma's declaration then extends beyond the initial meaning when Baldwin was discussing the impacts of apartheid on African Americans to shed a further light on the various ongoing spaces of death the empire generates and disavows. Selma's embrace of inhumanity then opens our eyes to the larger ecology of violence at stake. Yusoff argues the "proximity of black and brown bodies to harm in this intimacy with the inhuman is what I call *Black Anthropocenes.* It is an inhuman proximity organized by historical geographies of extraction, grammars of geology, imperial global geographies, and contemporary environmental racism. It is predicated on the presumed absorbent qualities of black and brown bodies to take up the body burdens of toxicities and to buffer the violence of the earth. Literally stretching black and brown bodies across the seismic fault lines of the earth, Black Anthropocenes subtend White Geology as a material stratum" (Yusoff, xii). I have already discussed my anxieties about collapsing Black identities with other communities, however I will not contest Yusoff's definition. I believe global anti-Blackness necessarily demands an understanding that Blackness, first does not exist as any absolute purity and next necessarily informs the negative social and political impact of many dark-skinned identities that would not necessarily be Black identified. Therefore, Black Anthropocenes are global because anti-Blackness is global. We then arrive at several inhuman geographies across the planet that is on

fire, because the earth's nature of inhumanity must also be punished. Or rather devoured by the unsustainable stomach of the imperial networks which ravish the Earth. Black Anarchist Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin reminds us that a global superpower like the United States cannot be divorced from the reality that the national project has been "a polluting, poisoning, deadly, oppressive institution leading us toward a planetary catastrophe" (Ervin, 47). The project of modernity has been murderous on many levels as it bisects the earth and the inhuman inhabitants that populate it.

I want to have conversations about how racial capitalism was ushered, in part, by the hazardous overproduction of cotton. The cotton mill hurt the earth and the Black flesh forced to aid production, as it founded the economy whose eventual over production and over extraction has generated climate change. I want to discuss the correlations between chattel slavery and climate change. I want to emphasize the ironic intimacy that comes from the social and political construction of humanity, and therefore inhumanity, as it intersects with the mass historical desecration of the environment and all life that appeared to live beyond the species which decided a select few would be human. The human category and the attendant empires or nation states which propagated their self-definition to an important degree are menaces. The core thesis of this dissertation has argued for divestment from humanity and its present bedrock nationalism and that is the core thesis of "Misadventures of Selma." Selma struggles to fight the United States, otherwise the embodiment of the enlightenment rational human fantasy, and loses because Selma is stuck in modernity. Ted acknowledges her reality while ripping her heart out, when he tells her it's too late to avoid being integrated into a burning house (West, 7). "Misadventures of Selma" functions at once as a warning about the violent cycle embedded in modernity and acts as a cartoon catharsis. When I originally conceived of the piece being longer,

I wanted Selma's catchphrase to be "If I am the anti-human, I'm not going to be polite about it." I hope that spirit also entered the comic. If I am in modernity, I am going to bark, but I am also going to laugh. Because I will not be polite about the original sin of the human. "Misadventures of Selma" then acts as a sardonic response to the nation and a call to divest. Selma explicitly screams "DIVEST" at Ted as he is huddled under the confederate flag and dying under the weight of his own unsustainable scaffolding as a violent, contradictory, political predator (West, 19). Ted is clearly irredeemable, and purposefully demonic, by the end of the comic. Ted's inability to be reformed or directed toward anything but self and mutual destruction, then leads us to my next project "ACAB: a comic." The central thesis of "ACAB: a comic " is revolution. We must change everything if we are ever to overcome the perpetual inhuman death cycle of modernity which will also overtake humans soon as they are currently acknowledging their own Anthropocene. However, before we embark on my analysis of "ACAB: a comic" In Appendix A, I offer the full comic of "Adventures of Selma."

ACAB

Figure 7. Concept Art for "ACAB: a comic."

"ACAB: a comic" is based off the popular acronym meaning "All Cops Are Bastards." The article "A Brief History of ACAB: The story behind a charged acronym" by Colin Groundwater provides a brief history of the phrase. Groundwater acknowledges how the acronym "ACAB has been rolling through the US protest movement from graffiti to signs to streetwear." Groundwater argues the acronym "can tell us about protest, police, and the dynamic between a state and its citizens." The origins of the term are unknown, but the earliest consensus of witnessing the phrase has been documented in England in the first half of the twentieth century. Reports state the phrase first emerged as "All Coppers are Bastards" before it was abbreviated to ACAB by striking workers in the 1940s. In the present day, Groundwater argues

ACAB began to get broader traction as it was used in relation to supporting the American anti-police brutality movement. Groundwater argues, “the best defense of ACAB might come from anarchists, who have been preaching ACAB for decades. As one group put it, it's not that all cops are bastards, but rather that all cops are “bounded”--not bad people themselves, but institutionally trapped in a system that is inherently oppressive” (gq.com). I sought to communicate a similar sentiment in “ACAB: a comic.” The six page predominately silent comic follows a story in which a police department engages in mass divestment from the carceral system and defies their own bondage.

In Figure 6 above I have included the original concept art I based the comic on. The human, animated and response on each page it appears represents the other inhuman elements of the world who watch our stories and also cannot contribute to influencing history. Following my argument about anti-histories, I see the moon as a witness to Black social and physical death. The moon supports and sympathizes with the protagonist and the inflamed vintage sheriff’s vehicle represents the institution of policing which ultimately must be abolished as an extension of the military state which regulates the populace for the defense of private poverty and the maintenance of civil society which purposely excludes many lives from its protection and ensnares countless within incarceration. In previous sections of this dissertation, I offered literature reviews which discussed how the emancipation of the slave did not usher in freedom. As adaptable anti-Blackness found ways to imprison former slaves in debt peonage and sharecropping and then the chain gang and ultimately in the hold of criminality which once again equated to inhumanity within the context of state abandonment and perpetual antagonism. I had originally wanted to base this section of the dissertation on the upcoming text *Change Everything: Racial Capitalism and the Case for Abolition*” by Ruth Wilson Gilmore. However,

the book will not be released in time as it is currently set to debut December 5, 2023. In the meantime, the summary of the project remains the spirit of "ACAB:a comic." At Haymarket Books the current pitch for the text reads as follows: "Abolitionism doesn't just say no to police, prisons, border control, and the current punishment system. It requires persistent organizing for what we need, organizing that's already present in the efforts people cobble together to achieve access to schools, health care and housing, art and meaningful work, and freedom from violence and want. As Gilmore makes plain, "Abolition requires that we change one thing: everything" (haymarketbooks.org). I absolutely agree with Gilmore, which is why the thesis of this dissertation has been the assertion we should retire Western civilization, its construction of the human, and the present institutions which propagate the nation state. From the start of this project, I have argued for considering other forms of living and organizing life which are concerned with the support of the collective. Rather than policing the world for exploitative and self-destructive imperial gain. However, in order for us to truly change everything, we must enter a world defying power as discussed in my argument about a speculative knowledge of freedom.

A speculative knowledge of freedom, described by Saidiya Hartman, allowed for the enslaved to imagine other possibilities for life beyond the plantation and the formation of the nation state. Maroon societies and fugitive lives were often manifestations of the alternative frameworks for living Black flesh asserted even as it was ensnared in modernity. "ACAB: a comic" imagines a speculative knowledge of freedom manifesting in a world defying power wielded by a magical black girl. The costumed protagonist of the comic generates a fiery magic which ultimately defies the carceral state to the degree that her power inspires an entire police department to divest from the American judicial system, before redistributing their resources and abolishing their entire institution. The magical Black girl narrative is based on the genre of

Japanese magical girl animation. In the article “Magic, “Shōjo,” and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society,” Kumiko Saito discusses the history of the magical girl. Saito argues magical girl animation “called *mahō shōjo* and *majokko* anime in Japan, is a mainstay of television animation that distinctly targets female prepubescent viewers. The conventions of the magical girl genre, especially the elaborate description of metamorphosis that enables an ordinary girl to turn into a supergirl, have been widely imitated across various genres and media categories. The success of *Sailor Moon* in the North American market triggered the first wave of cute female-hero action programs, such as *Powerpuff Girls* (1998-2005) and *Totally Spies* (2001--present), in the United States and Europe (Loos 2000, 1-2)” (Saito, 144). I grew up watching each of the television shows listed. *Sailor Moon*, *Powerpuff Girls* and *Totally Spies* each had a profound influence on me and were the subjects of my sketchbooks growing up. However, the core inspiration *Sailor Moon* was always my favorite. In “ACAB: a comic” I sought to reproduce *Sailor Moon*’s iconic transformation but give it a Black spin. The fire magic which foments the transformation of my protagonist harnesses the anger associated with Black femmes for slashing the system which provokes the justified rage.

Hearing the Washington Post statistic, “Black Americans are less than 13 percent of the population, but the rate at which Black Americans are killed by the police stands twice as high as the rate for White Americans,” makes the protagonist's eyes enflame (West, 1). On the title page the reader witnesses the full transformation which engulfs the protagonist in flames while outfitting her in a sailor uniform reminiscent of soldier *Sailor Moon*. As a magical warrior our heroine stalks the streets and intervenes in the state execution of a Black woman by a police officer. I drew the police officers in the comics as pigs to bridge the work with past Black protest

art. In the New Yorker article “Seeing Police Brutality Then and Now” Nell Painter describes how the iconography of the pig was central to the history of Black protest art. Nell discusses how Black artist Emory Douglass, whose work was published in the Black Panther newspaper, used the pig symbolism. Nell states, “Douglas also popularized “pigs" as the epithet for policemen, and he would show “pigs” singularly or in twos or threes, to represent not only local police but also the economic and political forces of war, Nixon, capitalism and colonialism. The big-bellied “pig” character was often drunken and banged up, an emblem of the abuse of power; one image defined him as “low natured beast that has no regard for justice, or the rights of people…a foul, depraved traducer, usually found masquerading as the victim of an unprovoked attack” (newyorker.com). I first sought to forward this legacy of protest art. In many regards the pig acts as a challenge to the bodies who sought to protect themselves through the construction of the human category. The pig, purposefully playing on the pinkness of lighter skin as it specifically referenced white police officers, acts as a denouncement of personhood. A protest which demands the human see its own contradictions, for if the category was meant to commit the lives under it to progress, that pursuit has not only sorely failed but often proven empty in the ultimate motivations of the political system. Therefore, the pig denounces the representatives of the police system as inhumane in their actions, perceptions, and profession.

I understand the subversive nature of the pig imagery as Black flesh challenged the supposedly innate personhood applied to representatives of the political system, particularly white ones. However, I am starting to think more critically about the pig. I am willing to accept the critique that seeking to demean our opponents with nonhuman imagery actually reinforces the allegiance to the human category I ironically want to break. I do not want to blindly repeat our patterns of disparaging the inhuman to make a point nor do I want to encourage Black flesh

to self-advocate through an insistence to be associated with the human we are purposefully removed from. Therefore, although I honor the past use of the pig imagery in protest art, I am unsure if it will return to my work again. My goal has been to provide a thorough argument about how the human category as a violently excluding social and political construction put the lives of all considered inhuman at risk including actual innocent pigs and much more life on Earth. For these aforementioned reasons, I return one last time to the last sentiment communicated at the end of "ACAB: a comic." We must change everything. Entering a world interested in collective planetary justice will require a different global political system and any chance of reaching that system will require a drive to make the world anew. A new self-concept for all. A new episteme where we hope to find the ultimate release from Black ontology and the death trap of an anti-Black modernity. In the Appendix B, I offer the full comic of "ACAB: a comic."

Conclusion: The Promised Neverland and How to Move Forward with Ontological Devastation

By thirty years old, I had blood in my stool daily. I turned thirty years old in San Francisco and by August as I drove the distance between the Bay and Los Angeles to relocate--my colon was afire. Swollen. Pained daily. Intense stomach aches, and sporadic vomiting, would persist over the last school year in which I would be enrolled at the University of California San Diego ("UCSD"). I completed my doctorate in the worst physical health of my life. I want that on record in my dissertation. In the essay "Bringing Out the Dead: Black Feminism's Prophetic Vision," Grace Kyungwon Hong reminds us of Barbara Christian's brilliant and haunting 1994 essay "Diminishing Returns: Can Black Feminism(s) Survive the Academy?" Hong argues the essay reveals "the university's fetishization of Black feminism as an avenue of intellectual inquiry does not render impossible, and indeed in some ways facilitates, its systemic violence against Black women" (Hong, 125). I am in profound agreement with the aforementioned insight, as my physical health was directly impacted by the profound stress and sadistic pressures I faced in my final doctoral year. I will discuss my experiences at UCSD in public, with explicit detail, after graduation. However, for now I want it known that I finished my doctoral project while facing profound structural violence from the university. I won the 2022-2023 President's Dissertation Year Fellowship to complete my doctorate this current spring, and yet even I received an onslaught of institutional violence. No one is immune and I am lucky to make my break with the university while still breathing.

Hong reminds us that the structural violence faced by Black women in the university have often led to their premature death. Hong recalls the fallen including "Christian herself in 2000. June Jordan in 2002. Sherley Anne Williams in 1999. Toni Cade Bambara in 1995. Audre

Lorde in 1992. Beverly Robinson in 2002. Endesha Ida Mae Holland in 2006. Claudia Tate in 2002. Nellie McKay in 2006. VeVe Clark in 2007. Toni Yancey in 2013. Stephanie Camp in 2014." Hong names these women to engage with Baldwin's call to "bring out your dead," which Hong interprets as "a raging mediation on the erasure and disavowal of racialized death." As Hong lists multiple Black women-identified scholars who have died prematurely while employed in academia, she seeks to "remember what must be forgotten, to find the "evidence of things not seen": that life is not protected if you are raced and gendered, and that you are raced and gendered if your life is not protected." Hong asserts that bringing out the dead "is to say that these deaths are not unimportant or forgotten, or, worse, coincidental. It is to say that these deaths are systemic, structural" (Hong, 126). The university has historically produced systemic violence, which disproportionately impacts the physical reality of individuals whose race and gender are controversial under anti-Black and white supremacist structures that exacerbate our vulnerability to violence. Hong asserts it is impossible to prove the aforementioned Black women "suffered early deaths because the battles around race, gender, and sexuality were being waged so directly through and on their bodies. Yet the names bear witness to this unknowable truth" (Hong, 127). I too have faced a battle upon my body within the university, however my worst experience was mitigated by Ethnic Studies faculty that sought to provide the protections otherwise denied to me. I am forever grateful for the interventions made my committee chair Andrew J. Jolivétte, however I had to also seek individual coping mechanisms independent of any support I could receive. In my Afrofuturist practice, I survived. I brought all my pain, rage, betrayal, stress, and subversive joy to the making of my comics "Adventures of Selma" and "ACAB: a comic."

In “Adventures of Selma” I performed many of the scenes from the comic to produce my own references. Below you can see the image I took and then flipped to create a reference for the sixteenth page of “Adventures of Selma.”

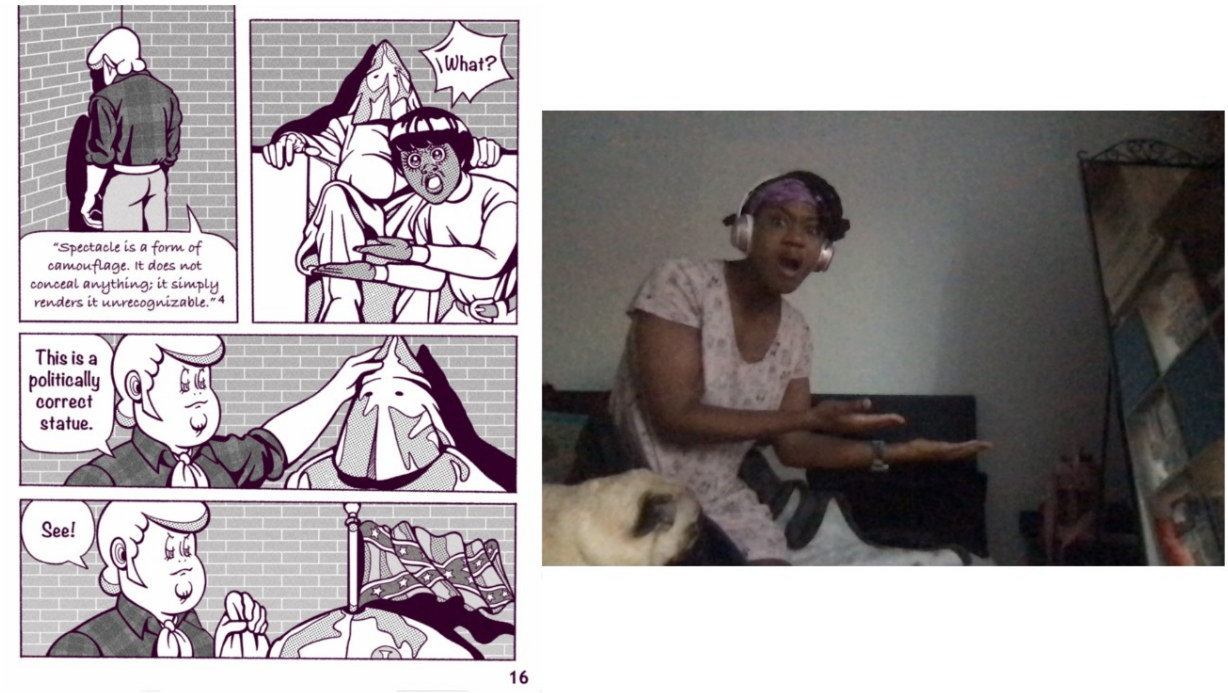


Figure 8. Page sixteen of “Adventures of Selma” next to the reference image I posed for.

Throughout my diminishing health this year, I have been forced to spend much of my time in bed. A week before I defended my dissertation, after months of several tests and a colonoscopy, I was diagnosed with Ulcerative Colitis. My doctors were first confident I was showing symptoms for Crohn’s Disease. However, after my colonoscopy was studied more closely and I continued to discuss the conditions of my current life, my doctor determined I have a chronic autoimmune disorder which was in part triggered and further exacerbated by stress. The stress of the university, the stress of institutional violence. Throughout the onslaught of this violence, I have found resistance and at times joy. At the bottom of the reference photograph, my

sweet, baby, pug Pickles makes an appearance. My two-year-old daughter is never far behind me. When I'm unwell, or even vomiting, Pickles always comes to my side and sits with me. She kept me company as I spent many days in bed, in profound pain, and her support encouraged me to make that pain productive. Through support from my favorite inhuman life, I found ways to fight for my inhuman life. In moments of emotional distress, I would channel my feelings into references for my comics. I found through performing the pain I was experiencing from the university, and my physical condition, I could move the trauma and harm out of my body and into my artwork. My therapist Channing Richmond, a Black woman godsend, highly encouraged me to take all of the emotions around the profound injustice I experienced, and transform it into political action. I engaged subversively with rage in both my comics, but my experience generating "Adventures of Selma" was the most healing. I performed both the roles of the characters Selma and Ted. I engaged in a disidentificatory performance by restaging much of the structural trauma I experienced. My performance of this violence then highlights the ultimate condemnation of our modern structures, like the university.

Figure 9. Photo reference of myself next to a fragment of page eight of "Adventures of Selma."

In “Adventures of Selma” the middle panels of eight represent the trauma of being physically dominated and silenced.

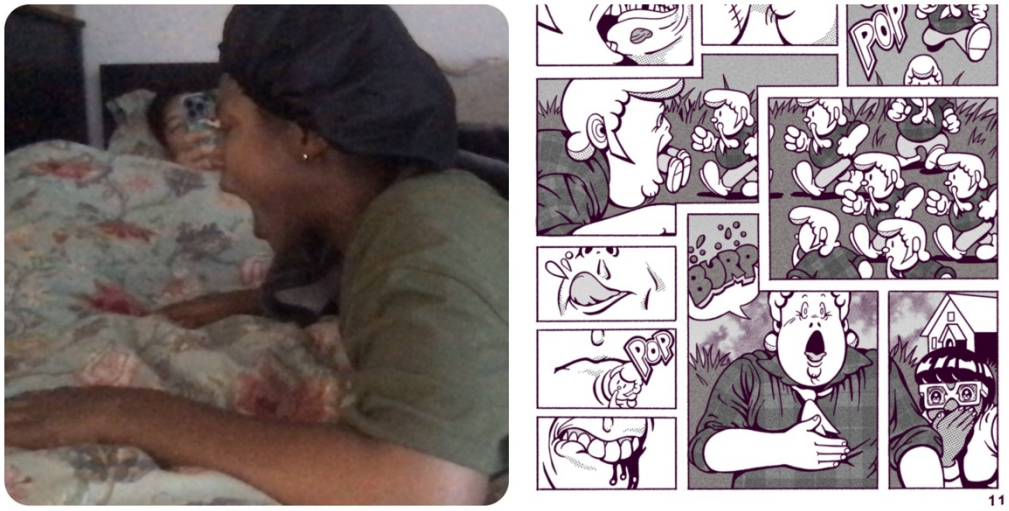


Figure 10. Photo reference of myself next to a fragment of page eleven of “Adventures of Selma.”

Page eleven represents the violence of being consumed. My partner Gregory Okada is in the background of this image, and he also encouraged me to channel our discussions of my experience into performance.

Figure 11. Reference photo of me next to fragment of page seven of “Adventures of Selma.”

The top panel of page seven represents the condescending surprise we receive when we resist the institution.

Figure 12. Reference photo of me next to fragment of page of eight.

The second top panel of page eight represents the violence of gaslighting.

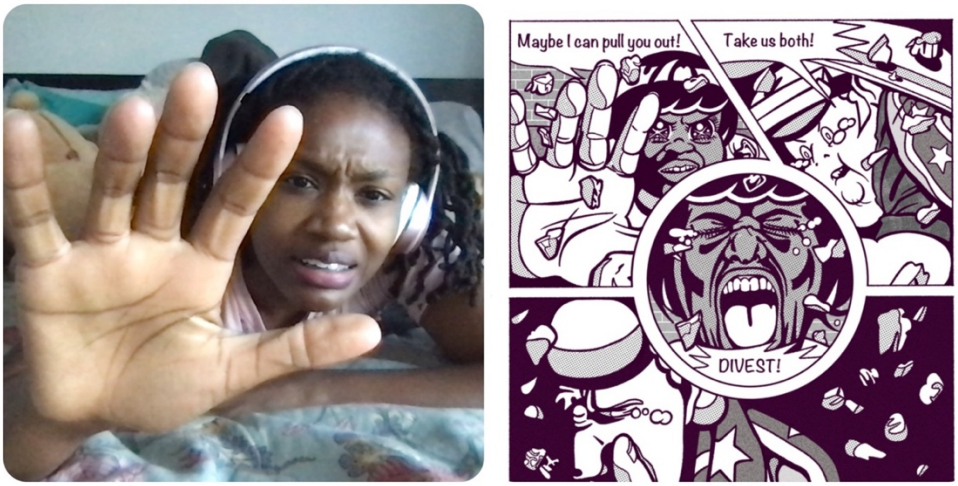


Figure 13. Reference photo of me and a fragment of page nineteen from "Adventures of Selma."

Page nineteen represents the heartbreaking moment you offer all the tools you can to help someone with more power than you, and they still refuse to divest. Selma ultimately, employs a dark humor as a form of insurgent Black joy, because if I am the anti-human, I am not going to be polite about it.

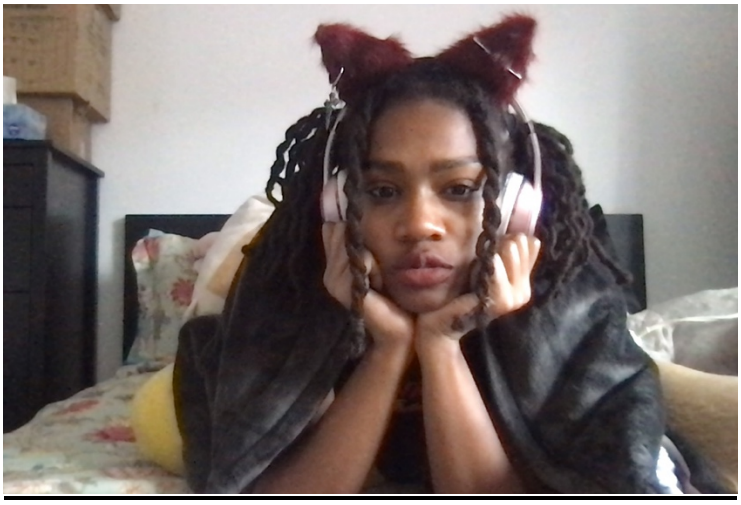


Figure 14. A photograph of me in costume ears.

Last, I offer a photograph of myself in cat ears, because if I am the anti-human, I am also going to be cute about it. Making "Adventures of Selma" truly opened me up to a beautiful, Black, sardonic, resilient humor that I believe has saved my life. However, I believe my work has a purpose beyond healing myself. In the following section of this conclusion, I will discuss the larger intention of my work, through an analysis of the Japanese manga and anime *The Promised Neverland*.

Figure 15. Poster/promotional art for *The Promised Neverland* animation.

My work has many influences but one of the most prominent and persisting has been the influence of Japanese cultural products specifically in manga, otherwise known as Japanese comics, and animation. I have read manga since middle school. My favorite childhood title was *Ranma ½* by Rumiko Takashi. I own a physical copy of nearly all thirty six books within the series. Currently, I have been watching the animation of and reading the current new best selling manga *The Promised Neverland*. By August 2022 *The Promised Neverland* had "over 41 million copies in circulation, including digital versions, ranking the work among the best-selling manga series of all time. The manga has won numerous prestigious awards, including the 63rd

Shōgakukan Manga Award, the Japan Expo Award, and the Kono Manga ga sugoil." The speculative story begins in the year 2045 and after a thousand years has passed since the infamous agreement called the "The Promise" was enacted between the demon and the human population. In this reality human children have been cooperatively provided to be reared and harvested as food in a rural establishment literally referred to as a plantation. The specific plantation we follow is located at Grace Field House where the human orphans slowly discover the destiny of their ontology within a world that has cast demons as the protected population while the human category has ironically fallen into the vulnerabilities it has currently cast upon the inhuman in our world. The children have tattoos on their neck, which are purposefully reminiscent of serial numbers found on cattle, and come into the traumatic acknowledgement of their social death as rations to be consumed without agency. The children are raised by a femme human figure referred to as "Mother." Mother lies to the children and promises each child will be adopted when they turn twelve. When in reality the children are shipped out to be eaten, at age twelve, by the larger demon population. Only children with uteruses are given the opportunity to become breeders and Mothers for the plantations. The reality of the demons and the overall political and social system of the world is purposefully hidden from the children throughout their formative years on the plantation. The three core protagonists, Emma, Norman, and Ray discover the truth before they turn twelve and help their fellow orphans to escape.

However, after they leave the Grace Field House the reader finds themselves in a demon world that intentionally mirrors our own. The violent social and political hierarchies which nourish the population, through farming the children, also permeate within the larger demon dynamics. Ironically, the demons in power are obsessed with eating humans in order to look humanoid. Again, the obsession with this manufactured human category perpetuates a violent

hierarchy in which demons who look less human and therefore do not have as much access to human flesh experience poverty, starvation, social humiliation, and rejection. Further, demons who look less human are considered lower class and less intelligent than demons who are more humanoid. In this seemingly contradictory system, I believe the writer Kaiu Shirai gives us much to consider about human construction and its hierarchical violence. Ultimately, the children ally with some demons, as humans and demons collectively recognize the overall political system must be destroyed to provide an opportunity for ethical relations. Throughout the story, the children are led by a mysterious figure called William Minerva. William Minerva, who is later revealed to have died before the story began, purposefully left clues in the literature at Grace Field House to alert the cattle children to their reality and to aid their escape. The story reveals William Minerva was a descendant of one of the humans who agreed to the initial arrangement called the "The Promise." Before the current timeline of the story, the humans and the demons were at war. In order to save the human population, some humans agreed to allow some people to be farmed by demons, while the rest of the human population would depart to a new dimension which constitutes our present world. In many regards the "The Promise" was the violent catalyst which initiated the new ontology of the cattle children. Discussion of "The Promise" throughout the series often mirrors discussion of Black ontology, as a social and political reality so fixed and formative to the world system that breaking the ontology would break the entire world. Many demons and people, throughout the story, doubt the cattle children will ever be able to break their ontology in the demon world nor reach the human dimension (yakusokunoneverland.famdom.com).

In a happy ending, the children successfully break "The Promise." A new promise, made between Emma and a cosmic, God-like demon, totally transforms the corrupt demon world and

transports the children to the human dimension. In the article "The Promised Neverland Reveals How America Dies" author Reuben Baron provides a fascinating discussion of the ending. Baron first acknowledges how the more pessimistic character Ray, identified by his gothic hairstyle, worries the human world will have the same problems as the demon world they changed and departed from. The final page shows the children arriving in the human world through an interdimensional gate by the Statue of Liberty. In the year 2047, the children come into a world drastically different from our present day. The chapter provides a historical overview reflecting on the events that took place in our universe between 2020 and 2047. Baron argues, "*The Promised Neverland* has already gotten topical before, but setting the start of the series' apocalypse in 2020 makes it extra clear this story is a reflection of current anxieties. Climate change and pandemics are cited as a cause of World War. The survivors of this war had to rebuild society from the ground up, in a more selfless, less territorial form." The global network of nation states is gone. Borders are gone. The global community must work together for the benefit of all or perish further. Baron argues the manga's final historical lesson "places the general ethos of the series-- "Only caring about yourself at the expense of others would no longer work"--into the context of radical political change." Baron elaborates stating life within the conclusion of the manga, "is Alex Jones' nightmare, but things seem to be working for everyone. Pollution has decreased, and the lack of borders means there's no chance for the refugees from the demon world being persecuted as undocumented immigrants" (cbr.com). I have many critiques in regard to the overall series and the ending. The most notable being the world becoming organized into one huge central government. I have no idea what that entails; however, I have made an argument against organizing life within the nation state throughout this

dissertation. I stand by that argument even as I stand beside this manga as an ultimate success in my perception.

I believe the problematic parts of the comic also provide generative discussion. For instance, one of the most notable problems in the series for me and many fans is the Black femme antagonist Krone.

Figure 16. An image of the character Krone from the anime *The Promised Neverland*.

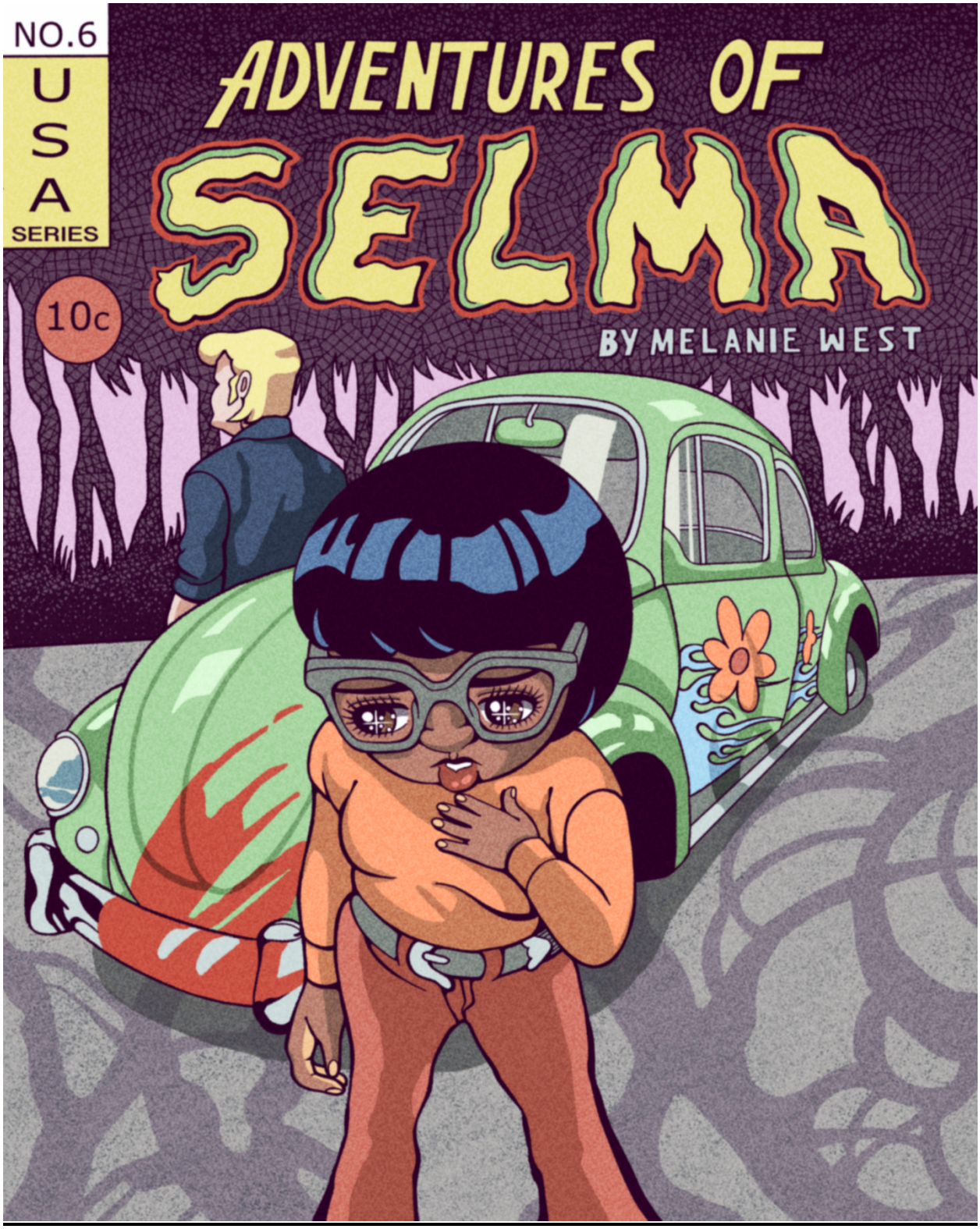
Krone, once a cattle child herself, makes the impossible choice to become a breeder rather than be devoured by the demons at the age of twelve. Krone's depiction, reminiscent of a Black pickaninny, is aggressively racist and Krone ultimately dies devoured by demons. Krone also never gets to reunite with the only black child in the Grace Field House, which I suspect to be her daughter. On the other hand, it becomes cruelly notable that the non-Black character referred to as Mother at the Grace Field House gets to unite with her son Ray and make peace with her history of forced reproduction. Krone's treatment represents the violent ontological positions the author reproduces even as it tries to make a subversive argument with the cattle children. By refusing to enter a discussion of an actual ontology that has literally been treated as cattle, here being Blackness, the comic fails to critique its own culture and work for reproducing the anti-Black ontological violence which also importantly helps to reconstitute Japanese national and diasporic self-identity. I argue the narrative ultimately fails to come to terms with

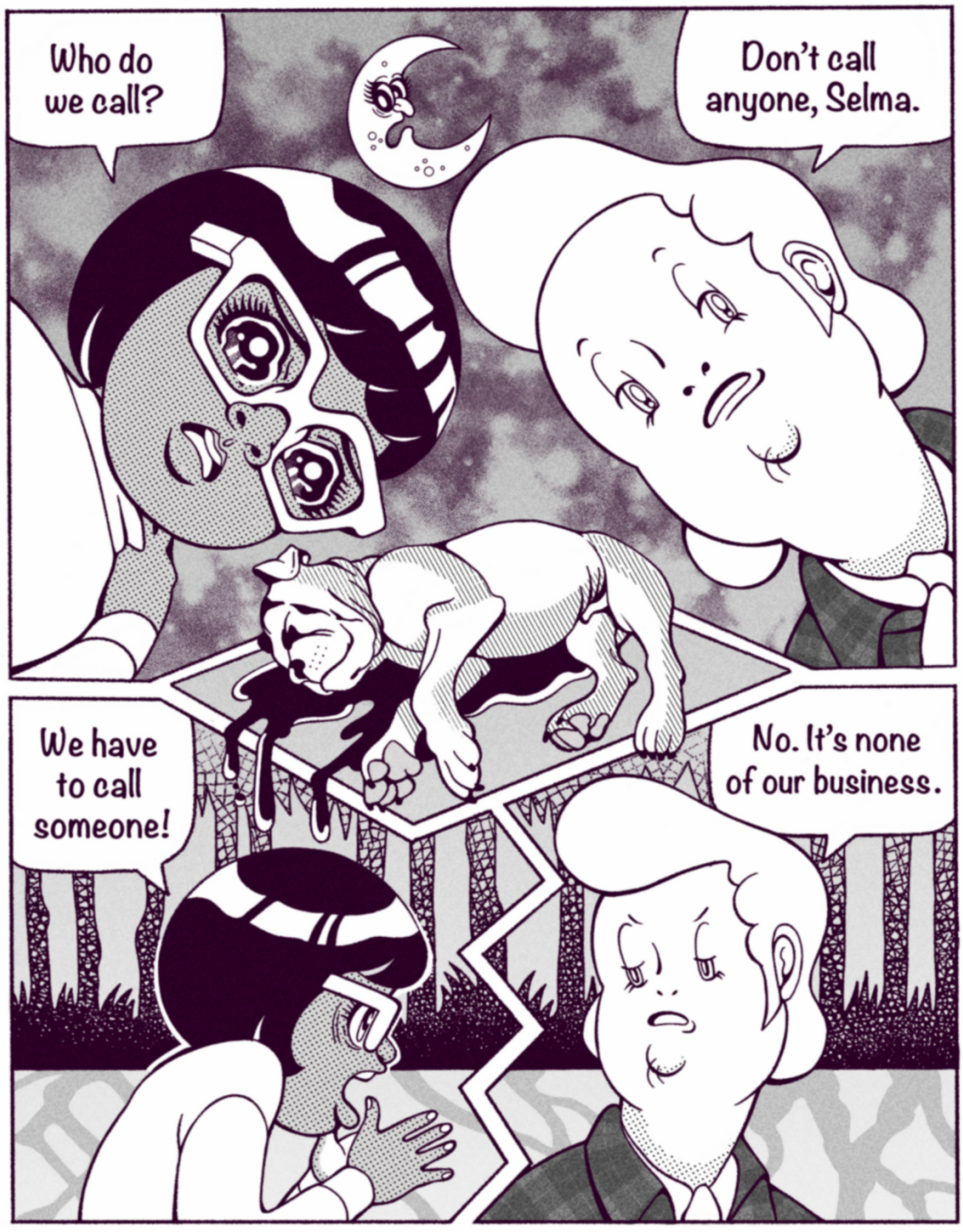
this and thus fails to fully engage with the character Krone. However, I believe this failure is important in discussing how speculative fiction, when utilizing Black positions and histories, often fails at making an overall successful narrative when it refuses to engage with that direct history. I apply this exact critique in my open disdain for *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. Despite the problematic features, I am still a huge fan of *The Promised Neverland*. I am still encouraged by the ultimate narrative, whose thesis, like "ACAB: a comic," still emphasizes that we must change everything.

The Promised Neverland makes an open critique of global capitalism in the demon economy. Further, the comic ending in a world with no borders has a very promising message. Although I do not agree with the decision to still root the world within a central government, we are still offered a planetary network drastically different from our own. A world whose institutions are implied to no longer be in competition for hoarding the planet's resources, but instead dedicated to creating a system for the overall benefit of all life. In the world provided at the end there appears to be less an emphasis on humanity and more of a general emphasis on the importance of life extending beyond our biological species to all forms of life on the Earth. I offer this analysis of *The Promised Neverland* because I believe my job in this lifetime is to be a William Minerva. Although, I do not assume any of the guilt for my present ontological reality, which William Minerva carries for the cattle children, I still believe it is my responsibility to aid in changing the world. However I can. I offer my literature and my illustrated scholarship to this pursuit. My goal as an academic, artist, writer and interdisciplinary thinker is to be a William Minerva for my time, as Butler was in her time. Butler's work alerted me to many of the politics I have discussed, which I have displayed throughout my analysis in this dissertation.

I seek to make my work engaging, like Minerva and Butler, for all age groups. I believe anyone can and should be allowed knowledge and opportunity to analyze their social and political framework. I would like to write a children's book about social death. I will continue to make more materials which grapple with the construction of humanity and Black ontology. I want to create documents which encourage mass divestment from the pillars which constitute our current political system. I want to tell Black children there is no shame in being a non-person, because association with the human is an identity sustained by mass death and exploitation. I want to offer however many clues I can that will buffer the realization the world has betrayed young Black life, but there are alternatives beyond our modern massacre. I hope each of my works convey: Follow the clues cattle children. Run from the plantation. You will have to blow up the world to blow up your position. But everyone deserves to live better and therefore we all deserve liberation.

Appendix A



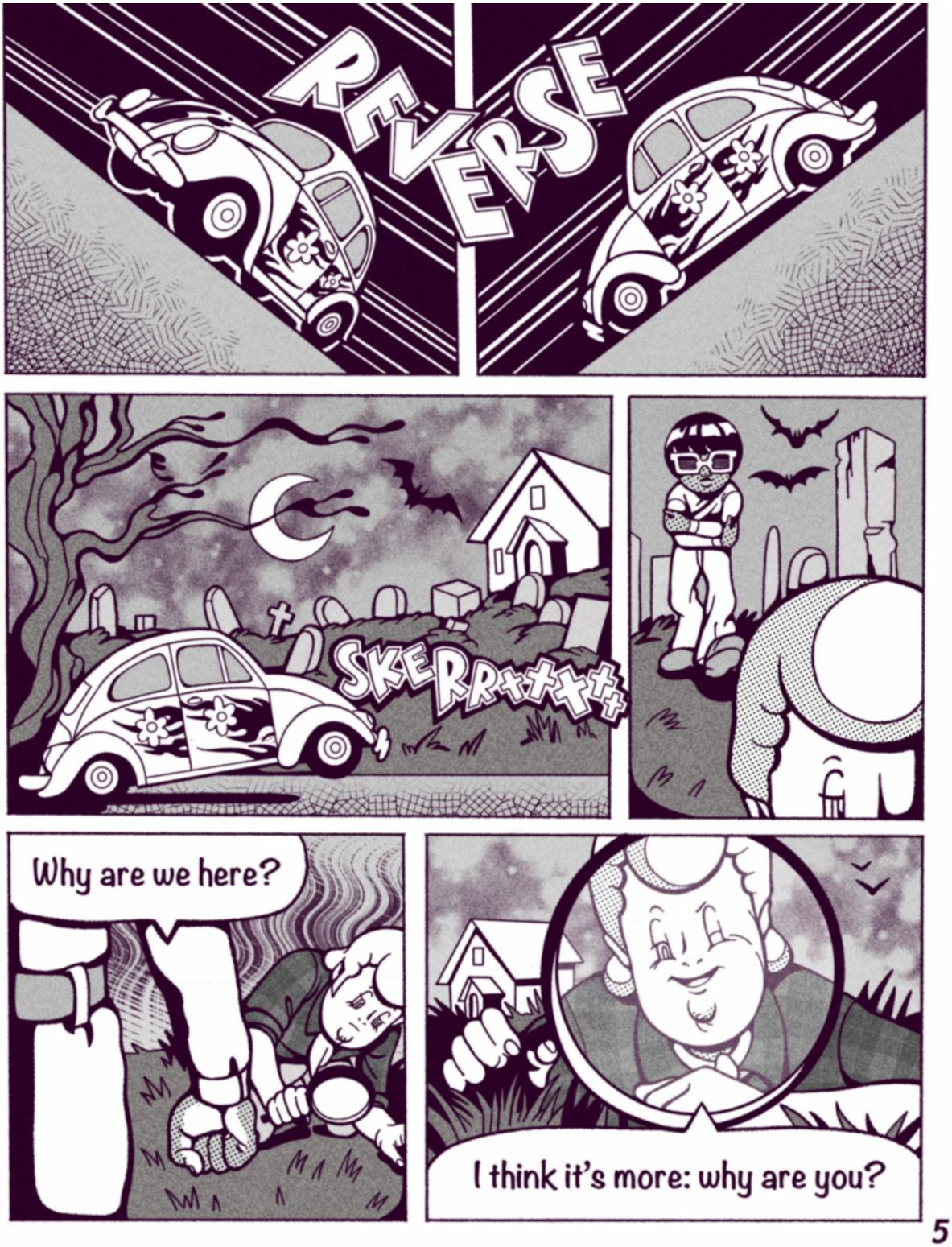

Who do we call?
Don't call anyone, Selma.
We have to call someone!
No. It's none of our business.

1


But you hit him, Ted.
No. It ran into the road.
He laid in the road.
I told you to—
GO AROUND
2


I-I thought it would move. I thought I could spook it.
No. I didn't.
You killed him.
I saw you.
Pfft
So, what?
3


You're driving backwards?
I'm driving forward.
The dog!
We have to solve the mystery.
CRACK
SCREEECH
4


REVERSE
SKERRRRRRRR
Why are we here?
I think it's more: why are you?
5


Because of you! You! And now this dog. You're doing it again, Ted.
You keep doing this! And this-
"this is the crime of which I accuse my country
and countrymen, and for which neither I nor history will ever forgive them,
that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it
and do not want to know it.
But it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent.
It is the innocence which constitutes the crime."[1]
6

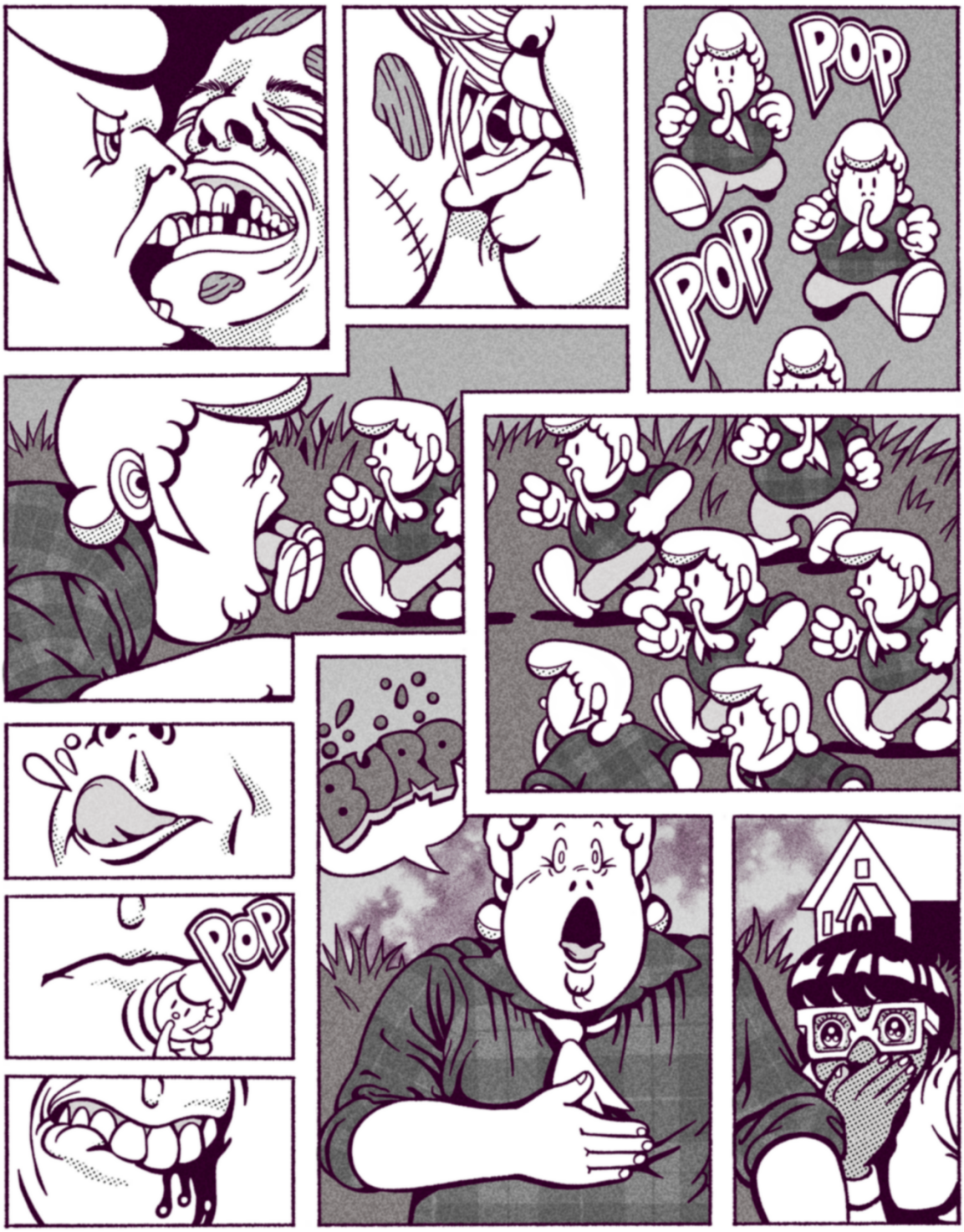

It's wrong!
And it's done. We're done.
People are done, Ted.
"You know the day is coming when
they will no longer go to the courthouse
for redress of grievances.
And when that day comes, the country will have no one
We are not waiting for the fire next time!
I will not be integrated into a burning house!
Too late.
to blame but itself."[2]
7


Too wha-?
We have to solve the mystery.
We know-
SHHH!
If we could understand then we could stop fighting.
I AM RESISTING!
Love is the answer.

8


Miscegenation
doesn't
change
anything
and...
It's how you
made this place.
Y-You're obsessed with identity politics!
And if you and others were nicer toTrump voters—
you wouldn't get KILLED!
9


We're divided.
You see this unity, Selma!
We have to let go of race
gender
class
sexuality.
We're all the same.
NO!
Yes.
POP
10



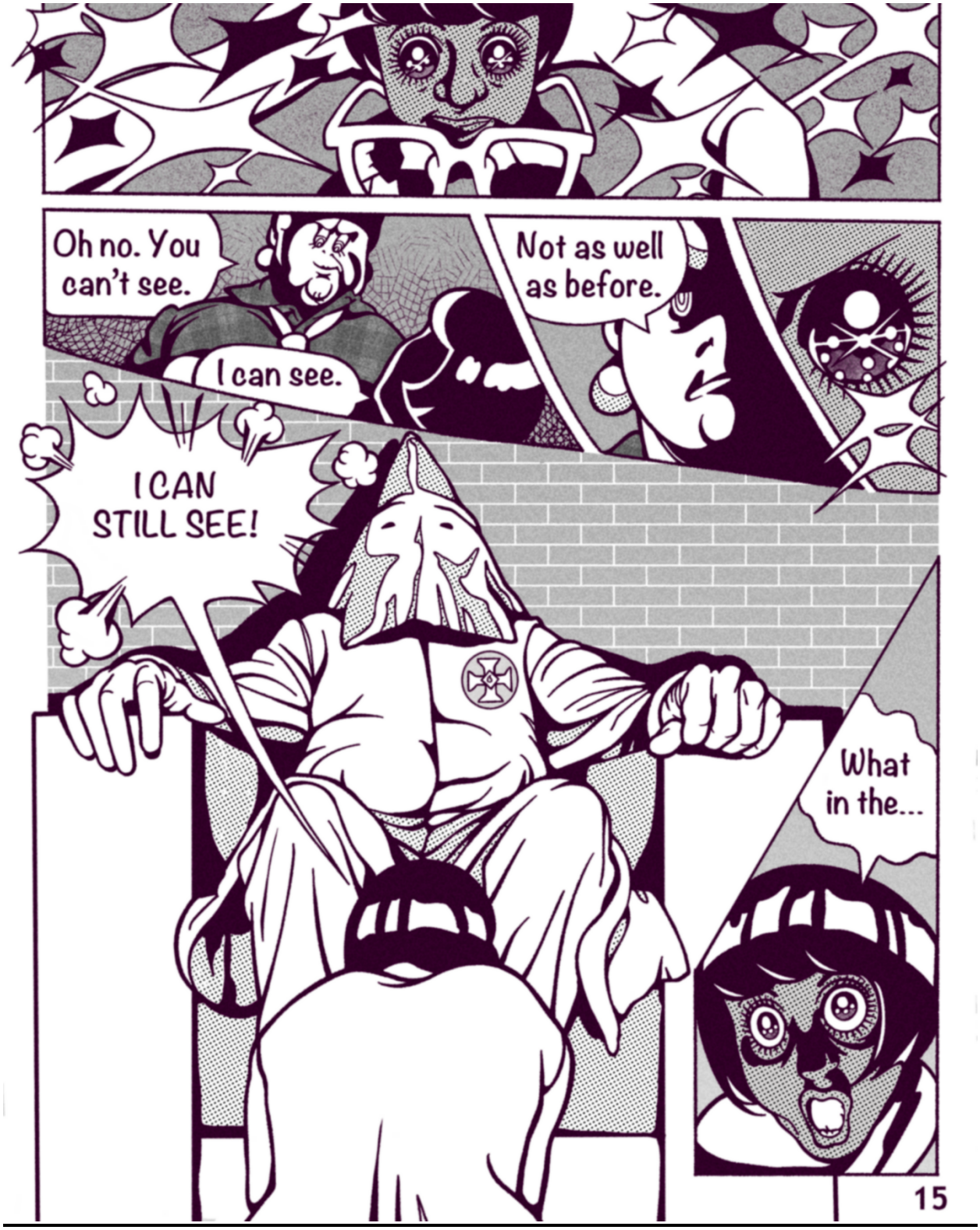
11

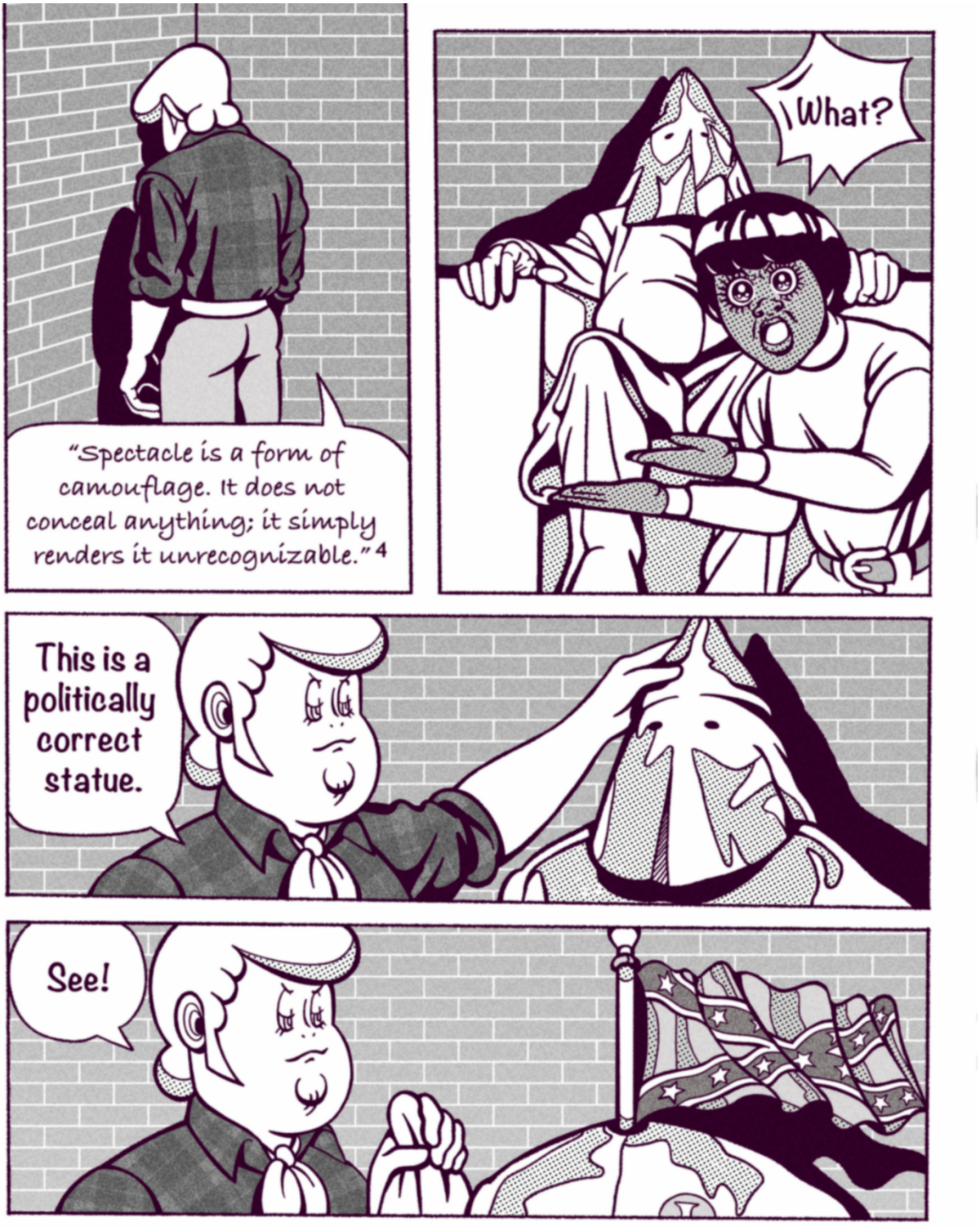

Maybe there are answers in that white house.
We don't need difference, Selma.
Then die, Ted.
I am asking us to live.
You know I am not alive.
Don't. Say. It.
"Social death."[3]

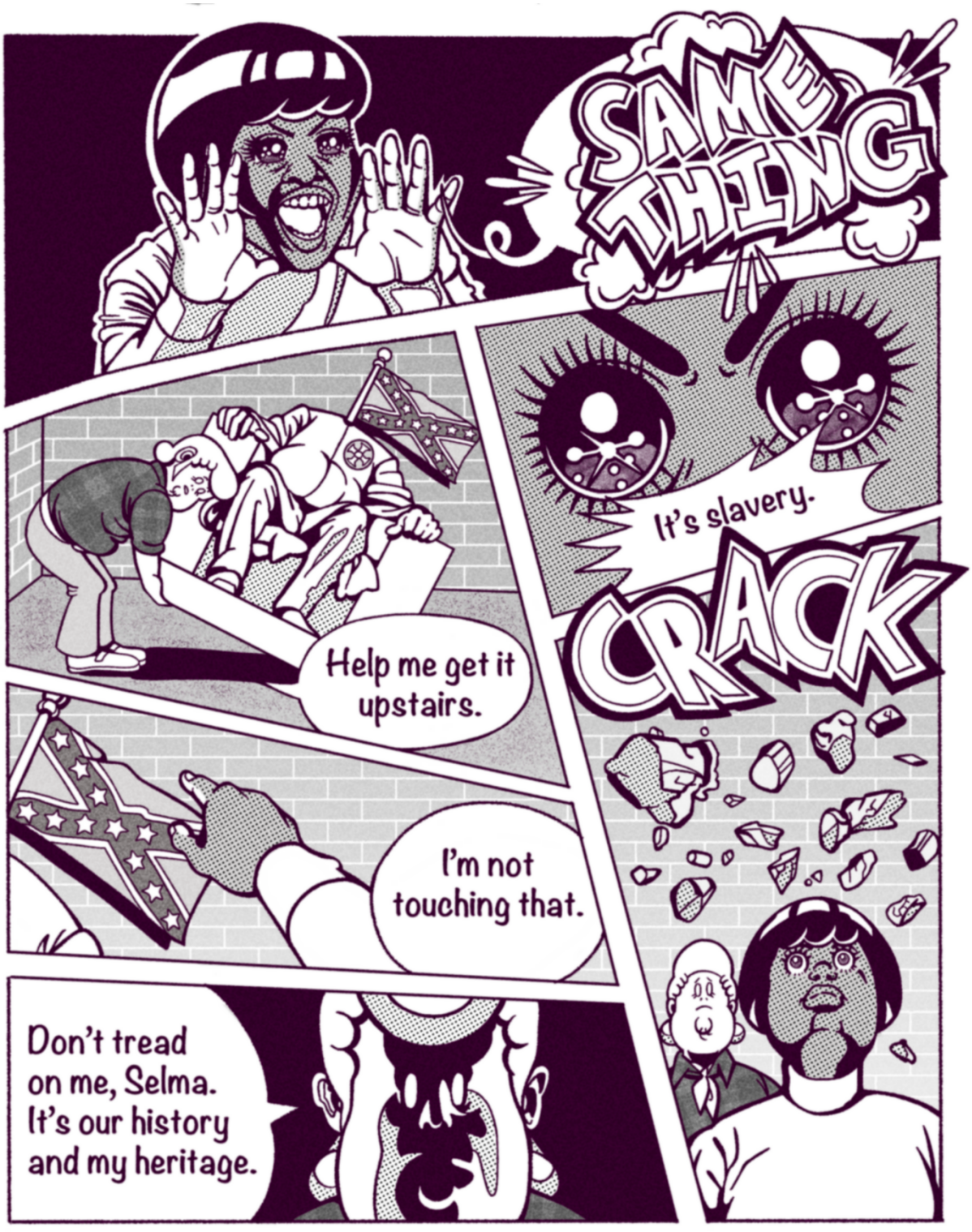
12


PFFT—POOT!
"Social-"
BRAAP!
We have to solve the mystery.
It's the only way forward.
You're insane.
13


CRACK
My glasses!
14


Oh no. You can't see.
I can see.
Not as well as before.
I CAN STILL SEE!
What in the...
15


"Spectacle is a form of camouflage. It does not conceal anything; it simply renders it unrecognizable."4
What?
This is a politically correct statue.
See!
16


SAME THING
It's slavery.
CRACK
Help me get it upstairs.
I'm not touching that.
Don't tread on me, Selma. It's our history and my heritage.

17


The house is caving in!
Help me.
We have to go!
Help us!
I can't!
I'm just a boy!
BAM
Selma!

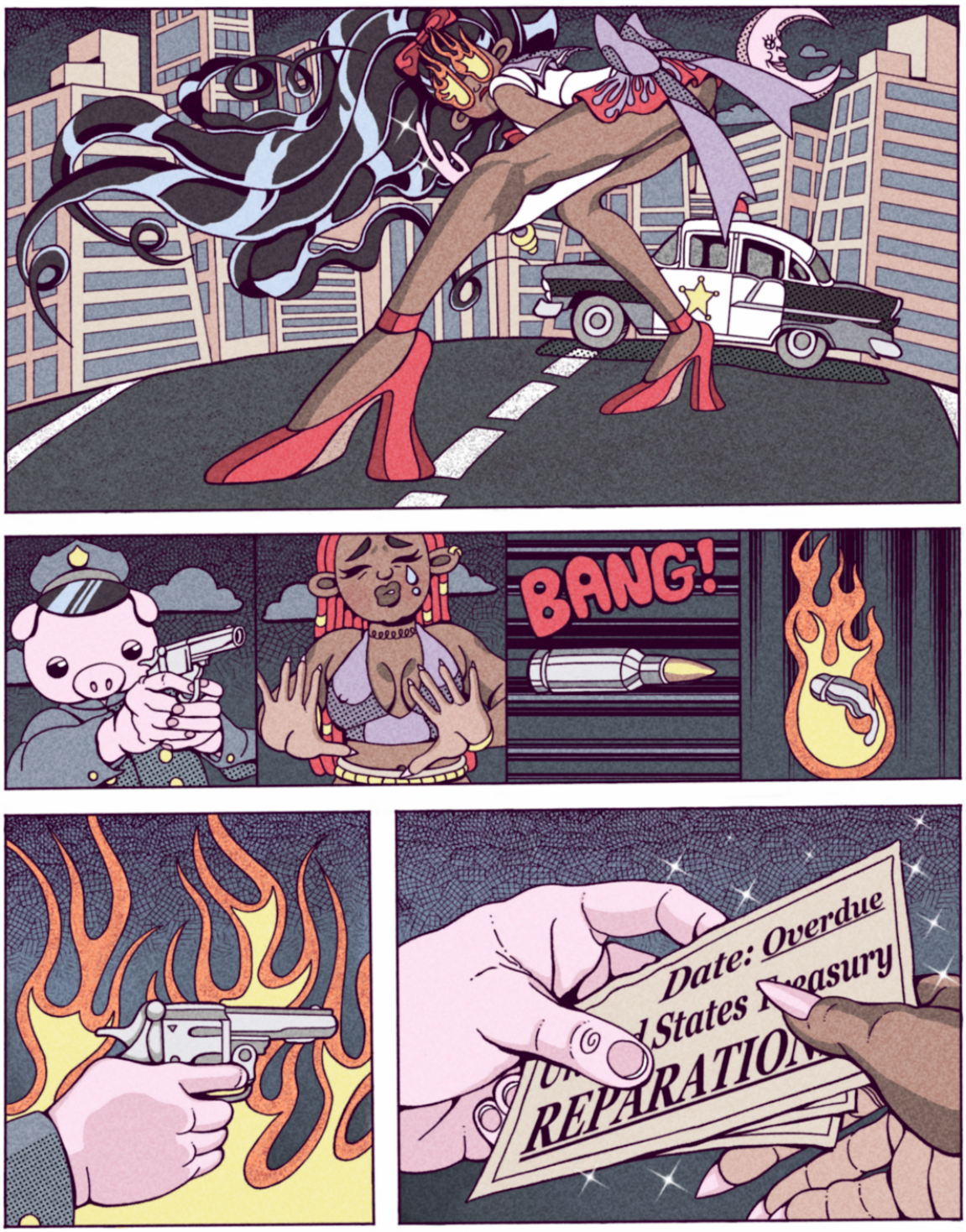
18

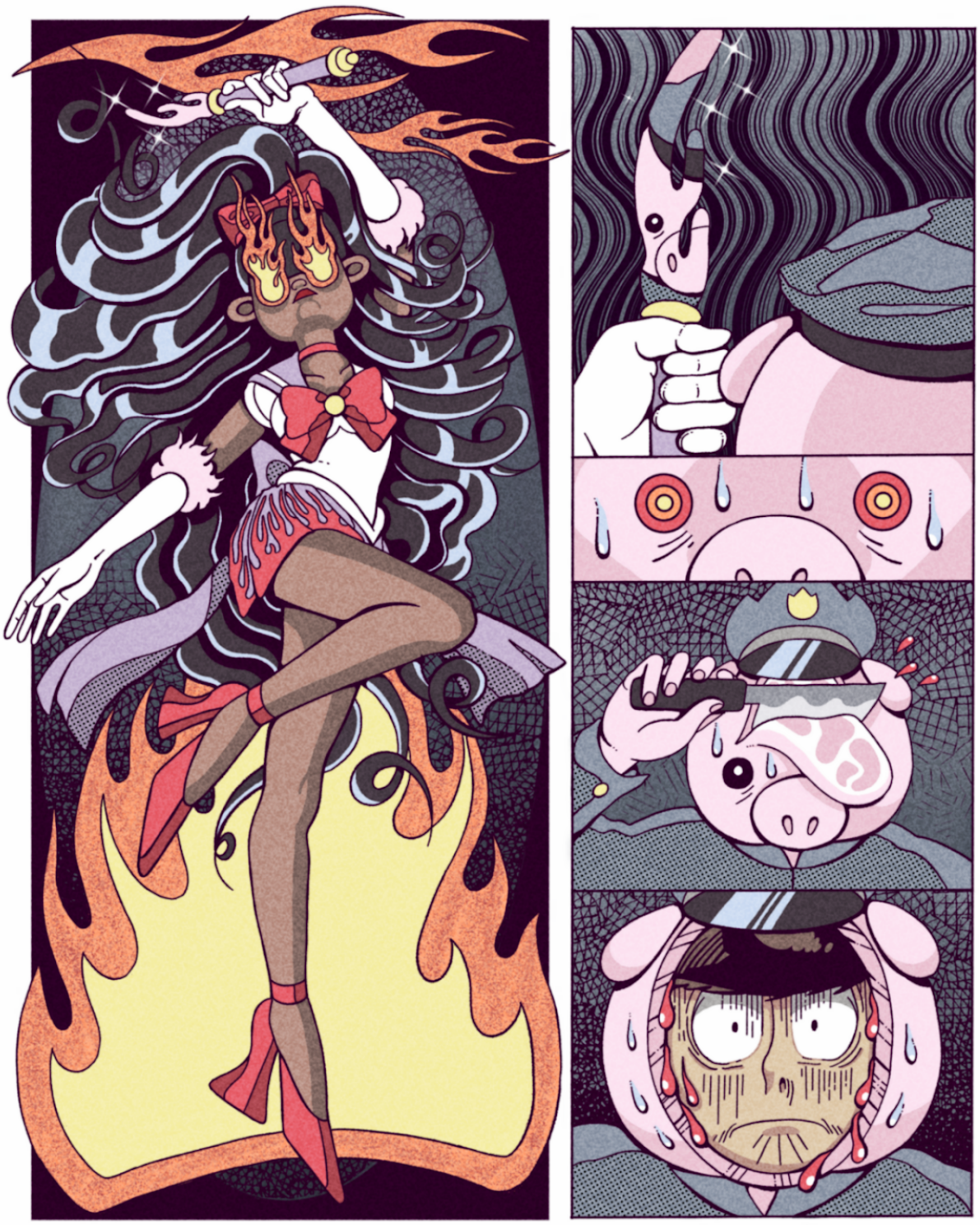
19

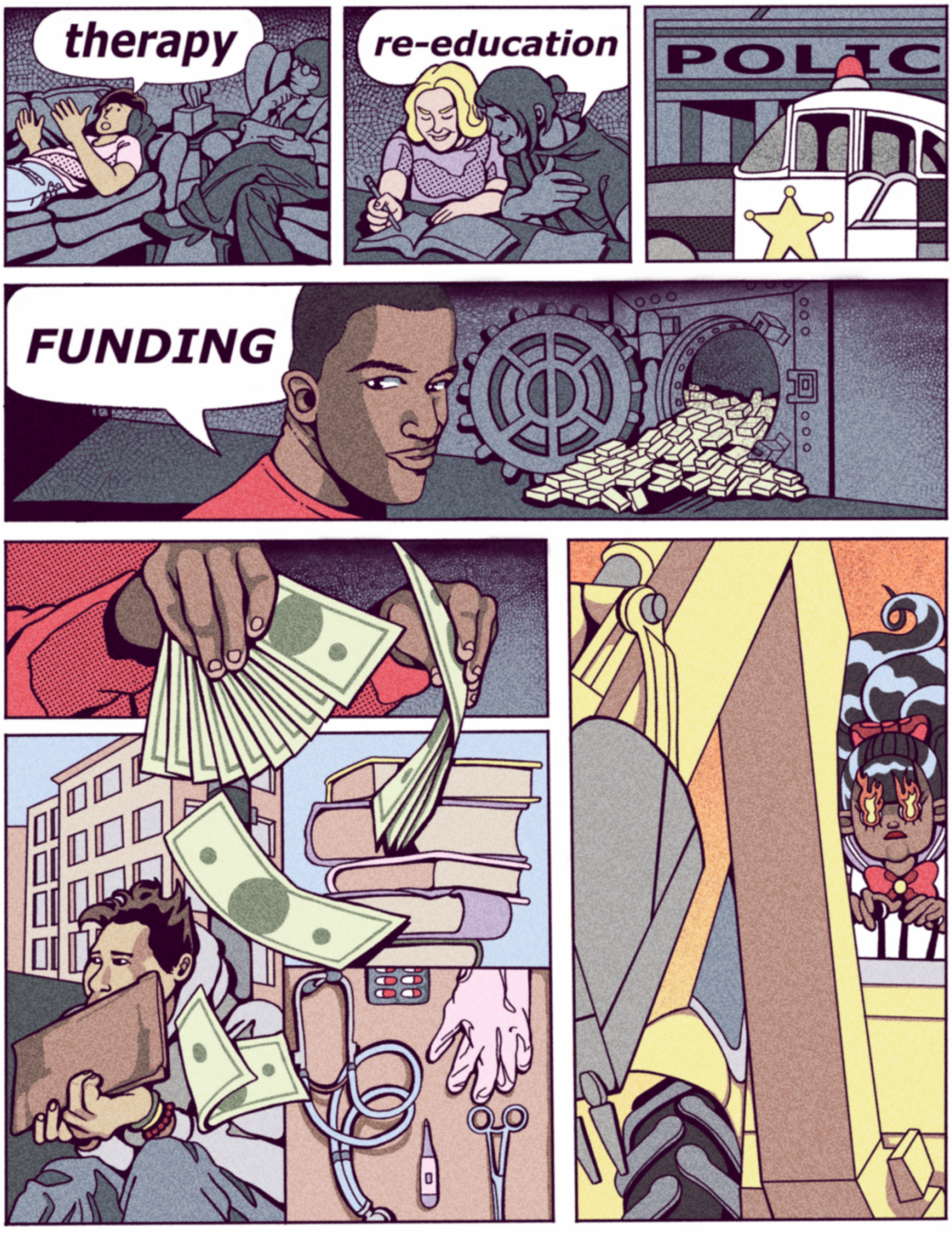
20

Appendix B


A.C.A.B.
a comic
by melanie west
CLICK!
According to The Washington Post, Black Americans are less than 13 percent of the population, *but the rate at which Black Americans are killed by the police stands twice as high as the rate for White Americans.*


BANG!
Date: Overdue
REPARATIO




therapy
re-education
POLIC
FUNDING

END

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