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#### **Publication Date**

2014

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

**Mental Death**  
**Slavery, Madness and State Violence in the United States**

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

with an emphasis in FEMINIST STUDIES

by

**Adam Metcalfe Reed**

September 2014

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## Table of Contents

List of Figures

Page iv

Abstract

Page vi

Acknowledgments

Page vii

[Introduction](#)

Page 1

[Chapter 1: Haunting Asylums: Madness and the Archive](#)

Page 22

[Chapter 2: Compounds of Madness and Race: Governing Species, Disease and Sexuality in the Early Republic](#)

Page 92

[Chapter 3: Worse than Useless, Too Much Sense: Enslaved Insanity in Plantations, Hospitals, Courtrooms and Asylums](#)

Page 150

[Conclusion](#)

Page 226

Bibliography

Page 256

## List of Figures

Image 1, Cherry Hospital Museum

Page 26

Image 2, Payroll and Budget

Page 27

Image 3, Kettle and Cotton

Page 28

Image 4, List of Superintendents

Page 29

Image 5, Mower

Page 30

Image 6, Rocking Chair

Page 31

Image 7, Cradle and Doll

Page 32

Image 8, Cage

Page 41

Image 9, 'If You Have Your Sanity, You Will Lose It,'

Page 87

Image 10, "Dying Confession of Pomp"

Page 236

Image 11, Enlargement of "Dying Confession of Pomp"

Page 237

Image 12, Security Camera Footage of Esmin Green

Page 247

Image 13, "Activists re-enact Esmin's murder"

Page 254

Image 14, Flyer for the Vigil/Demonstration on the Second Anniversary of Green's Death

Page 255

Adam Reed

Mental Death: Slavery, Madness and State Violence in the United States

In this dissertation, I analyzing the invagination of slavery and madness as constitutive of the political, medical, economic, legal and literary institutions of the United States. In my introduction, I discuss my previous project concerning all black mental institutions that emerged in the American South after Reconstruction. My first chapter, “Haunting Asylums: Madness, Slavery and the Archive,” addresses my difficulties with the fragmented records of the racially segregated mental asylums and how figurations of the ghost or the inhuman failed to provide me with a salvific moment. In Chapter 2, “Compounds of Madness and Race: Governing Species, Disease and Sexuality in the Early Republic,” I map the epistemic ground of race, mind and nation in the Revolutionary-era United States. My third chapter, “Worse than Useless, Too Much Sense: Enslaved Insanity in Plantations, Courtrooms and Asylums” is the culmination of previous two, where I trace the admission and treatment records of a sixteen-year-old slave interned in a mental asylum to the discourses and institutions surrounding the internal slave trade. I conclude by discussing two deaths separated by two centuries but connected by the violent conjunction of antiblackness and madness.

## Acknowledgments

I owe an incalculable debt to my advisors, Anjali Arondekar, Angela Davis and Donna Haraway. Platitudes fail me—I cannot thank you enough for your guidance, support and critique. I also owe a great deal to other faculty members who worked closely with me while at UC Santa Cruz, such as James Clifford, David Hoy, and Kim Lau. I also depended upon the critique, support and guidance I received from my colleagues in the History of Consciousness and other programs at UCSC. I wish to single out Nicole Archer, Martha Kenney, Nick Mitchell, Michelle Potts and Eric Stanley for their tremendous gifts. Outside of UCSC, Demelza Champagne and James Singer have enriched my education for many years and were instrumental in helping me finish this particular work. Platitudes also fail me when it comes to my family: my parents, Bill and Jody, and my sister Lindsey who have supplied the foundation for my life, my scholarship and much more. Finally, my thoughts remain with J.F.C., Esmin Green, Kate, Christopher McPherson, Pomp, Rose, Sophia, William (Spencer), Isham Thomas, Davy (Walker) and the many others, named and unnamed, who were murdered or worse under the auspices of state violence, white supremacy and sanity.



## Introduction

“Question 1    What is the patients age, and where born [sic]?”

Ans.            About 45 years old, born in Henry Co. Va.

Question 2    Is he married, + if so how many children?”

Ans.            Has been married—has no children he says.

Question 3    What are his habits, occupation and reputed property?”

Ans.            He is a common vagrant, no occupation and has no property.

Question 4    How long since indications of insanity appeared?”

Ans.            For at least five years past as I learn [sic] by inquiry—He has shown it ever since I knew him during the last year.

Question 5    What are they?”

Ans.            He imagines that property belonging to certain citizens in and about Courtland Va. is his own, and his claims to that property is asserted to the annoyance of said parties. He claims that he is not a human being because he says he has not been allowed to vote...”

So begins the admission form for Isham Thomas, who came to Virginia’s Central State Hospital on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1895 from the Courtland jail. The deposition was given by the physician to justices of the peace, which was the standard practice at the time but it caught my eye: this was the first year of admission reports that I had

been reviewing in which the majority of depositions were given by physicians.<sup>1</sup> In the previous years I reviewed, the physicians were often replaced by farmers, stable owners, and other professions or occupations not usually associated with the capacity to diagnose insanity. Yet these witnesses repeated some of the same descriptions of the future inmate of the asylum (and usually the present inmate of a jail) that are contained in the above passage. “She imagines she is the owner of the property on which she lives,” “demanded the keys to my house and said they were his,” “believed he was the owner of all he saw,” were common responses to the “What are they?” query. But even more frequent were other elements that under gird the above disposition: labor and movement: “Refuses to work,” “neglects his work,” “utter repugnance to labor,” “misunderstanding of orders,” as well as “he thinks he is not at home and wanders,” “tendency to run away,” “a disposition to wander about the country from place to place, not disposed to do anything,” etc.<sup>2</sup> I do not believe it is wild speculation to assume that a number of these witnesses and current employers were also the inmates’ former masters and mistresses.

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<sup>1</sup> See Todd Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: the Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 247. I reviewed five years (1874, 1875, 1885, 1895, and 1906) of admission files in four boxes that were housed at the State Records Center located east of Richmond, behind a tiny strip mall and next to an abandoned barn. The Center was an annex of the State Library of Virginia and only open on Wednesdays and Thursdays, from 9-12 and 1-4. The center had the admission files from 1874-1906 and 1930-55, the latter dates being inaccessible on account of medical privacy laws. But there were 40 boxes I could access; I only chose four because of time constraints and the fact that each record was in a sealed envelope and had to be opened by an archivist, which made me feel a bit guilty when the 1895 and 1906 boxes contained over 500 files.

<sup>2</sup> These records are now available in the main branch of the Library of Virginia. See Records of Central State Hospital, 1874-1961. Series II. Commitment Papers, 1874-1906, Boxes: 1-107, State government records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. I do not present the specific box and folder numbers because I have not returned to this archive since my original visit. The above citations come primarily from the 1874, 1875 and 1895 admission papers.

But I am slighting the questions of humanity, citizenship and sanity that lie at the heart of this narrative. As the disposition continues:

Question 8: Is his derangement evinced on one or several subjects? What are they?

Ans. On being deprived of a right to vote.

Question 9: What is the supposed cause of the disease?

Ans. Answered in question 8.

The exact meaning or motivation for this repetition is difficult to pin down. This could be a social critique—the race and political allegiance of the doctor being unmarked in the deposition. Yet the “claims” in the previous testimony seems to code Isham Thomas’ disenfranchisement as a delusion, drawing from the discourse concerning the “mental strain” of citizenship that overwhelmed the fragile emancipated psyche.<sup>3</sup> I believe that once Isham Thomas entered the asylum the “exciting cause” of his insanity was noted as “political excitement”—and that if this case had occurred in the first four years of the asylum’s existence, the catalyst of his madness would have been classified as “freedom.”<sup>4</sup>

My dissertation began as an attempt to expand and complicate Thomas’ narrative through an interrogation of his space of confinement, namely, the Central

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<sup>3</sup> While the “Underwood Constitution” of 1870 did not explicitly disenfranchise black voters and the poll tax in Virginia was revoked in 1884 (and later reinstated along with literacy tests in 1902), de facto and extra-legal intimidation of black voters, such as the 1883 race riot in Danville that occurred on the eve of an election, was widespread. See Peter Wallenstein, *Cradle of America: Four Centuries of Virginian History* (Topeka: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 237-8.

<sup>4</sup> These phrases come from the Central State Hospital Superintendent’s Annual Reports to the Governor of Virginia. See CSH AR 1871, Table XXXIV, Supposed Causes of All Admitted.

State Hospital in Petersburg, Virginia. Beginning in 1870, there were at least seven psychiatric facilities built exclusively for black inmates in the American South; Crownsville State Hospital was the furthest to the north in Maryland while Taft State Hospital was the furthest west in Oklahoma.<sup>5</sup> Central State Hospital was the first to open its doors in 1870, inheriting them from a hospital for the “care and treatment of sick and homeless negroes” built by the Freedmen’s Bureau two years prior in Richmond. In order to care for the “72 insane and idiotic negroes” at the site as well as the 30 confined in the Eastern Lunatic Asylum at Williamsburg and the unknown number in the state’s jails, a single story building “without any pretense at architectural beauty” was added to the grounds and iron bars were placed on every window.<sup>6</sup> In 1969, Alabama became the final state to desegregate its separate asylum, despite Governor George Wallace’s promise four years earlier to the superintendent of Searcy State Hospital that “there is no power in the world” that could force this to happen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In order of establishment: Central State Hospital (formerly the Central Lunatic Asylum for the Colored Insane) in Petersburg, Virginia, founded in 1870 and desegregated in 1965; State Hospital at Goldsboro (formerly the Asylum for the Colored Insane and Eastern State Hospital, and presently known as Cherry Hospital) in North Carolina, 1880-1965; Searcy Hospital (formerly the Mount Vernon Hospital) in Mount Vernon, Alabama, 1902-1969; Crownsville State Hospital (formerly the Hospital for the Negro Insane) in Crownsville, Maryland, 1911-1963; Palmetto State Hospital (formerly South Carolina State Hospital-State Farm Division and currently a geriatric facility known as Craft-Farrow State Hospital) in Columbia, South Carolina, 1914-1966; Lakin State Hospital for the Colored Insane in Mason County, West Virginia, 1926-1954; and the Taft State Hospital in Taft, Oklahoma, 1933-1955.

<sup>6</sup> Henry M. Hurd, William F. Drewry, Richard, Dewey, Charles W. Pilgrim, G. Alder Blumer and T.J.W. Burgess, *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada, Volume III* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1916), 736-7.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Dr. J. S. Tarwater, June 4, 1965. I accessed this letter at the Alabama Department of Archives and History, but neglected to record the box or folder number. I believe it can be found in Alabama. Governor (1963-1979), state institutions files, SG021949-SG21976, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

While some psychiatric historians argue that the profession was in a state of crisis after the Civil War as the failure of medical and moral treatments cast a shadow over the science, the discourses surrounding the newly built asylums for black men and women in Virginia, North Carolina and Alabama were brimming with certainty about both the rapid increase of black insanity, its cause and cure. In annual reports, articles published in medical journals, conference presentations, etc., the various doctors and administrators associated with the asylums pointed to the large statistical increase in black insanity since the Civil War and portrayed emancipation as pathogenic. There were of course different emphases at each site. Virginia focused on the “mental strain” of freedom and the unleashing of “unbridled appetites” that lead to the spread of venereal disease and the consequent hereditary degeneration.<sup>8</sup> North Carolina being especially concerned with how the new found “heavy burden of responsibility” caused men to abandon their wives, who were not as mentally equipped to survive in such a harsh world.<sup>9</sup> Alabama panicked about the “safety to the community, as well as humanity” presented by those who “were never able of themselves to formulate a civilization.”<sup>10</sup> Yet each site diagnosed the root cause of the rise of black insanity as the loss of the physical, mental and moral discipline under slavery. While never explicitly formulated as such by any of the hospital personnel, at least in publication, the task became to reverse emancipation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> CSH, AR, 1903, 11.

<sup>9</sup> State Hospital at Goldsboro, AR, 1889, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Alabama State Hospital, AR, 1886, 22 and AR, 1910, n.p.

<sup>11</sup> The development of Crownsville Hospital in Maryland has a slightly divergent itinerary. While the Maryland Lunacy Commission replicated this discourse—“In the slavery days insane negroes were not

Physical labor on the institutions' farms constituted the primary means of cure. While this aspect of moral treatment was a mainstay in white asylums both before and after the Civil War, its overwhelming centrality to these asylums' lives, the rate of production that sometimes doubled the output of the white asylums in the same state, and the barely veiled coercion that enforced the practice reveal that the overemphasis on manual labor was not just a simple repetition. According to the Superintendent of Central State Hospital, "Most of this work is voluntary; those who are physically able, and whose mental condition will be improved by manual labor, are forced to go out with the work parties, if only for the sake of sunshine and change from the ward to the field. All who work willingly are given tobacco and something extra at meals. Manual labor is the normal and only employment of this class of our insane, and *the only means we have thus far discovered to facilitate their cure.*"<sup>12</sup>

Likewise, the Superintendent at the State Hospital at Goldsboro described "our farm"

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often seen, if we can credit the reports. As life has become more strenuous for them, mental diseases have notably increased," for example (AR, 1906, 25)—the asylum was constructed under a more progressive banner. A documentary photograph campaign organized by the commission in 1908 disseminated a number of pictures as proof of the poor state of care for psychiatric inmates, especially the blacks ones, with photographs of black inmates chained to bars or each other being among the most prominent. See Robert W. Schoeberlein, "The Beginning of Mental Health Care Reform in Maryland, 1908-1910" *Maryland Historical Magazine* 96(4) Winter 2001. Yet the black inmate as pure, helpless victim did not preclude the utilization of his or her labor: Crownsville may be the only asylum in American history that was built by the inmates themselves, as they were drawn from other institutions and gathered at work camps to construct it in 1911.

<sup>12</sup> CSH, AR, 1872, 7, emphasis added. The rest of the passage demonstrates how some patients drew connections between this practice and their former bondage: "Some involuntary laborers, encouraged thereto by their friends and relatives visiting them, object to work, on the ground of its reducing them to their former slave state—'making them work without pay;' and object, logically, that 'if well enough to work, they are well enough to be discharged.'"

as “a remedial agent for mind and body, far more efficient than anything found in the catalogue of drugs.”<sup>13</sup>

But death was perhaps the asylums’ most productive resource for theorizing racial difference. When compared with the death rates in the white asylums of the state, each black institutions’ was always higher, sometimes astronomically so. For instance, in 1910, 197 inmates died at Alabama’s Searcy Hospital, or 20% of the total treated that years, while at the white Bryce Hospital only 6% of the patients died. “There is some discouragement in the care of these people because of a great lack of improving response to the best directed treatment; they readily become demented and they easily die,” was all the report had to say about the subject.<sup>14</sup> The other institutions sought more specific reasons as to why the death rate of their inmates was “usually about double that of whites.”<sup>15</sup> In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, both Virginia and North Carolina became particularly invested in the linkage between the rise of tuberculosis and insanity in black populations after manumission, to the point of concluding that “both are neuroses” resulting from the Negro’s inability to adjust to modern civilization.<sup>16</sup> Yet the focus shifted in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to

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<sup>13</sup> SHG, AR, 1930, p. 3. There is clear overlap here with the labor practices in these asylums as well as those in the convict lease system. Most of the states I consider utilized this system at some point with important differences: while Virginia did so sporadically, and North Carolina focused more on prison farms at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Alabama practiced leasing with almost religious zeal until 1928. See Matthew Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866-1928* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1996). Considering a large number of the asylums’ inmates came from local jails, I am curious as to how strongly their capacity to labor influenced their transferal to the asylum.

<sup>14</sup> ASH, AR, 1910, n.p.

<sup>15</sup> CSH, AR, 1898, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> SHG, AR, 1900, p. 13.

pellagra and especially syphilis, with a corresponding increase in the rhetoric of degeneracy and eugenics.<sup>17</sup> The following long and confused passage from the superintendent at Central State Hospital represents this budding formation:

“From the information gleaned from commitment papers, from observation and examination of the patients who come to us, and a general study of the problem, the truth regarding the causes of insanity and degeneracy in the negro is more or less definitely revealed.

Bad heredity is, of course, an important factor. In many, inherent mental incapacity and constitutional inferiority furnish as a basis for the development of mental disease and deterioration as soon as they face the responsibilities of making for themselves and those dependent upon them a livelihood. Some, especially those who are predisposed, lose their mental balance completely when subjected to unfavorable environment, or of stress, strain, or emotional disturbances of any kind. Venereal disease, excessive indulgence in alcohol and vices of various kinds are potential factors in undermining the general physical health and making the sufferer an easy victim of insanity. Through neglect, ignorance, dissipation, exposure, unwholesome food, bad hygienic living conditions, the bodily functions become disordered, constitutional disturbances, especially of the kidneys, heart, gastro-intestinal system, etc., develop, the physical vitality is lowered, and finally the nervous system succumbs and insanity is often the inevitable result.<sup>18</sup> Much more might be said, but the above is sufficient to give some general idea of the chief causes of insanity in this race. Here is a rich field for sociological investigations, and for the application of preventive measures by way of eugenics, sterilization, segregation, etc.”<sup>19</sup>

What unifies, or at least brackets, this mishmash of the freedom-as-overwhelming-stress theory, neo-Lamarckianism, and vision of black populations as the breeding ground for disease is the promise of eugenic control.

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<sup>17</sup> Pellagra was first diagnosed on US soil at Searcy Hospital in 1906. In 1915, it was shown to be a result of dietary deficiency when Joseph Goldberger induced it in eleven white inmates of the Rankin Prison Farm in Mississippi.

<sup>18</sup> Considering the neglect, abuse, lack of nutrition, hard labor, etc, *within* the asylums, it is hard not to read this sentence in particular without fainting from the irony.

<sup>19</sup> CHS, AR, 1912, p. 8



It was not the syphilitic or schizophrenic but the feeble-minded that emerged as the central target of eugenics, sterilization and segregation—as the most dangerous population to both the institution and “a menace to society generally.”<sup>20</sup> Embodying a number of elements from the above nexus of discourses of bad heredity, mental lack, uncontrollable sexuality and social danger, the demand for state provisions for feeble-minded Negroes became the central mission for the asylums, especially at Virginia. Here, the reports were filled with descriptions of the feeble-minded inmates’ “lack in self-control, and in power to adjust themselves to environment, or to apply themselves voluntarily and steadily to any work.”<sup>21</sup> Along with this inability to work, which was still the main form of treatment at the facilities, lay a propensity for violence and sex: it was the feeble-minded inmates in particular “who form combinations here among themselves, are continually plotting mischief, inclined to sexual perversions, abuse of other patients, and from time to time break down the doors and make their escape.”<sup>22</sup> Violent and unemployable, nonheteronormative and overly-reproductive, the feeble-minded inmates were the majority of those sterilized in Virginia and North Carolina, especially those who were “potential mothers.”<sup>23</sup>

Sterilization practices were suspended after World War II, but I have trouble pointing to the exact date as each institution becomes much harder to follow in the

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<sup>20</sup> CHS, AR, 1919, p. 13

<sup>21</sup> CSH, AR, 1913, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> CSH, AR, 1925, p. 15

<sup>23</sup> CSH, AR, 1917, p. 17. Even though the vast majority of sterilizations were performed on women, the institutional discourse is remarkably desexualized, almost never emphasizing the prominence of female inmates in this practice.

1940s when the asylums stopped producing annual reports and much of their documentation is kept behind privacy laws. But let me end this brief, schematic overview of their lifetimes with another case narrative, a sort of inversion of Ishman Thomas'. On September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1961, Wallace Nelson, Juanita Nelson and Rose Robinson entered Crownsville State Hospital. The trio, originally from Philadelphia, had been transferred to this institution from the Cecil County Jail because, according to Sheriff Edgar Startt, "Anybody that will not eat and won't stand up in court and plead acts like a mental case to me—and also to the State's attorney."<sup>24</sup> That their refusal to eat or plead was a response to their arrest during a sit-in at a restaurant where they were refused service apparently did not affect the sheriff's or the state attorney's diagnosis of their mental status. But the dissimulation of this hunger strike as mental illness was not enforced by the staff at Crownsville, which was by this time integrated—seven out of the seventeen staff physicians were black, and a number of the others were Jewish refugees from Europe who had worked at the asylum since the late 1940s. Indeed, according to Vanessa Jackson, "Dr. Charles Ward, the hospital superintendent who personally evaluated the protestors, determined that they showed no signs of mental illness and had informed [the sheriff] that eating would be cooperating in a situation that they thought was wrong and unfair."<sup>25</sup> The activists were thus sent back to jail and were eventually convicted of trespassing. Unlike the

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<sup>24</sup> Cited in "3 On 12-Day Hunger Strike Are Moved to Crownsville" *The Baltimore Sun*, September 19, 1961

<sup>25</sup> Vanessa Jackson, *Separate and Unequal: The Legacy of Racially Segregated Psychiatric Hospitals, A Cultural Competence Training Tool* (2005, available at <http://www.patdeegan.com/documents/SeparateandUnequalCMHSFINAL.pdf>), 24

words of Thomas, the protest of Wallace Nelson, Juanita Nelson and Rose Robinson was not classified as madness, despite the hopes of Maryland law enforcement. Also unlike Thomas, I know they were able to leave the asylum.

I arrived at the racially segregated mental institutions primarily through the work of Vanessa Jackson, a social worker who described herself as “clueless...all I had was drapetomania” when she began investigating the history of African Americans and psychiatry.<sup>26</sup> Yet her research led her to contemporary psychiatric consumer/survivor/ex-patient (c/s/x) activists who were beginning to archive their movement, specifically Pat Deegan, who was running a project entitled “It’s About Time: Discovering, Recovering and Celebrating Consumer/Survivor History” after receiving a grant from the Center for Mental Health Services.<sup>27</sup> While researching a monograph for that project called *In Our Own Voice: African American Stories of Oppression, Survival and Recovery in Mental Health Systems*, Jackson began to hear of all black mental asylums in the American South. Information on these sites was uneven; some states, like Virginia, North Carolina and Maryland, had online traces and archival materials while in other states the asylums seemed to have never existed.<sup>28</sup> Jackson found out about them in inventive ways; for instance, after

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<sup>26</sup> Personal Communication, phone conversation, 5/20/08. Jackson is referring to Samuel A. Cartwright’s diagnostic category that coded slaves’ desire to runaway a mental disease, which I will discuss at length in Chapter 3.

<sup>27</sup> National Empowerment Center, Inc., “National Empowerment Center – Articles, It’s About Time: Discovering, Recovering and Celebrating Consumer/Survivor History,” <http://www.power2u.org/articles/history-project/how.html> (accessed 5/25/14). The Center for Mental Health Services is a Federal agency within the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

<sup>28</sup> Vanessa Jackson, “In Our Own Voice: African-American Stories of Oppression, Survival and Recovery,” *Off Our Backs*, Vol. 33, No. 7/8, July-August 2003

“countless hours spent on the Internet typing in every conceivable variation of Negro and ‘insane,’” she discovered the ruins of the Lakin State Hospital for the Colored Insane in West Virginia on a ghost-hunters webpage.<sup>29</sup> While interviewing former staff members at this site, one of them mentioned hearing about another racially segregated institution in Taft, Oklahoma, and she was only able to confirm its existence when she was in South Carolina, researching another asylum, in a chance review of a legal text on state laws and race.<sup>30</sup>

In her transformation “from a mental health user/social worker to an amateur historian,” Jackson also experienced a radicalization of her beliefs and a profound questioning of her practice.<sup>31</sup> She told me that, as she was conducting her research, there were times when she thought “I can’t be a therapist anymore—we are evil.” The asylums were for her barely veiled sites for the containment of the socially unacceptable, a means of suppressing any form of black dissent or discontent (“they were political prisons”), and the control of black labor pools while also a source of well-paying jobs for the white staff, who were appointed through systems of patronage. Yet she also found “bright spots,” which ranged from black psychiatrists refusing coercive methods and experimenting with milieu therapy in West Virginia to white staff members in Maryland who overcame the racist divisions, recognized a

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<sup>29</sup>Vanessa Jackson, *Separate and Unequal*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> When she called the Oklahoma state archives, they responded with a “What?!” Personal Communication, phone conversation, 5/20/08.

<sup>31</sup> Jackson, “In Our Own Voice,” 19.

common humanity, and administered “love medicine.”<sup>32</sup> In the monograph that came from this research, Jackson attempted to downplay the brutal power relations and focused instead on “how to bring out what worked” in the asylums. Still, she hoped her readers would realize that “everything old is new again,” that black communities still lack access to mental health services and, when they fall under the psychiatric purview, their struggles are consistently misrecognized and contained in reductive, biological labels.<sup>33</sup> The Center for Mental Health Services, however, did not agree; making outrageous demands for evidence—for instance, discounting a witness’s description of lobotomies in one asylum because of the lack of a medical chart to back it up, even though the records of the asylum had been misplaced decades ago—the center refused to publish her monograph. So Jackson uploaded it on the webpage for her clinical and consulting practice (<http://www.healingcircles.org/>), which is where I found it.

I intended to use the history of the racially segregated, all-black mental asylums to exemplify a conjunction of antiblackness and subjectivity that I place under the catachresis of “mental death.” The inspiration for the term, and the only use of it in this context that I have been able to locate, comes from Secretary of State

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<sup>32</sup> She gave me the example, “unthinkable nowadays,” of when the staff at the Crownsville Hospital in Maryland took all of the children home for Christmas. Personal Communication, phone conversation, 5/20/08.

<sup>33</sup> Jackson described the diagnoses of conduct disorders in adolescents as “the modern day drapetomania,” as the rush to medicate the children disavows how, as a result of poor schools, unacceptable living situations, lack of job opportunities, etc., these children are “clinically pissed off” on a whole other level. Personal Communication, phone conversation, 5/20/08. See also Peter Breggin and G.R. Breggin, *The War Against Children of Color: Psychiatry Targets Inner City Youth* (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1998).

John C. Calhoun's statement after reviewing the 1840 census: "Here is the proof of the necessity of slavery. The African is incapable of self care, and sinks into lunacy under the burden of freedom. It is a mercy to him to give this guardianship and protection from mental death."<sup>34</sup> I will speak at greater length on this census in my third chapter; suffice to say here that it supposedly recorded an abundance of madness in free black men and women in the Northern states, and a corresponding wealth of sanity in the enslaved of the South. Calhoun's assertion that black minds and spirits die outside of bondage is an articulation of race and madness that I do not believe has been sufficiently explicated in histories of the invention of race or in studies of the racialization of psychiatry. This is why I am interested in the double emphasis in the concept-metaphor of mental death: *mental* death, which points to how constructions and destructions of the mind, brain, intellect, etc., have been and continue to be integral elements of racial formations and apparatuses of incarceration, irreducible to but imbricated with bodies. Moreover, mental *death* implies the ultimate foreclosure from personhood, but also a sentence that is more or less commuted even if it never fully becomes "life" in the institutions and discourses under consideration.

Mental death also alludes to the theorization of "social death" in slavery and prison studies, a concept that has been surprisingly absent from the critical or anti-

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<sup>34</sup> Cited in Edward Jarvis, "The Autobiography of Edward Jarvis: Part 1" *Medical History Supplement* (12) 1992, 63. While this quote has been cited by various authors—Albert Duetsch claims it was "thundered on the floor of Congress"—it may be apocryphal. See Albert Deutsch "The First U.S. Census of the Insane (1840) and its Use as Pro-slavery Propaganda" *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 15, 1944, 473. Jarvis' autobiography, as dictated to his wife in 1873, is the first place I can locate the statement, where it is provided without date or context.

psychiatric literature. Claude Meillassoux's and Orlando Paterson's description of the slave as someone who is socially dead, stripped of all social and kinship ties and rights, becoming "not-born" through a "secular excommunication," has proven an important resource for tracing the repetitions and ruptures among chattel slavery, the convict lease system and the contemporary prison industrial complex.<sup>35</sup> Yet scholars of psychiatry, especially in the American context, have neglected to grapple with how social death is and has been intertwined with psychiatric discourses, institutions and technologies. To think of mental death—a co-articulation of blackness and madness in terms of pathology, incarceration, and exchange—as a sometimes corollary and sometimes originary dimension of social death may help to bring the insights of critical slavery and prison studies into a productive dialogue with contemporary accounts of psychiatry and its histories. Such an engagement is necessary due to the persistent elision of race in the latter texts, whether they fall under the rubrics of Whiggish narratives of progress, foreboding tales of increased social control, neo-Foucaultian considerations of govern-mentality, or more recently, "neurochemical selves."<sup>36</sup> Often this exclusion is accomplished by selective inclusion as people of color, particularly black men and women, as supernumeraries in these grand

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<sup>35</sup> Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 107; Orlando Paterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 5. Colin Dayan's notion of "civil death" stands as one of the most productive outcomes of this latter line of analysis. See "Legal Slaves and Civil Bodies" *Nepantla: Views from South* 2(1) 2001. See also Angela Y. Davis, "From the Convict Lease System to the Super-Max Prison" in Joy James (ed.) *States of Confinement: Policing, Detention and Prisons* (New York: Palgrave, 2002) and Dylan Rodríguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> The phrase belongs to Nikolas Rose. See Chapter 7 of *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

narratives, where they appear as either woefully underdeveloped in the past and the present or as the most visible and tangible evidence that exposes the social bias of a supposedly objective science. Ultimately, I believed I could draw a contiguous line from chattel slavery through the segregated mental asylums to the contemporary scene of the United States, where selective recognitions and curations of mental illness operate at the foundation of the prison industrial complex.<sup>37</sup>

But I failed to write this dissertation. Instead of theorizing mental death in spaces designed to contain and eradicate madness, I turned to an institution predicated on its absence. One of the core elements of pro-slavery discourse was the mental well-being of the slaves, properly disciplined and maintained by their masters, as opposed to the free blacks preyed upon by their unbridled appetites and unable to compete in American society. As I will discuss in Chapter 1, certain analyses of psychiatry's origin reproduce this discourse by accepting the absence of enslaved insanity, in representation if not fact. Yet as I began to investigate the pre-history of the racially segregated asylums, I found insane slaves to be subject to regimes of visibility and individuation denied to the populations of the post-Reconstruction mental institutions. I do not mean that enslaved men and women were treated "better" than their descendants who disappeared into the asylums, for a constitutive element of the former's representation and materiality was their subjection to constant

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<sup>37</sup> See Terry Kupers, *Prison Madness: the Mental Health Crisis Behind Bars and What We Must Do About It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999) and Lorna A. Rhodes, *Total Confinement: Madness and Reason in the Maximum Security Prison* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).



and absolute violence. A substantial part of their value was associated with their sanity, defined not as the absence of madness but the ability to work to their masters' content; slaves were primarily diagnosed not in asylums, but in courtrooms, auction houses, plantation fields, etc. As I began to connect this dispersed archive, my dissertation shifted from examining specific sites of confinement and disappearance to entanglements of race and madness across the different levels of antebellum America, from the slave market to the presidency. Although I did not abandon my concerns about the present state of incarceration and white supremacy, I stopped trying to perform a genealogy of psychiatry and the prison industrial complex, focusing instead on the invagination of slavery and madness as constitutive of the political, medical, economic, legal and literary institutions of the United States.

My first chapter, "Haunting Asylums: Madness, Slavery and the Archive," addresses my difficulties with the fragmented records of the racially segregated mental asylums and how figurations of the ghost or the inhuman failed to provide me with a salvific moment. I begin by detailing my research in North Carolina, where an asylum's museum promised me a kind of access to the lives of inmates I was denied in the official archives. Yet I encountered similar techniques of keeping the dead at bay at both locations and turned to the thought of spectrality in the works of Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Spivak, Achille Mbembe and Avery Gordon in the hope to hear the inmates whose voices, bodies and records had been misplaced. But transforming the lost into speaking ghosts repeated the violence I intended to upend, for spectrality is also a function of the social death enforced upon the enslaved, explicated brilliantly

by Saidiya Hartman. I attempted to use Michel Foucault's work on the history of madness in the early modern period in order to think of a space before this complicity of slavery and haunting. But rather than a pre-divided experience of madness and humanity, Foucault's work demonstrates the entanglement of monstrosity and animality that becomes marked as "race" in the biopolitical period. I end by analyzing the two texts written by inmates that I was able to find in my research, which I read as navigating and antagonizing regimes of violence and fungability that mark them as enslaved.

In Chapter 2, "Compounds of Madness and Race: Governing Species, Disease and Sexuality in the Early Republic," I attempt to map the epistemic ground of race, mind and nation in the revolutionary-era United States. First, I focus on the works of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Rush, two foundational patriarchs who defined blackness and citizenship as mutually exclusive, but with different itineraries. Jefferson merges the government of difference within natural history and the American nation to formulate a conception of "race" where blackness signifies lack and rebellion. Rush seeks to save the enslaved from permanent foreclosure from the republic, yet reinforces their threatening difference by making blackness a contagion. I then turn to two texts that profile the madness of those caught in these regimes of power and health, unable to ascend to the status of citizen or control their own desires. The first is an autobiography written by Christopher McPherson, a free man of color whose calls for justice are heard as the screams of a madman, a move by the Richmond authorities that seizes his property along with his body. The second text

consists of a doctor's description of an enslaved woman named Rose who embraces her mistress after she is denied her ability to choose a husband. As opposed to the other writings profiled in this section, Rose's text consists of a short paragraph; I thus use other discourses concerning slave sexuality and sodomy, some written by Jefferson and Rush, to explicate the scope of violence visited upon her.

My third chapter, "Worse than Useless, Too Much Sense: Enslaved Insanity in Plantations, Courtrooms and Asylums" is the culmination of previous two, as I trace the admission and treatment records of a sixteen-year-old slave interned in a mental asylum to the discourses and institutions surrounding the internal slave trade. In 1853, Davy (Walker) was admitted to the Eastern Lunatic Asylum in Williamsburg, Virginia, his madness consisting of "running away, threatening his mother, killing cats and painting himself with poke-[berries?] (*Phytolacca decandra*)."<sup>38</sup> I explicate the first three of these symptoms by examining techniques of plantation management that sought to regulate enslaved men and women's affective ties to property and kinship. Then I turn to the poke berries, which were used as medicine by enslaved healers as well as doctors in the service of masters, a battleground exposed in the texts of medical journals that define enslaved cosmologies as mental illness. To understand why Davy (Walker) was sent to a mental asylum before the auction block, I draw from the largest archive on enslaved madness: records from breach of warranty trials, where the value of enslaved sanity

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<sup>38</sup> Patients, Register of, 1853-1854. Series 1, Volume 29. Records of Eastern State Hospital, 1770-2009, State government records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

was rigorously calculated by owners, lawyers and doctors. I then return to the asylum where Davy (Walker) eventually died, profiling how the superintendent drew from the discourses discussed above in defining slave sanity not as the absence of madness, but in the ability to work. I end the chapter by examining a slave cured of his madness through silence and another whose unsound sense proved to be insurrectionary.

I conclude this dissertation by discussing two deaths separated by 200 years and how I can and cannot connect them. The first comes from a broadside containing the “dying confession” of Pomp, a “NEGRO MAN, who was executed at IPSWICH, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August, 1795, for Murdering Capt. CHARLES FURBUSH, of Andover.”<sup>39</sup> Although the text contains descriptions of Pomp’s abusive master and escape attempts, he is never described as a slave. The institution was supposedly abolished in the state twelve years prior to Pomp’s execution and the broadsheet foregrounds his madness in order to elide his status as property. The second death, belonging to Esmine Green, was captured by a security camera in the waiting room of a Brooklyn hospital in 2008. Green had been held in the psychiatric emergency room for 23 hours, waiting for a bed in ward to open up, before she collapsed on the floor. For the next hour, she lay there as hospital staff, security guards and visitors passed by, unable to see a death that would subsequently become hyper-visible on television

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<sup>39</sup> Jonathon Plummer, *Dying Confession of Pomp, A Negro Man, Who Was Executed at Ipswich, on the 6th August, 1795, for Murdering Capt. Charles Furbush, of Andover, Taken from the Mouth of the Prisoner, and Penned by Jonathan Plummer, Jun* (Newburyport, MA: Jonathan Plummer; Blunt and March, 1795). Accessed at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/pomp/menu.html>

and the internet. I believe my work on the racialization of madness can help to connect these condemned; beyond a shared chromatism and designation of insanity, Pomp and Green were made fungible and disposable at the legal, medical, political and economic foundations of the United States. But I hesitate to name this process a continuous ontology of blackness, as proponents of the Afro-pessimism school of thought appear to do in their attempt to adopt a vanguard position against all forms of racial subjection. Instead, I look at how continuities and discontinuities in systems of incarceration can be used as spaces for resistance and for the promise of abolition.

## Chapter One: Haunting Asylums

### Madness and the Archive

A madman's [sic] narrative is not history.

--Dipesh Chakrabarty<sup>40</sup>

You don't know the history of psychiatry—I do.

--Tom Cruise<sup>41</sup>

Psychiatric historiography has much to learn from slavery and prison studies. While the former, even its most radical instantiations, relies on overly stable conceptions of power and witnessing, the latter antagonizes its conditions of possibility even as it irreducibly forms them out of its conditions of impossibility. Rather than making the inmate speak the truth of social control or mourning/adoring her in (her) silence, critical and abolitionist slavery and prison studies approach the captive body at and as the limit of racist state regimes of violence/representation *and* as a contemporary in the abolition to come. I have a lot to learn too; this chapter is an attempt to do so from the works of Saidiya Hartman, Colin Dayan, and Hortense Spillers among others, as I confront a series of discourses that are predicated on the absence of something else I am also trying to follow. In both clinical and critical psychiatric historiography and the texts of the state archives, the black psychiatric inmate is fundamentally unrepresentable—her words are gibberish, her experience a

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<sup>40</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 98.

<sup>41</sup> To Matt Lauer on *The Today Show*, 6/25/05

footnote, her life lost, her death unrecorded.<sup>42</sup> Yet my project in this chapter is not to fill in the gaps with a better representation, re-narrating the development of psychiatry with race at the center nor resurrecting the inmate to speak to her ghost, but to think about how I can trace the im/possibility of her representation within and against an American grammar.

What I am (mis)naming “mental death” is my attempt to theorize the historical, material and psychic conditions of what Hartman terms “the denial of black sentience” and how this moment or act exists before and through the asylums I am researching.<sup>43</sup> Mental death is for me a catachresis, both a concept and a metaphor that has no literal referent; in my experience, the term never appeared in any of the asylums’ records. Yet I am deploying it as a kind of echo of two other terms that have been pivotal for the understanding of race, gender and captivity: social and civil death. The authors mentioned in the previous paragraph have used the conception of the slave as socially dead, exiled from humanity and kinship, and its repetition/displacement in the legal category of civil death applied to the criminal, to articulate a history that refuses easy periodizations of captivity and liberty, enslavement and emancipation. I hope to follow their lead in my tracing of mental death in this chapter that is bracketed with two of my archival experiences, but is

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<sup>42</sup> I will alternate between he, she and they when referring to the asylum inmates in this chapter. I view all pronouns as problematic, particularly “they,” as this reinforces the superintendents’ and other psychiatrists’ tendency to view the “black insane” as an undifferentiated mass. At the same time, mental death is irreducible to a dimorphic gender system, which is not to say that it is ungendered. See the discussion of Hortense Spillers’ conception of cultural vestibularity below.

<sup>43</sup> See Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), especially Chapter 1.

primarily focused on broader epistemic configurations of race, psychiatry, and history.

The two staged archival scenes I present here are both concerned with my failure to perform a history from below, a failure rooted not simply in my lack of data or knowledge of the inmates' lives, but also in regards to two conceptual or methodological systems, haunting and witnessing. The first scene is an account of my research in North Carolina, climaxing in a visit to a museum located in one of the asylums that held artifacts from its history. Here, I ran up against the limit of haunting discourse, which has proved a productive tool for many but in my specific situation seemed to repeat and codify the status of mentally dead. The second scene refers to my encounter with a letter and a newspaper article written by former inmates that were preserved in the governor's files in Alabama. While this testimony of the asylums' violent conditions would seem to be the evidence I had been seeking, analyzing the texts as a symptom of witnessing tends to obscure its dynamic and slippery position within and against an American Grammar. In between, I turn to the writings of a foundational theorist of madness, confinement, and power, Michel Foucault, in order to question whether he can also be considered one of race, slavery and colonialism. I will attempt to reread his narratives of madness and monstrosity in regards to larger histories of colonialism and specific formations of the asylums I researched to point to how Foucault can and cannot enable a theorization of mental death.

### **The Cage and the Chair**



I was just about to leave when the Cherry Hospital Museum curator/Special Services staff member asked if I had seen “the cage.” Located on the hospital’s grounds in Goldsboro, North Carolina, the museum consisted of a small room in the Special Services house filled with a number of items meant to represent the asylum’s 127 year existence (see image 1). For instance, next to a desk holding a 1903 Hospital payroll slip and the 1929-1931 budget report for the state of North Carolina (image 2) was a small kettle containing pieces of a cotton plant and bearing a small typed epitaph that read, “Patients picked cotton and were loaned out to area farmers until 1950’s [sic]” (image 3). I was unsure as to whether the kettle was a true artifact like the lawn mower across the room, and just below a framed list of the asylum’s superintendents and directors (image 4), which proclaimed its authenticity in its caption: “This mower was used by the patients to mow the yards of the staff who lived on the hospital grounds” (image 5). Perhaps it was a reproduction intended to help the patron visualize life in the hospital, such as the rocking chair that seemed a bit too new (image 6) or the black baby doll in the crib at the center of the room (image 7). The latter was an attempt to represent how “Cherry Hospital had a nursery until the early 1970’s. Most babies in the nursery were born to patients who came into the hospital pregnant...Babies were delivered in our operating rooms and placed in the nursery (Royster—off the infirmary). Babies remained in the nursery until family members could pick them up or the local Department of Social Services could place them—often several weeks.”



Image 1

Source: OOKL, "Cherry Hospital Museum,"

[http://www.ooklnet.com/web/venue\\_info/16801/Cherry+Hospital+Museum,](http://www.ooklnet.com/web/venue_info/16801/Cherry+Hospital+Museum)

(accessed 5/25/2014)



Image 2

Photo by the author.



Image 3

“Patients picked cotton and were loaned out to area farmers until 1950’s”

Photo by the author.



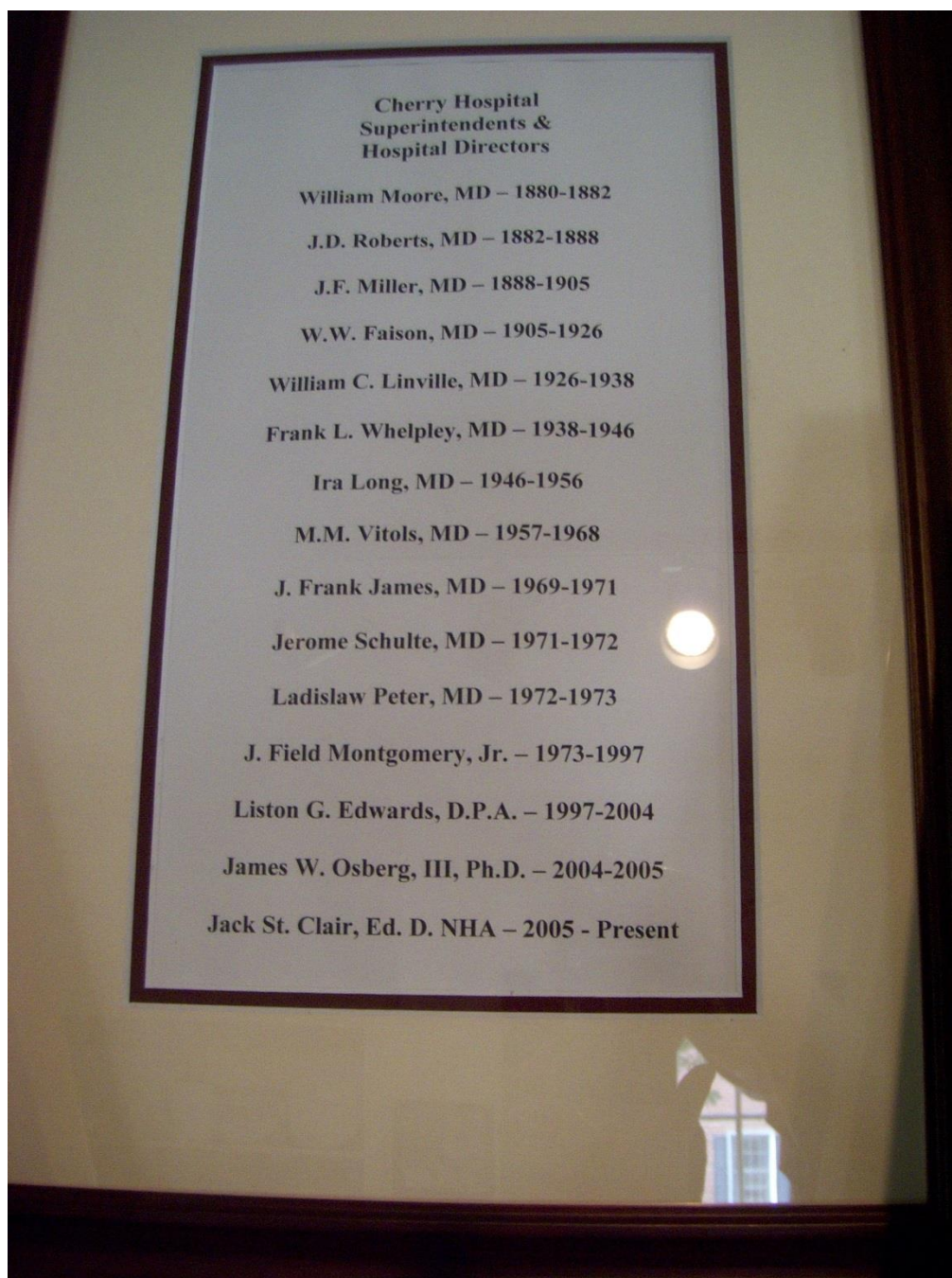


Image 4

Photo by the author.



Image 5

“This mower was used by the patients to mow the yards of the staff who lived on the hospital grounds”

Photo by the author.





Image 6

“Rocking was main patient activity prior to 1960’s...PLEASE DO NOT SIT”

Photo by the author



Image 7

“Cherry Hospital had a nursery until the early 1970’s. Most babies in the nursery were born to patients who came into the hospital pregnant. For protection, pregnant patients were sent to the infirmary during the last month of pregnancy. Babies were delivered in our operating rooms and placed in the nursery (Royster—off the infirmary). Babies remained in the nursery until family members could pick them up or local Department of Social Services could place them—often several weeks. There were often no babies in the nursery and seldom more than two. Therefore, staff on the infirmary assumed responsibility for the babies. Obstetric care was discontinued because of the risk involved when the same staff cared for sick adults and babies.

Now pregnant women receive prenatal care at the local health department and babies are delivered at Wayne Memorial Hospital. The baby is never returned to Cherry Hospital.

Last baby born here – 1991. Baby was born unexpectedly in bathroom on infirmary.”

Photo by the author.



For the past three hours, I had been dutifully photographing the contents of the room in a state of disaffection. It was not necessarily the presence of reproductions in the museum, diluting the artifacts' aura of authenticity as well as the "historical testimony [that] rests" upon it, that produced my sense of frustration.<sup>44</sup> It was rather that I seemed to be repeating the same ritual I had been performing throughout my stay in North Carolina. I came here two and a half weeks earlier from Virginia, where I had been for nearly a month researching another segregated mental institution—the Central State Hospital (CSH) at Petersburg—at a number of sites, including the State Library, the State Records Center, the University of Virginia's Special Collections, and a couple of different libraries at the Virginia Commonwealth University. While a good deal of that time was spent combing through dry superintendent's reports and psychiatric periodicals like *Mental Health in Virginia*, I was also able to find some admission files from the first years of the hospital and the patient records of slaves from an earlier asylum (the ones from CHS being missing). Along with a few histories of psychiatry in Virginia—a couple written by a former superintendent of CSH—a few scattered letters from a judge and a concerned (white) citizen, and the text of a 1934 investigation by the Virginia General Assembly, I felt like I had enough to begin to reconstruct the life of the asylum, if not necessarily that of the inmates.

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<sup>44</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 221.

Yet my hope that the archives in North Carolina would help to fill in this particular absence proved misplaced, as words of the superintendents were brief or missing and the itinerary of the asylum hard to trace in its general sense, much less its everyday operations. I spent more than a week at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's North Carolina Collection reading through the reports from the superintendent, the Report of the North Carolina Board of Charities, and the odd dissertation, all the while nostalgic for my time in Virginia. Whereas the CHS reports were usually annual and contained almost a dozen pages of text, those from the State Hospital at Goldsboro (as Cherry Hospital was formerly called) consisted almost solely of tables detailing the number of patients, the classifications of their disorders, the farm revenues, etc., and were submitted biannually and sometimes triennially. The other texts contained similar absences: the Board of Public Charities mainly just reproduced the tables from the asylum reports, tables which I had long stopped photocopying, and the history dissertations would only pause briefly in their descriptions of North Carolina's other two mental hospitals to note that "conditions were worse" at Goldsboro.<sup>45</sup>

After a brief and unproductive stop at Duke University, I spent the rest of my stay looking through the State Library in Raleigh, which had a small room in the basement for archival research. Even after I told the man at the front desk I was interested in researching the Goldsboro asylum, I noticed that he had written

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<sup>45</sup> Clark R. Cahow, *People, Patients and Politics: The History of the North Carolina Mental Hospitals 1848-1960* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 106.

“genealogy” as the purpose of my visit on the card I was to present to the archivist. I was not there for more than a couple hours: the Goldsboro folder in the institutional files of the governor’s papers was thin, as opposed to those of the other mental asylums that contained letters from the patients, newspaper reports, records of investigations, etc. The Goldsboro file consisted mainly of budget reports, a transcript from a court case regarding a section of the property claimed by one of the surrounding farmers, and a letter from an inmate’s sister to the governor in 1929, explaining that she had written the head officials a number of times without response and that she “would like to know if my bro. is alive or dead.”<sup>46</sup> Upon inquiring about other documents from the asylum, I was told that there were some patient records from the 1930s, but they were at another site and protected by privacy laws. So I made my way upstairs and spent nearly a week in the main library reading room combing through over a hundred years of the *North Carolina Medical Journal* in search of any mention of the asylum. Many of these volumes lacked an index and I would go hours without taking any notes, but I was able to find three articles written by different superintendents of the Goldsboro hospital. While these provided important supplements to the brief reports I had reviewed at Chapel Hill, none of

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<sup>46</sup> The file also contained a copy of the superintendent’s eventual letter of reply, which read: “Your brother, John Baxter Carson, is still living and in his usual physical health, but there is not much change in his mental condition.” Also enclosed was a letter from the superintendent to the governor, telling him to ignore the letter writer as she “has given us no end of trouble in regard to [her brother], in fact we feel satisfied she is a fit subject for an insane asylum.” Governor Oliver Max Gardner Papers, General Correspondence – Institutions (1929-1932), Boxes 4-7, 110-1, State Archives of North Carolina. I did not record the specific box or folder number.

them contained a case narrative or an in depth description of asylum life. The inmates' speech was not there even to be ventriloquized.

I know I am not the only one to be overwhelmed with tediousness and frustration in historical research, and that the enforced disappearance and selective archivalization of subjugated peoples is more often the rule than the exception, but my situation is perhaps unique as I have a museum to visit. I had heard about the museum, as I had the very existence of the asylums, from Vanessa Jackson; thanks to her work, I knew not to expect a complete break from the structure of the state archives. As she describes, "Upon arrival, it is hard to imagine that this museum is connected with a historically African American hospital because the most prominent photographs are of white people—former superintendents and others affiliated with the facility."<sup>47</sup> Yet I must confess that the idea of the museum helped sustain me during my research at the state archives, as it promised a system of presentation and classification that would be different from the superintendent's reports, the medical journals, etc. I knew the museum would not be innocent, and I knew I should avoid simplistic binaries between the artifact and the text, yet I hoped the museum would have a kind of visibility and palpability that the state archives did not. I hoped that the museum would be approachable as what James Clifford, following Mary Louise Pratt, has termed a "contact zone," a perspective in which the museum's "organizing structure as a *collection* becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral

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<sup>47</sup> Vanessa Jackson, *Separate and Unequal*, 16-7.

*relationship*—a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull.”<sup>48</sup> As opposed to the state archives, which were increasingly appearing to me as the product of simple and long past communications among administrators, I wondered who built the museum and why, and what exactly was in it. Why and how were the artifacts of this institution of racist state violence being preserved? Was it done in concert or dialogue with the communities that were once interned within its walls? And, the most pressing question on my mind, how was the museum’s collection a relationship and an exchange with those who lived and died within the asylum; how did the inmates push and pull in and through the objects on display?

Yet the museum did not give me the salvation I was hoping for; like the state archives, there were certain things I could understand and much more I could not. The curator/staff member was unsure about the museum’s history: she believed that the woman who had previously held her supervisor’s position built the museum about a decade ago, but did not know exactly how or why. Her supervisor would have known more but she was on vacation. The collection itself appeared less as a dynamic product of an ongoing interaction than an act of commemoration, which Achille Mbembe considers a technique of disciplining and “civilizing” the past by producing it as something that cannot be repeated.<sup>49</sup> The bare contextual elements of the museum given to me by the staff member included a contemporary pamphlet of

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<sup>48</sup> *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 192, emphasis in the original.

<sup>49</sup> “The Power of the Archive and its Limits,” in Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid and Razia Saleh (eds) *Refiguring the Archive* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 24.

the hospital, a paragraph-long history of the asylum, a brief biography of the hospital's namesake, Governor Robert Cherry, and six pages of dates that listed "Cherry Hospital Firsts," such as first telephone (1889), first social worker (1946) and first "tranquilizers used—Thorazine" (1955). Most of the list (5 of the 6 pages) concerned the period after the hospital was desegregated and did not directly reference any of the objects on display, which were mainly from the previous era.

Following Barbara Krishenblatt-Gimblett, the viewer's intended perspective of the museum was not so much panoptic, "the chance to see without being seen, to penetrate interior recesses, to violate intimacy," as it was panoramic.<sup>50</sup> The museum seemed to offer a broad overview of the asylum's history, while the individual artifacts were hard to approach given the logic of the exhibition. Furthermore, the museum almost resembled an early modern cabinet of curiosity with multiple artifacts collapsed or crowded together in a single, overflowing space, rather than being clearly demarcated visually, spatially or textually.<sup>51</sup> The objects seemed grouped together by loose types, such as farm equipment or medical instruments, and their brief captions dissimulated much more than they revealed. To my surprise, it was my previous time spent in the state archives that enabled me to read through them. For instance, I knew that the hospital did not have a cotton farm and the caption on the kettle, referring to the practice of leasing the inmates, was redundant. Moreover,

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<sup>50</sup> "Objects of Ethnography," in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Display* (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 1991), 413.

<sup>51</sup> See Anthony Shelton, "Cabinets of Transgression: Renaissance Collections and the Incorporation of the New World," in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994)

although there was no visible link between it and the budget report, I knew that a review commission had celebrated this practice, unique among the hospitals of North Carolina, for lowering the already paltry funding of the institution.<sup>52</sup> I also knew that the list of the superintendents and the lawnmower likewise existed in a tense relationship unacknowledged by the exhibition: forcing the inmates to cater to the white staff was one of the many strategies used by the superintendents to end the constant turnover.<sup>53</sup> I knew too that the operating room where the children were delivered was also where the mothers and fathers were sterilized or castrated.<sup>54</sup>

And I knew about the cage. I had stumbled across a brief reference to it during my week of combing through the *North Carolina Medical Journal*: “No treatment other than medical treatment is carried out [at Goldsboro]. Help is so limited that violent patients have to be restrained in cages similar to those used in the side show of a circus.”<sup>55</sup> As I was being led outside to view it, I quickly returned to the thought of rupture that the museum had previously promised me from the state

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<sup>52</sup> See *A Study of Mental Health in North Carolina: Report to the North Carolina Legislature of the Governor's Commission, appointed to Study the Care of the Insane and Mental Defectives* (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1937)

<sup>53</sup> “I find a married man with a good house to live in makes the best employee,” wrote the superintendent in 1936, yet he neglect to mention that the house would be kept up not just by the wife. SHG, AR 1936, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Vanessa Jackson had a different reading of this display, arguing that the caption's description of the mothers as already pregnant before they entered the hospital dissimulated the sexual abuse of the women by the staff members. Personal Communication. The use of the doll is particularly disturbing here, as it falls within the tradition of displaying the other body that began with Columbus's presentation of Native Americans to Spanish royalty and evolved into mannequins within natural history museum's dioramas. See Coco Fusco's *English is Broken Here* (New York: New Press, 1995). My thanks to Angela Davis for help with this reading. My thanks also to Donna Haraway for noting that the cradle also resembles the cage described below.

<sup>55</sup> Maurice H. Greenhill, M.D., “The Present Status of Mental Health in North Carolina” *North Carolina Medical Journal* 6(1) January 1945), 12

archives. Here would be the evidence of a struggle that could not be effaced, buried under a series of charts or elided by the superintendent's prose. Here would be the fact that the inmates fought back against state violence to such a degree that it was forced to make itself hyperlegible, its brutality undeniable. Here too would be the presence of the inmate, not as a number or a doll, but as "what is not present but somehow appears to us as a figure or a voice."<sup>56</sup> As a ghost, in other words. Yet when I saw the cage, I was profoundly disturbed but not haunted. It was not the cold, stark iron that unnerved me—indeed, according to the caption, the cage was a "wooden replica...modeled after the iron cages once utilized to contain highly disturbed or aggressive patients." What affected me was the open door; in contradistinction to the rocking chair, underneath whose caption was printed in bold letters "PLEASE DO NOT SIT," the cage was inviting me inside to experience the confinement first hand. But like the chair, whose full caption read "Rocking was main [sic] patient activity prior to 1960's," I could not hope to enter or to know what was (not) there. I photographed it nonetheless (see image 8). As I was attempting to rush out of the museum, the staff member asked me to sign the guest book. I noticed I was the third person to visit in the last couple of years, and the other two had been psychiatrists from other parts of North Carolina. I left the state the next day and made my way up to Maryland.

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<sup>56</sup> Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 70.





Image 8

“This 6’ by 9’ wooden replica is modeled after the iron cages that were once utilized to contain highly disturbed and aggressive patients. If necessary, a patient was locked up in the straw filled cage until they were calm. Dr. M. M. Vitols, Superintendent, removed the cages in 1956.”

Photo by the author.

## **The Ghost and the Slave<sup>57</sup>**

Perhaps I am reading too much into the cage: the open door may not have been an invitation but a symbol of the inmates' liberation from its confines, as referenced by the last sentence of the caption ("Dr. M. M. Vitols, Superintendent, removed the cages in 1956"). Perhaps too my denegation is dishonest or impossible; I could not and cannot not want to step inside the cage or sit in the chair and reconstruct the inmates' life. But what I experienced in that moment was precisely the failure to do so with my methodology of choice, haunting. As Carla Freccero has aptly put it, "in plain speech and popular culture, the ghost has come of late, it seems, to stand in and speak for a certain collective longing about the past...in late modern Western theories of subjectivity and historicity, something ghostly is being conjured to address a way of call and being called to historical and ethical accountability."<sup>58</sup> Haunting has proved a productive resource for destabilizing divisions between the past and present and the living and the dead, theorizing spaces and agents outside of strict disciplinarity, and for guarding against an arrogant and teleological relationship to the archive. I had come to my research preparing and praying to be haunted in order to approach the inmates outside of their representations in dominant psychiatric historiography. Yet, in front of the cage, I felt such a desire becoming articulated within another symbolic system that sedimented, rather than challenged, racial

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<sup>57</sup> The critical analysis of haunting discourse in this section was inspired by Eric Stanley's "Race Haunting, Otherwise" in Matilda, aka Matt Bernstein Sicamore (ed.) *Nobody Passes: Rejecting Rules of Gender and Conformity* (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, 69.

subordination. I am referring to what Hortense Spillers terms an American grammar, a relationship between subjects, objects, and actions that originated in slavery. More specifically, to construct the inmates as spectral subjects or to be haunted by their pained bodies and broken minds reproduces relations of social death and black fungibility. I will use this section to map out the slippages between spectrality, the archive and the specific form of racial violence I am thinking of as mental death.

Hauntological methods and the catachresis of the specter have produced some important interventions by opening up a number of ways to explore knowledges and agents outside of strict disciplinary frameworks. Jacques Derrida's formulation of spectrality in *Specters of Marx* represented a unique mixture of his early interrogations of the limits of philosophy, or what Gayatri Spivak has called the strategy of "'guarding the question'—insisting on the priority of an unanswerable question, the question of *différance*," with his later ethical focus on the call of/to the wholly other.<sup>59</sup> Here the specter complicates empirical or ontological conceptions of life and death through its "*living-on* [sur-vie]...a trace of which life and death would themselves be but traces and traces of traces, a survival whose possibility in advance comes to disjoin or dis-adjust the identity to itself of the living present."<sup>60</sup> The ghost's return thus destabilizes notions of linear or sequential temporality: the coming back of the ghost and the promise of its return complicate sharp divisions between the

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<sup>59</sup> Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 425. Vulgarly, the trace is that which is effaced in disclosure and *différance* is the track of this previous differentiation and continuous deferment. The call of the wholly other as experience of the impossible or radical alterity was undeconstructible in the earlier sense, in that it prompted an ethical relation to justice as what was outside deconstruction and prior to the trace.

<sup>60</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. xx

past, present and future. To be haunted is an experience of the impossible as this “proper body without flesh...this spectral *someone other looks at us*,” and the task of how to respond to this flickering presence requires less of a return to the past than thought of a future to come.<sup>61</sup>

In this text, Derrida asks how to inherit the Marxian revolutionary or messianic promise, or how to be haunted by something that is yet to come, but he has elsewhere remarked that the very “structure of the archive is spectral.”<sup>62</sup> The archive in *Archive Fever* is less a system that governs all possible statements than it is a site of violence guarded by those with hermeneutical authority, the archons.<sup>63</sup> Derrida remarks that the Greek word *arkhe* “names at once the commencement and the commandment.”<sup>64</sup> The former refers to the historical or ontological origin, while the latter signifies a “nomological principle” by which order is established and laws are enforced.<sup>65</sup> The specter appears in this model to trouble the notion of an archival ontology, as the archive is “spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent ‘in the flesh,’ neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met.”<sup>66</sup> While haunting seems to be a symptom of “archive fever,” Derrida’s diagnosis of the desire to enter into its space to unearth its secrets, even to the point of

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 7

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 84.

<sup>63</sup> I am working here from Sandya Shetty and Elizabeth Jan Bellamy’s useful clarifications of the distinction between the Foucaultian and Derridaian “archive.” While they describe the former as primarily concerned with discursive systems, Shetty and Bellamy consider Derrida’s as an interrogation of the ontological space where law is founded. See “Postcolonialism’s Archive Fever” *Diacritics*, 30(1) Spring 2000.

<sup>64</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 84.

death, the ghost does not appear to be a result of the archival violence that Derrida describes during the imposition of law.

Yet Achille Mbembe has expanded upon Derrida's notions of archival violence and haunting by linking them to the power of the state. The archive for Mbembe is likewise a space, but primarily a religious one that incorporates the features of a temple or cemetery. The archive is predicated on death, both on the death of the authors of its documents and its control over "dead time (the past)."<sup>67</sup> Through its consecration and internment of the dead, the archive keeps their traces at bay, ensuring that they are "prohibited from stirring up disorder in the present."<sup>68</sup> Thus the ability to control and destroy the past ensures the state's force: "there is no state without archives—without its archives...more than on its ability to recall, the power of the state rests upon its ability to consume time."<sup>69</sup> Yet the archive also represents a threat to the state, and it is here that Mbembe invokes the specter, the possibility of the dead to be brought back to life. I have already mentioned above one of the ways that specters are silenced: commemoration, or the production of the past as an event that cannot be repeated by its dissemination in commodity form. The historian, who brings the dead back to life only to speak in their name, is the other:

It may be that historiography, and the very possibility of a political community (polis), are only conceivable on condition that the spectre, which has been brought back to life in this way, should remain silent, should accept that from now on he may only speak through another, or be represented by

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<sup>67</sup> Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and its Limits," in Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid and Razia Saleh (eds) *Refiguring the Archive* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 21.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

some sign, some object which, not belonging to any one in particular, now belongs to all.<sup>70</sup>

Mbembe ends with this vision of the historian in service of the state, yet Avery Gordon helps to shift the focus away from the haunted to the haunter to articulate a kind of agency and relationality outside of strict disciplinary frameworks. Gordon is adamant that the ghost does not represent a negated or silent individual but “a social figure...[it] is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course.”<sup>71</sup> The operative phrase in the above is the “well-trained eyes,” as Gordon uses haunting to open up possibilities of interdisciplinary analysis to accommodate what falls outside disciplinary frameworks, such as the complexity of social life beyond sociological taxonomies, psychoanalysis’s inability to theorize the social, and the continuing experience of the legacy of slavery in America. Gordon develops this last analysis in a reading of what is perhaps the originary meditation on race, haunting and history, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,<sup>72</sup> where she articulates “two counterintuitive features of haunting.”<sup>73</sup> The first is that, like *Beloved*, the ghost is not the result of an individual trauma or death that remains in the past, but a collective experience of what is being repressed in the present. As such, “the ghost... (like *Beloved*) is pregnant with possibility.”<sup>74</sup> The

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>71</sup> Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>72</sup> Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Vintage, 2004)

<sup>73</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 182.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 183.

question of how to access that possibility, the second feature, remains outside of “modern retrieval” methods from the disciplines of sociology and history, but in a recognition that “history, as Morrison suggests, is that ghostly totality that articulates and disarticulates itself and the subjects who inhabit it...it is always a site of struggle and contradiction between the living and the ghostly.”<sup>75</sup> Gordon here troubles any easy separation not only between the past, present and the future, but between the haunted and the haunter, as both exist in a shifting network that both forms and deforms them.

While Gordon’s passionate critique of disciplinary methodology suffers slightly by taking one, literature, for granted, Gayatri Spivak has persistently brought history and literature in a productive crisis and in one instance encapsulates this dissonance in the figure of the ghost. Spivak speaks of haunting in her critique of Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* by contrasting his European selectivity (the “magisterial texts” of Marx and Shakespeare) with the Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890.<sup>76</sup> Like Derrida’s encounter with Marx, Spivak analyzes the ghost dance as an effort “to be haunted by the ancestors rather than treat them as objects of ritual worship,” yet she is more explicit how this represents an “ethical relation with history as such” and necessarily ends with a failure to make the past into the future.<sup>77</sup> Spivak rearticulates both of these features of haunting in her critique of another theorist engaged with divisions between the past and the present, Dominick LaCapra.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>76</sup> Gayatri Spivak, “Ghostwriting” *Diacritics*, 22(2) Summer 1995, 70.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

Like Hayden White, LaCapra has done much to counter the view of the archive as a depository of facts that the historian uses to reconstruct the past (or what LaCapra terms the “documentary model”) by highlighting the tropological and rhetorical, in a word literary, underpinnings of the historical discipline.<sup>78</sup> Spivak, however, is wary of such a reversal between history and literature and calls attention to the specific subject-position LaCapra constructs for the historian as literary theorist. LaCapra is particularly interested in how “a dialogical relation to the past encounters the problem of coming to terms with ‘transference’ in the psychoanalytic sense of a repetition/displacement of the ‘object’ of study in one’s own discourse about it.”<sup>79</sup> This “transferential” approach has been commended as a more dynamic relationship than the standard and static conception of historical experience.<sup>80</sup> Yet Spivak cautions that it may represent “a radical version of the academic intellectual’s desire for power,” in that the historian alternately assumes the position of the analysand and analyst in the process of making the past present.<sup>81</sup> What legitimates this alternating possession is the “arrogance of the cure,” which Spivak believes produces past subjects as self-consolidating others and a history that represents the reflection of the historian.<sup>82</sup> Instead, Spivak invokes haunting as a way to lay to rest the hope of fully incorporating or restoring the past while refusing to abandon a motivated, if

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<sup>78</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 18. See also, Hayden White, *The Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978).

<sup>79</sup> LaCapra, op cited., p. 38.

<sup>80</sup> Joan W. Scott, “‘Experience’” in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (eds.) *Feminist Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992)

<sup>81</sup> Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 206.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.



incomplete and discontinuous, relation to its fragile subjects (in this specific instance, the Rani of Samur).

I hope this brief and selective overview of haunting discourse has demonstrated my desire to see ghosts in the archive. All of the above theorists have conjured ghosts to problematize orthodox historical methods, narratives and subjects, and to open up other possible epistemologies and ethics. Even before I entered the archives, I was overcome with a need for such alternatives; as I mentioned above, the black psychiatric inmate does not exist in American psychiatric historiography. For David Rothman, whose *The Discovery of the Asylum* and *Conscience and Convenience* are perhaps the most canonical texts of American psychiatric historiography, all mental patients are white.<sup>83</sup> Gerald Grob, like the dissertations I read in North Carolina, occasionally mentions racial stereotypes and unequal treatment, but leaves them behind in his primarily Whiggish orientation.<sup>84</sup> Even historians of social control like Thomas Szasz—the mirror image of Grob’s perspective—seem content merely to cite Samuel A. Cartwright’s infamous diagnoses of drapetomania and dysaesthesia aethiopica, which refer to the compulsion of slaves to run away from the masters and the lack of work ethic or obedience, as proof of psychiatry’s biased and non-scientific status, but neglects those interned under these and similar labels.<sup>85</sup> I was hoping to use the ghosts of the inmates of the asylums I

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<sup>83</sup> David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002) and *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and its Alternatives in Progressive America* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002).

<sup>84</sup> See Gerald Grob, *The Mad Among Us* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) and *Mental Illness and American Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

<sup>85</sup> See Thomas Szasz, *The Manufacture of Madness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

researched to fracture these narratives rather than simply adding race to their content; I was hoping to expose the struggle that constitutes the domain of history and memory by bringing these inmates back into the forefront of American psychiatry, and back to life.

I was also depending on haunting to avoid what has become the hegemonic political-hermeneutic strategy for countering psychiatric authority: to read the inmates' speech not as a word-salad or a symptom of an underlying biological disorder, but as a product of/comment on social oppression. This strategy arose primarily during anti-institutional or anti-psychiatric struggles in the 1960s, as exemplified in Erving Goffman's interpretations of psychotic symptoms such as withdrawal as a response to the degradations of institutional life and R.D. Laing's rereading of a patient's speech presented at a lecture by Emil Kraepelin as a parody of the doctor's own discourse.<sup>86</sup> Yet this hermeneutics of madness found its fullest expression in feminist works of the 1970s, specifically in Phyllis Chesler's description of madness as gender nonconformativity, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's view of madness as an expression of anger and protest against patriarchy, and the numerous revisionist accounts of hysteria, especially Freud's Dora case.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Erving Goffman, *Asylums* (New York: Anchor, 1961) and R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

<sup>87</sup> Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1991), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1975), and Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (eds.), *In Dora's Case* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). Marta Caminero-Santangelo has mounted a stringent critique of this valorization of the madwoman's agency by arguing that madness represents a state of powerlessness in the texts that are usually upheld as paradigms of resistance. While I am sympathetic to her intervention, Caminero-Santangelo tends to mainly reverse, and thus legitimize, the previous position. See *The Madwoman Cannot Speak* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

The resignification of mad discourse as a critique or transcendence of patriarchy has produced some exciting reading, but has not necessarily challenged the psychiatric power that remains its condition of possibility. I am drawing here from the work of survivor activist Judi Chamberlin who articulated this in regards to Laing, yet I believe it reverberates within the larger tradition:

Although [the inmates] are sympathetically described, and their symbolism defined (by Laing, not by themselves), it is clear that Laing found them--and left them--inside the mental hospitals where he was trained as a psychiatrist. Laing grants what these 'schizophrenics' say has meaning, but only through his translations.<sup>88</sup>

Chamberlin is articulating here a call for a “political subjectivity and agency that antagonizes its condition of possibility rather than reifying it,” as prison abolitionist scholar Dylan Rodriguez has phrased it.<sup>89</sup>

Again, I believed I had found such a strategy in the ghost: he would subvert the transparency and visibility required for such an easy reading of madness as the result of a single determination. The ghost would provide a guarantee against the seductions of the state, psychiatric or Derridian archives as such by forcing me to consider an ethical relation to the past as both a radical alterity and as a subject existing in a divided presence. Even though his body would be untouched and his eyes unmet, the ghost would provide a way of approaching difference outside of periodization, state power and narcissistic projection. Yet standing in front of the cage, then and now, I did/do not feel the breakdown of temporality, identity or

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<sup>88</sup> Judi Chamberlin, *On Our Own: Patient-Controlled Alternatives to the Mental Health System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. xiii.

<sup>89</sup> Dylan Rodriguez, *Forced Passages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 81.

disciplinarity; instead, it seemed that my relation to the inmates was as motivated and structured as it had been in the state archives. At first, this seemed to be a problem of data: how could I be haunted by what I could not even begin to imagine? Haunting was supposed to guard against an arrogant possession of the past by pointing to a trace of what was effaced in disclosure, but what if practically nothing was disclosed in the first place? I had found so little about the inmates' lives that to imagine that I was haunted by them seemed identical with a transferential relation with the object, constructing them as a self-consolidating other or as my own reflection. Could I be haunted by the cage, instead of who was once inside of it? And in doing so, would I be haunted instead by those who built the cage, its original or reproduction?

On further reflection, I feel that even if I found stronger representations of their everyday life inside the asylum, conceptualizing the inmates as spectral subjects would be an ethically problematic gesture. I am thinking here of Saidiya Hartman's reading of John Rankin's description of the sufferings of slaves in the coffin that, although intending to be an abolitionist document, reproduces "the captive body as a vessel for the uses, thoughts and feelings of others."<sup>90</sup> Rankin's ability to identify and empathize with the tortured slaves is less a function of a universal structure of the psyche, than a result of a relation "historically determined by the denial of black sentience" in the institution of chattel slavery.<sup>91</sup> Hartman is particularly interested in how scenes of violence against the black body are so easily circulated and how the

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<sup>90</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

empathy that is invoked in the viewer actually repeats a kind of violence against the enslaved. While the abolitionist may be wishing to act as a witness to such scenes, by focusing on the certain visible forms of violence and ignoring the conditions of possibility for doing so, he stages and spectacularizes black suffering. Such representations draw upon the slaves' status as objects of property, their inability to act as witnesses themselves in legal and social settings, and their overall condition of social death, thus reproducing a relation of domination and possession. Hartman explains this process in a passage that is worth quoting at length:

what I am trying to suggest is that if the scene of beating readily lends itself to an identification with the enslaved, it does so at the risk of fixing and naturalizing this condition of pained embodiment and, in complete defiance of Rankin's good intention, increases the difficulty of beholding black suffering since the endeavor to bring pain close exploits the spectacle of the body in pain and oddly confirms the spectral character of suffering...If, on the one hand, pain extends humanity to the dispossessed...on the other, the spectral and spectacular character of this suffering, or, in other words, the shocking and ghostly presence of pain, effaces and restricts black sentience.<sup>92</sup>

Hartman here points to how representations of pain construct the slave as both human and inhuman, as a person with limited capacity for sense and as an abjected object only capable of being harmed. There is a clear slippage between the two states, as there is between the spectral and spectacular nature of the suffering, for they are both structured by logics of possession and domination in the institution of slavery.

Rereading this passage after my research returned me to the cage once again and increased my fear of ghosts, as I now saw haunting as a repetition of the violence

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 20.

of slavery.<sup>93</sup> I take the reference to the spectral and ghostly status of the slave's sentence in the above passage to be a reference not solely to haunting discourse but also to the concept of social death. Claude Meillassoux pioneered the use of this concept in slavery studies in his discussion of how the internal slave-trade in Africa depended on the production of the slave as alien and kinless. In one section in particular of his text *The Anthropology of Slavery* entitled "Unborn and the Reprieved from Death," Meillassoux discusses the four technologies for the production of the state (as opposed to status), of social death.<sup>94</sup> First, the captives undergo a process of "de-socialization" by being removed from their previous relationships and milieus. Here the slave is considered as someone with no rights or ties to the living, being treated "just as if he had been killed in combat" and as "*not-born*," or without any control over his kinship relations.<sup>95</sup> Secondly, the slave was "de-personalized" by becoming a reified commodity, thus removing her capacity to act as a human subject by making her into an object or "livestock."<sup>96</sup> Third, "de-socialization lead to de-sexualization," by which Meillassoux is referring to the loss of women's ability to be

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<sup>93</sup> Fred Moten argues that Hartman, in a certain sense, is not outside of this logic because she reproduces such scenes even as and precisely when she denies them. Moten is particularly interested in how Hartman opens the text by refusing to reproduce Frederick Douglass's account of his Aunt Hester's beating. For Moten, such a gesture reproduces the scene by referencing it and the rest of her text displaces it into the quotidian acts of violence and resistance that are her main focus. Moten's analysis is quite compelling, but I feel like he slights her dynamic investigations of multiple practices of self-making in favor of a consideration of the subject's originary foundations. See *In the Break* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 2-5.

<sup>94</sup> Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), Chapter 5. Meillassoux sees status as a positive notion, while state is primarily negative and is indeed the precondition for the reconstruction of the slave as someone with status in a new society. See 107.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 106 and 107.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 109.

mothers and the breakdown of the sexual distributions of tasks, although this concept can also incorporate the construction of male captives in the institution.<sup>97</sup> Finally, in their dependence on the will of the master, slaves became “de-civilized” and unable to identify with the collectivity as a whole.<sup>98</sup>

Orlando Patterson famously reworked Meillassoux’s analysis in his ambitious comparative study of almost all forms of slavery in human history, placing social death in the second constitutive element of slavery, “natal alienation,” but its presence is felt throughout the text.<sup>99</sup> Patterson’s first element, the “idiom of power” or slavery’s reliance on relations of domination and brute force, references the state of living under a commuted, although always potentially reactivated, death sentence. Yet Patterson most forcefully places the category of social death alongside that of “natal alienation,” the aforementioned loss of kinship ties, but oddly neglects an analysis of de-sexualization. Patterson’s final element is the product of these two power relationships and it plays itself out in the field of the mental:

The peculiar character of violence and the natal alienation of the slave generates the third constituent element of slavery: the fact that slaves were always persons who had been dishonored in a generalized way. Here we move to the sociopsychological aspect of this unusual power relationship. The slave could have no honor because of the origin of his status, the indignity and all-pervasiveness of his indebtedness, his absence of any independent social existence, but most of all because he was without power except through another.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 109. See the discussion of Spillers below.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>99</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 5.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 10.

Patterson is quick to add that he is not offering a diagnosis of individual or group psyches in this analysis, and that “there is absolutely no evidence from the long and dismal annals of slavery to suggest that any group of slaves ever internalized the conception of degradation held by their masters.”<sup>101</sup> Instead, honor structures the field of possible subject and affective positions open to the enslaved and the masters that can be negotiated and refused. Patterson’s analysis of how the slave’s subjectivity was always already degraded in these discourses of slavery overlaps with Hartman’s reading of denied black sentience and necessarily informs what I am thinking of as mental death.

Yet Patterson’s contention that the discourse of honor represents “the political psychology of slavery in all times and all places” is problematic in its universalist, linear, and de-sexualized presuppositions.<sup>102</sup> I am draw here from Hortense Spillers’s foundational text, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” which I take to be in part a rewriting and critique of Patterson’s argument.<sup>103</sup> Spillers appears to be drawing upon Patterson’s considerations of the violence, kinlessness and degradation as well as Meillassoux’s discussions of de-civilization and de-sexualization when she considers the “*theft of the body*” and the “high crimes against

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>103</sup> Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” in *Black, White and in Color* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 203-230. I owe the understanding of this piece as an interrogation of Patterson to Sharon Patricia Holland, who argues that Spillers “purposefully ghosts his narrative in order to demonstrate the problematic absence of gender in Patterson’s analysis.” See *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 48.



the flesh” that occurred during slavery.<sup>104</sup> In the reduction of enslaved men and women to quantities in the Middle Passage, the European seizure of the dynamics of naming and valuation, and the use of property relations to maintain an “enforced state of breach...where ‘kinship’ loses meaning,” the institution of slavery encased the enslaved in what Spillers terms a “vestibular cultural formation.”<sup>105</sup> I believe this state of cultural pre-view or site of passage between the inside and the outside is a reworking of the theory of social death, as Spillers traces its production to the specific forms of violence in slavery that rendered “a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden by the cultural seeing of skin color.”<sup>106</sup>

One of the disjunctures that Spillers is occupied within this text is the position of the African-American woman, who was produced as “female flesh ‘ungendered,’” flesh being for Spillers that “zero degree of social conceptualization” that exists before the body, through the regimes of violence and signification.<sup>107</sup> Yet, at the same time, her position in the family was misnamed as matriarchal, both by the juridical principle of *partus sequitur ventrem*, where the child born to an enslaved woman would also be a slave, and by the infamous diagnosis by Daniel Patrick Moynihan of the “tangle of pathology” that results from women-run households. It is particularly in this latter example which frames Spillers’s text that we see how “even though the captive flesh/body has been ‘liberated’...dominant symbolic activity, the ruling

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<sup>104</sup> Spillers, “Mama’s Baby...” 206.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 207 and 206.

episteme that releases the dynamics of naming and valuation, remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation.”<sup>108</sup>

Spillers’s text represents a radical intervention in slavery studies by showing how social death was not a universal state, but something that evolved with specific racial and gender formations. Moreover, Spillers deftly reveals how its structure of social foreclosure and violence continues to exist within racist symbolic paradigms. Finally, I hope it is clear why I believe haunting discourse does not challenge these paradigms as much as reproduce their logic by constructing spectral subjects as occupants of the cultural vestibule, as “bodies without flesh.” While the inmates of the asylums were not enslaved, the conditions of their confinement cannot be understood without reference to the legacy of slavery. Beyond the contiguous links of coerced labor and brutal confinement, these inmates existed in a state akin to civil death—while the asylum inmates were not necessarily charged with a crime, Colin Dayan’s discussion the legal term “civil death” directly applies to my subject. As Dayan defines it, civil death refers to “the state of a person who, though possessing natural life, has lost all civil rights... a logic of alienation that could extend perpetually along constructed lines of racial kinship.”<sup>109</sup> Dayan traces this state back

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 208. More specifically, we see in Moynihan’s deployment of “‘ethnicity’ as a scene of negation” the problematics of the flesh while the female’s captive body appears here as “a metonymic figure for an entire repertoire of human and social arrangements.” Ibid, 205. I do not believe her choice of the Moynihan Report is innocent, since it represents what is perhaps the most visible formulation of what Daryl Michael Scott terms “the image of the damaged black psyche,” (in *Contempt and Pity* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997]). Scott traces this ideology of African Americans as inherently, and irreparably, psychologically damaged back to early social science literature, but we can perhaps take it one step further to the denial of black sentience and always already degraded personhood that was articulated during slavery.

<sup>109</sup> As Joan Dayan, “Legal Slaves and Civil Bodies,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 2(1) 2001, 6.

to the “corruption of blood” in 15<sup>th</sup> century English law, where the criminal lost the right of property and heirs, and argues that this became inscribed in the racialized slave’s social death. After manumission, with *Ruffin v. Commonwealth* proclaiming criminals “slaves of the state,” those convicted of crimes were subject not only to techniques of labor and confinement directly inherited from slavery in the convict lease system, but regimes of solitary confinement, which Dayan argues is the double of capital punishment, imposing spiritual instead of physical death. Here, and in the contemporary explosion of supermax facilities, “the prisoner remains deprived of the moral, affective, and intellectual qualities sometimes given to slaves.”<sup>110</sup>

Dayan’s discussion of the prisoner’s civil death as an inheritance of slavery considerably overlaps with my research, as the inmates of these asylums were also placed under the guardianship of the state, deprived of civil rights and proclaimed mentally dead. While Dayan has constructed a persuasive legal history of the development of racialized nonpersonhood, I want now to turn to another thinker who approaches this issue from a different, wildly ambitious perspective, Michel Foucault. Foucault’s contributions to the study of prisons and psychiatry are immeasurable, even if the place of race in his texts is contested. Yet I want to interrogate his early *History of Madness* as well as his pre-biopolitical discussions of abnormality to see if they can also be read as theories of slavery and colonialism.<sup>111</sup> Foucault presents an intriguing consideration of the conditions of possibility for mental death in his

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>111</sup> I am working from the recent translation of the full text of *History of Madness* [hereafter *HM*] (London: Routledge, 2006).

description of the centrality of madness to the modern European episteme. Together with his thoughts on the monstrous criminal, I believe Foucault enables me to analyze who is excluded from human subjectivity even before they enter the asylum's walls.

### **The Philosopher and the Animal**

In his account of the birth of the carceral institution in colonial and antebellum America, David Rothman traces how the “grand mission” inherited from the Revolution became to uplift and correct the deviant members of society through various regimes of confinement.<sup>112</sup> From the prison to the orphanage, the workhouse to the mental asylum, “the Americans” sought to solve every social problem in these crucibles of care and discipline. Every problem except one. As Rothman comments in the opening of his chapter on mental asylums, “the insane were an apt group for this experiment. Raising none of the domestic or international complications that were unavoidable in such issues as the abolition of slavery...they presented a perfect opportunity to breathe new life into a downtrodden class.”<sup>113</sup> This passage is perhaps the most sustained examination of slavery in the nearly 400 page long text, a neglect all the more glaring when he turns to consider the co-articulation of madness and civilization a couple pages later. After outlining the general contours of the theory that mental illness was the price paid for the advanced pace and frequent temptations of relentless progress, Rothman cites reformer Dorothea Dix's contention that madness was lacking in “Indians...and the negro race,” but then quickly dismisses it as simply

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<sup>112</sup> David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum* (New York: Adline de Gruyter, 2002), 60.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 110

a “logical deduction” of the civilization hypothesis.<sup>114</sup> Most psychiatric historians have followed suit; I have been unable to find a sustained examination of how the creation of psychiatry drew upon the technologies of slavery, how theories of mental alienation and liberty, labor as a cure, and dangerousness were overdetermined by discourses on populations that supposedly lacked all signs of madness.<sup>115</sup> Critical prison studies scholars have not been so lax, displacing the origin of the penitentiary away from the Walnut Street Jail or the Auburn Prison, or even the Rasphuis of Amsterdam, to other regimes of “confinement, punishment and race”: “the reservation system, slavery, the mission system...”<sup>116</sup>

But it may come as something of a surprise that an author who relegated the scene of slavery and colonialism to a footnote in his book on prisons places their technologies inside the development of the modern mental asylum.<sup>117</sup> Four years before he published *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault delivered a lecture series at the Collège de France, now collected under the title *Psychiatric Power*, where he attempted to revise his previous analytics and conclusions in *History of Madness*.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid. 112

<sup>115</sup> An opening for this analysis has been made by Laura Briggs, “The Race of Hysteria: ‘Overcivilization’ and the ‘Savage’ Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology” *American Quarterly* 52(2) June 2000. Even though her study of hysteria focuses on the period after slavery, Briggs’ in depth examination of the co-constitution of overcivilization and savagery in the discourses of hysterical women provides a much needed corrective to hegemonic histories of psychiatry.

<sup>116</sup> Angela Y. Davis, “Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition” in Joy James (ed.) *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 97. See also Adam J. Hirsch, *The Rise of the Penitentiary: Prisons and Punishment in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) for a substantial consideration of how the public discourses of slavery and the prison were inseparable.

<sup>117</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 314, n. 1

<sup>118</sup> Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973-4* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

In these lectures Foucault proclaimed a shift away from an analysis of representation to the apparatus of power, from a consideration of violence to the multiplicity of force relations, from a focus on the institution to the individual—ultimately, away from the hypothesis of silence and repression to an analytics of disciplinary power. Within this new frame, and after describing the panoptical layout of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century French asylums, Foucault spends a couple of pages meditating on the establishment of the Clermont-en-Oise complex between 1850 and 1860. This complex combined a typical asylum, a *petite château* for the wealthier patients and the administrators, and a farm for agricultural work. As Foucault describes, “to each of these levels corresponds a specific architecture: that of the asylum; that of the farm, which in reality is a model practically bordering on slavery and colonization; and then the *petite château* with the management quarters.” For someone who has read a good deal of Foucault and has been frustrated with his elision of the colonial scene (in the metropole or the colonies) and the technologies of slavery, I find their invocation here, as a “second type of disciplinary power...the power of colonialism: putting people to work” eminently promising. Yet Foucault’s main object of analysis in this lecture is the family model embodied in the *château*, a step on his way to analyzing the family as a site for the construction of abnormality. Clermont-en-Oise is only briefly invoked as a “sort of perfect social microcosm, a sort of little utopia,” but then abandoned along with any further consideration of the imperial project.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 127

This is doubly disheartening given Foucault's likewise brief invocation of the conquest of Algeria a few pages earlier and his consideration of the roughly coeval (in the French experience) "two ages" of both psychiatry and colonialism: a period of initial violence—the chains and restraints on the mad and the "pure and simple conquest of arms"—followed by humanization or colonization in depth.<sup>120</sup> What saves this from being a simple analogy is Foucault's argument that both deploy the family model as the primary civilizing technology. But, again, the subject is dropped a couple of pages after it is invoked, and Foucault is pursuing the abnormal European once more. Furthermore, beyond the imposition of the bourgeois family model, the period that Foucault is describing was the time when the discourses of colonialism and psychiatry were in constant dialogue as the link between civilization and madness was reaching its zenith. The mid 1800s witnessed an explosion of texts describing the lack of madness outside of Europe, from Herbert Spencer's diagnosis of the overwhelming preponderance of basic functions, such as reflex and instinct, in the brain of non-European races that resulted in their lack of the higher disorders of the mind, to Jacques-Joseph Moreau de Tours' discussion of the low degree of mental alienation in the Orient as a result of the generally abnormal climate and culture.<sup>121</sup> To briefly invoke a common technique to the psychiatric cure and the civilizing

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 108

<sup>121</sup> See Graham Richards, *'Race', Racism and Psychology: Towards a Reflexive History* (London: Routledge, 1997). 20-22 and Richard Keller, *Colonial Madness: Psychiatry in French North Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 124-125.

mission is to dissimulate this broader and messier conjunction of the two apparatuses of power and knowledge.

Allow me one more melodramatic flourish: I am again startled to find that Foucault had already approached this subject ten years prior to these lectures in his *History of Madness*. I turn now to this text not because it offers a substantial reading of the colonial axiomatics of this hypothesis (again, the colonies and the “primitive” only flicker in Foucault’s manifest content), but because its central considerations on history, madness and animality offer an entry for such a reading. In saying that Foucault’s history of madness is also a history of race and colonialism, I obviously hold a great debt to Ann Stoler and Gayatri Spivak.<sup>122</sup> While I am not in a position to match their intricate decenterings of Foucault’s project, I want to gesture at where a theory of the colonality of knowledge and power can supplement his analysis. After following the narrative Foucault constructs in this text of the transformation of the critical and tragic experiences of madness to the anthropological circle of mental illness, I want to briefly point to its echoes in his later works leading up to his articulation of biopower.<sup>123</sup> My overall strategy in this section is to reread an author

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<sup>122</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) and Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999.), 279 and “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Carey Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988) The inspiration of this section comes from the latter’s provocation: “It is well known that Foucault locates epistemic violence, a complete overhaul of the episteme, in the redefinition of sanity at the end of the European eighteenth century. But what if that particular redefinition was only a part of the narrative of history in Europe as well as in the colonies? What if the two projects of epistemic overhaul worked as dislocated and unacknowledged parts of a vast two-handed engine?” *CSS*, 281, *CPR*, 266-267.

<sup>123</sup> I am referring to his lecture series. These include *Psychiatric Power, Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (New York: Picador, 1999) and “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 1997).



whose work is unavoidable in any study of psychiatry and other systems of confinement by highlighting certain figures that represent the intersections between race, madness, and the human. While I am engaged with Foucaultian methodology throughout this dissertation, here I will focus more on the narrative he constructs and how it can enable me to theorize the formation of mental death from the early modern period to its articulation in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century discourses of civilization and monstrosity. I will end my explication of Foucault's text with a critique of his categories of experience and witnessing.

The socio-political narrative of the *History of Madness* is by now hegemonic in the Anglo-American social sciences; even though historians never tire of disputing his empirical claims, Foucault's description of the Great Confinement of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the contingent construction of mental illness in the institutions, and its mastery disguised as liberation by Philippe Pinel and Samuel Tuke reverberates throughout numerous studies of psychiatry and its history.<sup>124</sup> As productive as this reading might be, it neglects the central analytic of this work: how the critical experience of madness was transformed in the anthropological knowledge of mental illness while repressing the tragic experience of unreason, which ultimately returns in

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<sup>124</sup> This is of course a result of the highly abridged version that, until recently, was the only one available in English translation, but there are also strong disciplinary motivations for such a narrow reading. See Colin Gordon, "*Histoire de la folie*: an unknown book by Michel Foucault" in Arthur Still and Irving Velody (eds.) *Rewriting the History of Madness: Studies in Foucault's Histoire de la folie* (London: Routledge, 1992) and Gary Gutting, "Michel Foucault's *Phänomenologie des Krankengeists*" in Mark S. Micale and Roy Porter (eds.) *Discovering the History of Psychiatry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

the works of mad artists.<sup>125</sup> Foucault's historical method in this text is Nietzschean but not necessarily genealogical, as he stays closer to the author's early work, *The Birth of Tragedy*.<sup>126</sup> Foucault's preface invokes "the great Nietzschean quest... [to] confront the dialectics of history with the immobile structures of the tragic," structures which moreover lie "at the center of [various] limit-experiences of the Western world."<sup>127</sup> A number of commentators have noticed the approximation between the critical and tragic experiences of madness and Nietzsche's analysis of the Apollinian and Dionysian aspects of Greek tragedy,<sup>128</sup> but what interests me here is the limit-experience of "the animal." As I will attempt to show, the biologization of madness is irreducibly linked to its complex and discontinuous animalization. The animal is a central figure in both the early division between critical and tragic experiences of madness and the necessary remainder in the anthropological version. I

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<sup>125</sup> Experience here is not easily incorporated into a structuralist agenda nor dismissed as vulgar phenomenology, although Foucault himself has tried to do so in his later works, referring to the concept as "very floating" in the text and perilously "close to admitting an anonymous and general subject of history." "Preface to *The History of Sexuality, Volume Two*" in Paul Rabinow (ed.) *Ethics: Subjectivity and Thought* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 202 and *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 16. In the former text, Foucault admits that what troubles him now about the use of experience in *HM* is not only "its theoretical weakness" but also "its ambiguous link with a psychiatric practice." "Preface to..." 200. The latter statement may be a response to Derrida's critique discussed below. Foucault then attempts to reread his notion of experience by separating it into three axes: first, the play between types of understanding [*savoir*]; second, the organization of a normative system or relation to a series of rules; and third, the modality of relation to the self. These three axis roughly correspond to his archeological investigations, his genealogies of crime and sexuality, and his ethical focus on the hermeneutics of the self. See 202-4.

<sup>126</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

<sup>127</sup> *HM*, xxx.

<sup>128</sup> See Jan Goldstein, "'The lively sensibility of the Frenchman': some reflections on the place of France in Foucault's *Histoire de la folie*" in Arthur Still and Irving Velody (eds.), *Rewriting the History of Madness*, and Michel Serres, "The Geometry of the Incommunicable: Madness" in Arnold I. Davidson (ed.) *Foucault and his Interlocutors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

am following the animal here not only to elucidate Foucault's narrative, but to point to the possibility of another, one that centers on race and colonialism. Perhaps thinking about the biologization and animalization of peoples and animals beside and alongside the mad, reading "the animal" as a screen-allegory "that foreclose[s] a reading of the broader narratives of imperialism," may work towards rewriting the history of madness as a history of colonialism.<sup>129</sup>

The critical and the tragic experiences of madness coexisted during the Medieval and early modern periods of Europe, with the critical being tied to language and reason and the tragic linked to the fantastic, the cosmic and the inhuman, but the former became the primary mode of experiencing madness after the institution of mass internment. During the Renaissance, the critical experience, or "the vision of madness as an experience within the domain of language," became tied to discourses of morality and reason in literature and philosophy; the wisdom of the fool being one of its instantiations.<sup>130</sup> In contrast, the tragic experience, more properly belonging to the realm of painting and the figure, concerned "the absolute tear in the fabric of this world that opens on to the other," a position that is variously occupied by devils, demons and the gryllos.<sup>131</sup> Foucault spends a good deal of time discussing this latter animal-human monstrosity as well as other "fantastical figures...impossible animals, the fruit of mad imaginings" that "reveal the dark rage and sterile folly that lurks in

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<sup>129</sup> Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999.), 279 and "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Carey Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 291.

<sup>130</sup> *HM*, 27.

<sup>131</sup> *HM*, 39.

the heart of mankind.”<sup>132</sup> In his portrait of the breakdown of the medieval bestiary, Foucault may be gesturing at the crisis in Christian dogma that arose with new investigations into nature, or he may be signaling something deeper and more primordial. Nevertheless, the animal, or more properly the inhuman beast, as a signifier for a more general and/or transcendental unreason seems to become fused with that other manifestation that obsessed the early modern Europeans, madness.

This animal nature—a nature which Foucault sees as a “counter-nature,” as the animal in this time was not a part of the harmony of nature’s laws, but “negativity that menaced the order of things”—of madness in the tragic experience will later reappear in the age of confinement as the central figure in the struggle between the two experiences.<sup>133</sup> In his famous description of the Great Confinement of various populations in the *hôpitaux généraux* in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, Foucault shifts his register from a strict focus on madness to other forms of unreason. The new impetus for confinement was tied to demographic shifts and peasant migrations in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and a new “experience of work” that broke from earlier notions of Christian charity to emphasize moral fault. Paupers, libertines, blasphemers, alchemists, sodomites, the mad and other “experiences that the sixteenth century had either accepted or refused, formulated or sidelined...were now taken up by the seventeenth century and grouped together and banished *en masse*.”<sup>134</sup> This had the result of constituting “a domain of experience that had a unity, coherence and function” with

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<sup>132</sup> *HM*, 19.

<sup>133</sup> *HM*, 151.

<sup>134</sup> *HM*, 71 and 82.

these various forms of unreason being homogenized and measured “against the social horizon of poverty.”<sup>135</sup> As Colin Gordon has noted, this mass internment was less the application of a homogeneous category of deviancy than its condition of possibility, as the multiple forms of unreason were now consolidated in one site and measured against a social norm.<sup>136</sup>

Even before madness became singled out as a singular form of unreason, there was a specificity to its experience and treatment by the operators of the *hôpitaux généraux*. In his chapter on “The Insane,” Foucault goes into great detail about “an image of bestiality” that “haunts the hospices,” a figure that emerged as a primary site for the struggle between not only the mad and their keepers, but the critical and tragic experiences of unreason. As Foucault describes,

Madness here took its face from the mask of the beast. The men chained to the walls of the cells were not seen as people who had lost their reason, but as beasts filled with snarling, natural rage, as though madness at its furthest point was liberated from the moral unreason where its milder forms languished, and was revealed in all its immediate, animal violence.<sup>137</sup>

In this passage, Foucault is pointing to a certain confluence of the critical and tragic experiences of madness, as the animalized mad person breaks with the critical form (“moral unreason” and its “milder” manifestations in the blasphemer, sodomite, etc.) through a kind of inhuman violence. Yet this is not the tragic experience per se, even though it embodies some of its elements; the naturalness that Foucault describes here is a move away from the “beyond” of tragic unreason, the transcendental and earth

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<sup>135</sup> *HM*, 82 and 77.

<sup>136</sup> Gordon, “*Histoire de la folie...*” 23-4.

<sup>137</sup> *HM*, 147.

shattering experience, to a kind of immanence.<sup>138</sup> And the violence here is met with violence in turn, as the mad were whipped and chained in an effort to tame or train the beast inside.<sup>139</sup> This was not an effort to exorcize the beast, but to restore man to his animality: “in this reduction to animality, madness found its truth and its cure.”<sup>140</sup>

Such an ambiguous embrace of a quasi-natural naturalness is not the experience of madness as disease, but more properly relates to the theological-moral discourse of an early modern Christianity engaged with the scandal of unreason. In this frame, animalized mad people served a didactic purpose: “madness showed men how close to the animal world their fall could take them.”<sup>141</sup> Yet this moral coding of madness did not completely efface the previous connections between the animal, the mad, and unreason in the tragic experience. No matter how modified it was by the critical, there still remained a brute struggle between reason and unreason that had not yet been reduced to silence. This is what Foucault terms “the major paradox of the classical age”: “madness was caught up and enveloped in the moral experience of an unreason that was proscribed by internment in the seventeenth century, but it was also linked to the experience of an animal unreason that formed the absolute limit of the incarnation of reason, and the scandal of the human condition.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *HM*, 148. There seems to be a trace of Georges Bataille in Foucault’s reading here, as that theorist states at the opening of one of his texts, “animality is immediacy or immanence.” See Bataille’s *Theory of Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 17. For a provocative theory of how this immanent animality was played out in the colonial scene, see Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>139</sup> Is this the origin of the circus-cage?

<sup>140</sup> *HM*, 150.

<sup>141</sup> *HM*, 154.

<sup>142</sup> *HM*, 158.

But the animal did not liberate the mad from the chains of reason. Quite the contrary, as Foucault states that the animalization of madness served as the condition of possibility for biopsychiatry. Although the view of mad person as beast was far from the imposition of the disease model of mental illness, both “an evolutionary perspective” and “the idea of a mechanistic psychology would be derived from this animal nature of madness.”<sup>143</sup> To reach this point, madness must pass into “The Anthropological Circle,” the final chapter and endpoint of Foucault’s book, where the classical binary structure of reason and unreason is replaced by the modern trinity of “man, his madness and his truth.”<sup>144</sup> No longer a great, cosmic encounter with the Truth, madness becomes solely the property of the human and his own truth, the truth of his subject.<sup>145</sup> Lost is the liberty of the impossible animal; after the subjectivization of madness by the institution of regimes of perpetual judgment and observation by Pinel and Tuke, this liberty was objectified, or alienated, and trapped within the closure of humanism. “While previously [the madman] was a Stranger to Being... now he was trapped in his own truth and thus exiled from it.”<sup>146</sup> Here is where Freud and the positivist psychiatrists will enter to read mental illness as the truth of the individual.

But before arriving here, and even before the mastery of madness by Pinel and Tuke parading as its liberation, Foucault sees the possibility for the modern

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<sup>143</sup> *HM*, 148 and 150.

<sup>144</sup> *HM*, 522.

<sup>145</sup> I wonder if I am alone in hearing an echo of this when reading Foucault’s *History of Sexuality: Volume 1*.

<sup>146</sup> *HM*, 516.

anthropological experience of madness formulated in a general epistemic shift at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Somewhat paradoxically, what opens the door for the biopsychiatric paradigm that draws upon the animalization of the mad is the separation of the two figures: whereas both the animal and the mad were united in the inhumanity, the latter becomes human and the former non. While Foucault is elusive about the precise determining forces of such a shift, it appears to coalesce around a concern about the rising presence of madness in society, first veiled as panic about gaol fever spilling out of the *hôpitaux généraux* and into the general populace and then expressing itself in an explosion of texts linking insanity to the price of civilization. Foucault reads the former as a residue of the tragic experience embodied in the leper (“the great image of medieval horror rose up once again”), but this was quickly assuaged with a new critical theory about the role of civilization in the production of madness.<sup>147</sup> A number of investigations during this time linked madness to increased political and economic liberty, the decline in religious hegemony, and the proliferation of the arts and entertainment. According to Foucault, this produced a new conception of the force of the milieu in determining madness, especially a highly civilized milieu that abstracted humans from nature.

The passage in which he describes this is worth quoting in length:

Milieu therefore plays a role that is almost a mirror image of the role previously taken by animality. In earlier times there was the lurking presence of the beast, the point through which madness, in its rage, could erupt in man; the deepest point, the ultimate point of natural existence was also the point where the counter-natural was exalted—human nature being to itself, immediately, its own counter-nature. But at the end of the eighteenth century,

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<sup>147</sup> *HM*, 355.



animality had come to be associated with the tranquility and happiness found in nature, and it was by escaping from the immediacy of natural life at the moment when a milieu is constituted that man opens himself to the perils of madness. The animal could not be mad, or at least it was not in its animality that madness could originate. It was therefore quite natural that primitive men were the least disposed to madness.<sup>148</sup>

Foucault then follows this with a citation from Benjamin Rush, whom I will discuss at length in the next chapter, where he expresses his inability to find but a few cases of melancholy and madness among the Native Americans. There is a very interesting chain of substitutions occurring in this proto-anthropological experience of madness: nature-animal-primitive. All three are where madness and history are not. Foucault does not continue this line of analysis, speaking more about the primitive man in the scientific imaginary or explaining what he is referring to by the tranquilization/naturalization of the animal, but instead focuses on the importance of time in this formation. Although the milieu will be a central technology with Tuke and Pinel, Foucault is more concerned here with how madness becomes fundamentally and irrevocably linked with history: “from [this] point on, madness was clearly inscribed in the temporal destiny of man, and was even the consequence and price of the fact that men, unlike animals, had history.”<sup>149</sup> Interestingly, Foucault dates the emergence of theories of degeneration from this point—not the biologized

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<sup>148</sup> *HM*, 373.

<sup>149</sup> As David Hoy has pointed out to me, the importance of the milieu reappears in Foucault’s lectures on governmentality, collected in *Security, Territory and Population: Lectures at College de France, 1977-1978* (New York: Plagrave Macmillan, 2007). Here, Foucault contrasts the governmental milieu with sovereign territory: while the latter is based on the geographic localization of political power, the former concerns the circulations of bodies and actions, and is more a problem of security. See 20-2. This conception of the milieu further troubles Nikolas Rose’s periodization of biopower discussed below.

degeneracy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but a cultural form that was still “sedimented into the silent time of heredity.”<sup>150</sup> Even though this “historical consciousness” was stronger for 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Europeans “than it is for us today,” it was this link between madness and history that first articulated the anthropological experience, as truth became unlinked from a primordial inhumanness and tied to the nature of man himself.<sup>151</sup>

Unfortunately, Foucault ends his analysis of the connections between the animal, the primitive, the mad and history here. Foucault’s brief consideration of the new role of the animal and even briefer citation of the thought of the primitive tends to obscure the discursive explosion on both these subjects in the mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. To refer to this period as “the great age of classification” is only a slight hyperbole, as scientific and popular discourses both produced a taxonomic wealth on animals, women and non-Europeans.<sup>152</sup> Moreover, this eruption of systems of classification did not always promote the image of an idyllic and serene nature; often, the threat of a racialized monstrosity loomed over the proceedings.<sup>153</sup> The infamous Hottentot Venus was only one in a long line of figures of monstrous crossings between animals and non-Europeans that imbued the nascent discourses on race with a mix of fascination and horror.<sup>154</sup> The historicizing as anthropologizing of

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<sup>150</sup> *HM*, 377.

<sup>151</sup> *HM*, 378.

<sup>152</sup> Londa Schiebinger, *Nature’s Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

<sup>153</sup> See Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>154</sup> See Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

madness was inflected by this milieu and perhaps the animal and the primitive were never fully relegated to the position of the non-human. Perhaps too, madness never fully became human nor lost its overdetermination by these two figures of inhumanity—which might serve as a better explanation for the emergence of evolutionary and biopsychiatric paradigms of mental illness.<sup>155</sup> Still, it would be a misrepresentation to imply that Foucault completely abandons the connection between madness and inhumanity, either in this text or elsewhere. I want to briefly consider the reappearance of the beast as the monster in the lectures that lead up to his theorization of biopower; while Foucault once more elides a consideration of race and colonialism in these writings, they hold the seeds of possibility for such an analysis.

In his lecture series delivered directly before the publications of *Discipline and Punish* and the *History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, Foucault placed madness and psychiatry at the origins of what he had yet to term biopower. As mentioned above, in *Psychiatric Power* Foucault traced the connections between psychiatry, the discourse of the family, and the mass deployment of disciplinary technologies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Foucault continued and expanded upon this analysis in the lecture series collected under the title of *Abnormal*, where he placed a pre-Freudian instinct theory at the foundation of the contemporary homology between psychiatry and the law.<sup>156</sup> Interestingly, he puts the presence of the monster at the origin of this process. The

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<sup>155</sup> Foucault never fully explains how the animalization of the mad served as the condition of possibility for these two paradigms after it was foreclosed in the anthropologization of madness in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>156</sup> Foucault, *Abnormal*. See also the first chapter of *Discipline and Punish*, which also begins, after the famous description of Damians' brutal execution, with a consideration of the psycho-legal problematic.

first of the three “elements...figures...or circles” that constitutes the domain of the abnormal, the monster appears at the limit of law and nature, violating both through a transgressive mixing.<sup>157</sup> From the Middle Ages to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the monster “combines the impossible and the forbidden...it traps the law while breaching it” in the fusion of separate realms (such as human and animal), species, sexes, forms and, ultimately, life and death.<sup>158</sup> Foucault is interested specifically in three manifestations of monstrosity that are dominant in different periods: in the Middle Ages, the monster “was obviously the bestial man,” the inhuman mixture of human and animal, while the Renaissance privileged Siamese twins.<sup>159</sup> After briefly mentioning that both of these mixtures were thought to derive from and signify a prior sin, particularly bestiality, Foucault turns to the Classical Age, where the hermaphrodite emerges as a complex and mutable figure. Towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the hermaphrodite ceases to be a monstrosity by virtue of his/her existence, instead becoming an eccentricity or error of nature. Monstrosity still remains, however, in conduct or behavior: “no longer juridico-natural but juridico-moral,” since the hermaphrodite emerges as a monster if s/he desires or acts against social norms and classifications (i.e., if he or she has been named a woman, but sleeps with other women).<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 55. The other two figures being “the individual to be corrected” or the incorrigible, who does not receive very much attention in this text, and the “masturbating child,” who Foucault theorizes as the center for the deployment of the nascent understanding of instinct in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 66. I have not checked the French original, but it appears that Foucault is anachronistically referring to conjoined twins as Siamese. Term originated from P.T. Barnum’s display of Chang and Eng Bunker, conjoined brothers from Siam, during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. See, Rosemarie Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 73.

This reversal—from the monster as a transgression of social, divine and natural laws to the transgression of laws as a monstrosity of behavior, from the criminal nature of the monstrous to the monstrous nature of criminality—lies at the core of Foucault’s analysis of the abnormal individual. After moving on to detail the rise of a “new economy of punitive power” with the disciplinary technologies and briefly considering certain famous “dangerous individuals” as legal limit-experiences, spectacular murders and crimes without motives that he details to a greater extent elsewhere, Foucault returns to the thought of the monster.<sup>161</sup> As a “principle of intelligibility” that continues to “haunt the figure of the abnormal man,” the monster enables the deployment of a nascent theory of instincts in 19<sup>th</sup> century psychiatry to explain murderous drives or homicidal monomania.<sup>162</sup> Instinct allows psychiatry two related operations: first, it opens up “the possibility of inserting psychiatry into a biological problematic and not just in a medical model that it had utilized for some time.”<sup>163</sup> Second, the vision of a dangerous, uncontrollable abnormality allows 19<sup>th</sup> century psychiatry to fulfill its mission as a form of social hygiene, pursuing every slight deviancy that could contaminate the social body (no longer a metaphor) as a whole, in a process that Foucault is on the verge of naming biopower.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 89 and Michel Foucault, “About the Concept of the ‘Dangerous Individual’ in Nineteenth-century Legal Psychiatry” in James D. Faubion (ed). *Power* (New York: The New Press, 1994).

<sup>162</sup> *Abnormal*, 56.

<sup>163</sup> *Abnormal*, 136. Foucault then lists a series of questions that follow from this possibility: “Are human instincts the same as animal instincts? Is the morbid human instinct a repetition of an animal instinct? Is the abnormal human instinct the resurrection of archaic human instincts?”

<sup>164</sup> In *Psychiatric Power*, Foucault also speaks about this mission in reference to the infamous legal cases, calling it a turning point in the history of psychiatry: now that “every mad man is a possible criminal...[there] was a way of founding psychiatric power, not in terms of truth...but in terms of danger.” 250.

Foucault's theorization of monstrosity at the origin of biopower is particularly useful for complicating certain easy and clear demarcations made by contemporary champions of the post-biopower age. Nikolas Rose's recent consideration of life itself, biological citizenship and neurochemical selves, for instance, depends on a persistent disavowal of the fraught legacies of what he terms eugenics. While Rose employs a complex theoretical and empirical analysis to support his assertion that the "four terms that delineated eugenics—population, quality, territory and nation—do not characterize the molecular biopolitics of the present," perhaps the monster, both in the past of eugenics and the present of life itself, does not allow such easy divisions.<sup>165</sup> To consider "monstrosity as a regulatory construct of modernity that imbricates not only sexuality, but questions of culture and race" is to acknowledge that a mixture of danger, animality and madness violates sanitary narratives of sublation and total separations of geopolitical spaces.<sup>166</sup> Foucault himself argues that psychiatry and criminology begin to focus more on containing deviations from the norm, so that "the disorder of nature will no longer disturb and challenge the game of the law through the exceptional figure of the monster,"<sup>167</sup> yet I believe that Eve Sedgwick's critique in a different context of Foucault's "unidirectional narrative of supersession" applies here as well.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), 58.

<sup>166</sup> Jasbir K Puar and Amit S. Ray, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terror and the Production of Docile Patriots" *Social Text* 72(20), Fall 2002, 119.

<sup>167</sup> *Abnormal*, 162.

<sup>168</sup> *Epistemology of the Closet*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 46.

Ultimately, there remains for me a problem with Foucault's conception of the subject of enunciation or testimony. Derrida has famously critiqued Foucault's approach to madness as repeating its mastery and exclusion: "everything transpires as if Foucault *knew* what 'madness' means. Everything transpires as if, in a continuous and underlying way, an assured and rigorous precomprehension of the concept of madness...[was] possible and acquired."<sup>169</sup> Although never expressly stated as such by Derrida, I believe he is critiquing Foucault for reducing madness to a self-same speaking subject as opposed to a kind of writing in the general sense, an economy of traces. Such a reading is furthered by Derrida's remarks in "La parole soufflée," which is less well read than "Cogito and the History of Madness" but contains a further elaboration of his critique of Foucault. Here, Derrida is confronting a series of authors including Foucault, but also Jean Laplanche and Maurice Blanchot, who published revisionist readings of mad artists to counter reductive psychiatric codifications of their texts. Yet for Derrida, this critical commentary unites with the clinical at a certain juncture: "At the moment when criticism (be it aesthetic, literary, philosophical, etc.) allegedly protects the meaning of a thought or the value of a work against psychomedical reductions, it comes to the same result through the opposite path: *it creates an example*. That is to say, *a case*. A work or an adventure of thought is made to bear witness, as example or martyr, to a structure whose essential permanence becomes the prime preoccupation of the commentary."<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 41.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

Such a reading is clearly applicable to Foucault's *History of Madness*, especially the highly problematic last section that consists of a description of the return of the tragic experience of madness in the work of famous mad artists, thereby forcing "psychology...[to] justify itself when confronted by madness."<sup>171</sup> Giorgio Agamben, despite his intentions, helps us to make the same kind of critique on Foucault's later work on monstrosity. In his work on witnessing, Agamben conceptualizes the structure of testimony as a perilous disjunction between what is real and impossible, human and inhuman, bios and zoe. At one point, Agamben brings his descriptions of the witness's movement between subjecthood and desubjectification to Foucault's notion of the "vacant place" the subject occupies in the statement in his *Archeology of Knowledge* and the author-function Foucault spoke of elsewhere.<sup>172</sup> While Agamben is concerned with the ethics of such an effacement, he finds a somewhat salvific moment in Foucault's "The Life of Infamous Men," which deals with registers of internment, the *lettres de cachet*, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As Agamben describes, here "the darkness of the subject momentarily appears in all its splendor...What suddenly comes to light is...not the subject's face, but rather the disjunction between the living being and the speaking being that marks its empty place. Here life subsists only in the infamy in which it existed; here a name lives solely in the disgrace that covered it. And something in this disgrace bears witness to

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<sup>171</sup> *HM*, 538.

<sup>172</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 95, and "What is an Author?" in James Faubion (ed.) *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology* (New York: The New Press, 1994).



life beyond all biography.”<sup>173</sup> Agamben’s reading of Foucault betrays the easy possession that both authors share of marginal subjectivities and texts; in the latter’s case, the monstrous criminal and in the former’s, the “inhuman” *Muselmann*.<sup>174</sup> In the next section, I want to interrogate this kind of relation in my own work by engaging with two “witnesses” of life inside the asylum. But instead of celebrating their disgrace, I will try to appreciate how they approach the intersections of race, gender, and mental difference in a way that refers not only to what they have experienced, but broader structures of racism, violence and representation.

### **The Witness and the Archive**<sup>175</sup>

I found what I had been looking for on the second to last day of my research. I was in the Alabama State Archives in Montgomery, a regal building across the street from the state capital, directly beside the former White House of the Confederacy, and casting a shadow on a “Moo-seum” that detailed the history of cattle in the state. I had been in Alabama for only about a week, making a brief stop in Birmingham before spending the majority of my time in Tuscaloosa, reading through the superintendent’s reports in the special collections library of the University of Alabama. These reports were the briefest yet: while there was a bit of discussion on what to do with black inmates before the establishment of the separate asylum, when the Searcy Hospital was established, the text of their reports was often

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<sup>173</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 143.

<sup>174</sup> See also Gayatri Spivak’s critique of Foucault’s intellectual transparency when representing the self-consolidating other in “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 272-5.

<sup>175</sup> The interpretations of the inmate texts in this section are heavily in debt to Anjali Arondekar, who first suggested the link between the newspaper article’s prose and the language of the Middle Passage.

under a page. For example, the text from 1910, 1914 and 1915 consisted solely of these lines:

As a rule, the colored insane are generally more passive than the whites. There is less dissatisfaction and contention, and there is much less solicitous inquiry from friends and relatives.

There is some discouragement in the care of these people because of a great lack of improving response to the best directed treatment; they readily become demented and they easily die.

The charts that followed these years put the death rate at almost 20%; that of the patients at the white facility, by contrast, was about 6%.<sup>176</sup> It only took me two days to read through the reports from the entire 66 year history of the asylum, and I spent the next couple days searching in vain for references to Searcy in other texts.

Yet in the State Archives, I was able to find two texts written by inmates in the State Institution Files of the Governor's Papers. One consists of a letter written to then governor Lurlene Wallace by a current inmate and the other a newspaper article written by a former inmate. In selectively presenting their contents here, I do not intend them to be taken as transparent testimonies or acts of witnessing, although both authors are navigating a tension between an uncommunicable violence/desubjectification and the ability to represent themselves.<sup>177</sup> Yet I see this less as the result of the structure of testimony per se than as a product of each author's specific engagement with racist state violence and the legacies of slavery. Likewise, both of these authors represent mental difference in a way that seems to play into the

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<sup>176</sup> In 1910, for instance, 197 out of the 964 inmates treated at Searcy died, while 133 out of 2104 died at the white asylum. ASH, AR 1910.

<sup>177</sup> See Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

antipsychiatric and sociological hermeneutic, where madness is a result of institutional or societal pressures and codings. But I believe both authors link madness, race, gender and power in ways that exceed such unidirectional interpretations or straightforward readings. Finally, I hope to show how each of the authors writes within and against a site of rupture in ways that I am trying to learn from.

Both the letter to the governor from J.F.C. and the one immediately preceding it have the function of making state violence hyperlegible. The letter that came before J.F.C.'s in the file was a response to the governor's legal advisor from the assistant superintendent at Searcy Hospital, Harry S. Rowe, M.D., and while that previous communication was not included it apparently consisted of a reproduction of J.F.C.'s text.<sup>178</sup> Rowe begins by countering J.F.C.'s assertion that he "wasn't seen by any doctors which must determine whether I should have been sent here are not," pointing to how a Lunacy Commission deemed him "insane and incompetent" before removing him from jail. Rowe includes a citation of the commission's report to prove his assertion, yet it muddles the itinerary of J.F.C.'s insanity and incarceration: "After full study and a long period of observation, it is the opinion of each of us separately, and our opinion jointly and collectively, that the said [J.F.C.] is presently insane and incompetent. It is also our opinion that he was insane and incompetent at the time of his admission in Searcy Hospital." Thus the Lunacy Commission sent

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<sup>178</sup> Alabama. Governor (1963-1979), state institutions files, SG021949-SG21976, Alabama Department of Archives and History. I did not record the specific folder number.

him to the asylum on account of his insanity, but then affirms his madness by his time at Searcy, in a report could not have been written before J.F.C.'s removal from jail.

After this episode, Rowe further cements his case by reminding the governor that, "I am sure that you remember that your offices was [sic] contacted by the FBI about this same" individual a few months prior. Apparently, the FBI "did not interview [J.F.C.] but about five minutes before they decided that he was not mentally capable of making a statement," but the reason for their investigation is never explained, possibly not even to Rowe himself. Rowe then recounts his own interviews with the subject, who "refused to give much information about himself" but was apparently on trial for the murder of his wife even though he contends that there was a struggle over a gun that accidentally discharged. The next couple of statements begin the end of Rowe's letter: "As stated above, he is a constant complainer and does smuggle letters out...His relatives have visited him several times and I believe they carry the letters out of the hospital and mail them for him. He has not shown a favorable response to treatment and continues mentally incompetent." Finally, Rowe swears that he can find no evidence of the physical abuse J.F.C. claims to have encountered and hopes "this information is about what you wanted."

Within this nexus of tautological internment, multiple layers of investigation and ever-present censorship, J.F.C. both critiques and aspires to certain forms of state power. J.F.C.'s letter, dated October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1967, (as opposed to the letter described above, which was written on November 3<sup>rd</sup>) begins by contending that he was never

judged insane by any doctors. Instead, he sees his internment in the hospital as a result of the lack of evidence against him in the case: “I spent several months in jail without a trial which a charge was placed against me that I am not guilty of and I think the court very well know [sic] it.” But after this initial refusal of state legitimacy, J.F.C. attempts to ally himself with the government, stating “[we] have just as good a state and good of state government as any other state or better” and this is why “myself and all of my peoples has voted and supported the Wallace administration.” J.F.C. also describes himself as a good citizen and former member of the Marines before launching into a description of the brutality, exploitation and starvation he experiences in the hospital. It bears quoting at length:

I have been attacked and savagely beaten by employees and left bleeding and I couldn't even get a chance to see a doctor which we rarely get a chance to see doctor. They are beating patients up every day here and if we say anything about it they will give us a shot of medicine so strong until it just knock a patient right away. I have seen patient die because of it and the stuff that they are feeding us for food is not fit for pigs to eat. Many of patients have been starved to death and there are just taking our money. All of the patients that has money here and checks coming here they just take it.

After this description of violence, animalization and theft, J.F.C. concludes his letter with a few lines that fascinatingly tie together state violence, psychiatry and what he considers helplessness: “Getting a chance to see the doctor is just as hard as getting a chance to come and talk with you. They will tell us that the doctor don't want to see us. They just take the advantage of us because we are here and can't help ourselves. So I will be looking for your response.” The parallel between the doctor and the governor is perhaps a subtle critique of the forms of power both positions share, and works against what might be a facetious attempt to appeal to the

governor's sympathies at the beginning of the text. Neither the doctor nor the governor wishes to see what is happening in the asylum, but J.F.C. tries to force them to nonetheless. His assertion that the inmates cannot help themselves likewise could be a reference to the state of mental difference and/or the enforced powerlessness of inmates who cannot get a trial, much less a Lunacy Commission hearing.

The second text also had an accompanying letter, but this one was unsigned and was written about 20 days after the newspaper article was published. It simply reads: "To the Governor of The State of Alabama, I sincerely urge you to investigate this report on Searcy Hospital." The article accompanying it, published in *The Southern Courier* on August 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>, 1967, was written anonymously and consisted of the former inmate's "story of what life was like inside the hospital—and her ideas on how it could be improved" (Image 9).<sup>179</sup> It is tempting to reproduce the entire article, as its form expresses as much as the content. The text is primarily written in the second person as a list or catalogue of a day in the asylum, from breakfast to dinner, yet begins with the inmate's entrance to the site: "When you enter the door, it looks very pleasant. But the worse will come." The author then describes how all of the inmates are black, but the majority of the staff is white. Then she gives a brief description of the receiving station and the removal of civilian clothing, and how often they are "misplaced." After being "slapped and cursed" into the showers, and noting that "if you are in a rage after the bath, you are locked up," the author

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<sup>179</sup> "If You Have Your Sanity, You Will Lose It' Former Patient Tells What Life is Like Inside Searcy State Mental Hospital" *The Southern Courier*, August 5-6, 1967, 4.

# 'If You Have Your Sanity, You Will Lose It'

## Former Patient Tells What Life Is Like Inside Searcy State Mental Hospital

(The author of this article was formerly a patient at Searcy State Mental Hospital in Mt. Vernon. This is her story of what life was like inside the hospital—and her ideas on how it could be improved.)

MT. VERNON, Ala.—When you enter the door, it looks very pleasant. But the worse will come. Although all of the patients are Negroes, most of the attendants are white. There are only a very few Negro attendants. All of the social workers are white, after visiting at the hospital, all persons are referred to the receiving section. For women it is Ward A and for men it is Ward B. When received, you are met by an attendant and another patient who has been there a long time. Sometimes the patient who has been there a long time is a criminal who court is released outside the court tells the hospital to set him free. All of your clothes are removed to be cleaned. Sometimes they are given back to you a few days later. Sometimes when you ask about your clothes, you are told they were misplaced.

When you are sent into the shower, if you don't go in, you are pushed or sometimes slapped and cursed and given a bath by some of the patients. If you are a raga after the bath, you are locked up.

You are given just two kinds of clothing to get on. Sometimes they are good, sometimes raggy—no always in-between. A lot of the women are not given panties, and the men wear no underpants.

If you ask too many questions you are locked up for worrying them. Some patients are locked up because they go to patient centers or other wards without asking. If there are court charges against you, you may be locked up.

When you are locked up, you are let out at certain times to get water. There are no toilet facilities in the rooms where you are locked up, so you must sit and use the bathroom there.

At Searcy, all the food is served in eight hours, early in the day, breakfast is between 6:30 and 1:00 p.m., dinner between 11:30 and 1:30 p.m., and supper between 3 and 4 p.m.

Breakfast is always grout or something resembling oatmeal, with gravy. There is very oily, sometimes sweet and sometimes sour. Bread can be day-old rolls. At noon, sometimes there is sliced bread or sometimes just a slice of bread. You get no meat at breakfast—unless you find it in the gravy. No butter either. However, the employees have bread for their breakfast.

Dinner is varied. The vegetables are whatever is raised on the farm. Sometimes we have beans and peas, and meat with cornbread and hot peppers mixed. Greens are cooked sometimes in plain water, sometimes with meat. Sometimes they are not even washed clean.

At dinner, we have powdered hot milk to drink. Most days we have salt mixed. Some days it is thick, sometimes plain chow. Very rarely, it is wasser and hotdogs. On Friday we have some fish that is never cooked.



SEARCY HOSPITAL.

Our supper is always boiled potatoes in the skin (not even washed clean), some corned, and sausage boiled in water. There is never enough for all to get some. Dessert is dried fruit, such as prunes or peaches, with never enough sugar on it. The powdered sugar is a sometimes sour.

In the summertime, fresh fruits like peaches, plums, pears, watermelon, and cantaloupes are given as long as the garden supply from the field lasts. You can buy food in the patient centers. The centers is run by white people. The food you get there is thrown—no handed-to-you, like you were a dog. Some patients volunteer to work, but others are forced. They carry clothes on their backs to the laundry, rain or shine. If they are not there, they are looked for as if they were paid to work.

Men and some women go to the field to work the garden. About two of the patients work for the staff. None, the assistant superintendent. He gives them a very, very small salary.

If patients refuse to eat the half-cooked or dirty food, they are sometimes given shock treatments. A lot of patients have been shocked and never awakened again.

Some patients come to recreation dirty. The women are kept much cleaner than the men. Some of the wards are cleaner than the others.

If you talk back to an attendant or nurse then, as they call it, you are given an electric shock treatment. All the attendants has to say is, "It was the patient who talked back" and the patient is taken in for a treatment. The usual treatment is ten shocks, but sometimes it is more.

If patients refuse to eat the half-cooked or dirty food, they are sometimes given shock treatments. A lot of patients have been shocked and never awakened again.

When patients walk to the attendants and tell them they are sick, the attendants must times say, "It's all old crazy." Patients have been killed, slapped, and even stumped by some of the attendants, but other attendants are kind and understanding.

There are no psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, or clinical psychologists at Searcy Hospital. Many doctors are Cuban studying to pass the Alabama medical examination.

The kitchen has no dietitian or dietitians to prepare the food. The head chef over the kitchen has no experience in the work. All the food besides the white houses and a white truck driver are Negroes. They get the food together as ordered by the headman over the kitchen. Just a few of the Negro help also here.

Searcy is a place that, if you are sent with your sanity, you will lose it. Some patients die of starvation or for lack of medicine.

To improve Searcy, it must be integrated. It should have trained nurses, attendants, and dietitians. It should employ more people trained for treatment of the mentally ill. The hospital should hire Negroes as social workers and secretaries, and for other responsible positions.



MRS. BOB CRAWFORD.

## Wilcox Distiller Gets A Year and a Day

BY BETH WILCOX  
FINE APPLE, Ala.—"I want people to know the justice we get in Wilcox County," said Mrs. Bob Crawford, 57, her husband was arrested April 25, 1967, for distilling whiskey.

The other men were arrested with Crawford. All of them were allowed, one day, but Crawford was held in Sheriff P. C. (Lamson) Jenkins, and the sheriff said he had to go to court.

Last November, in circuit court, Crawford was given two choices. According to her son, Bob Crawford Jr., the judge said he could take six months in Camden jail and \$500 fine, or a year and a day in Kilby prison in Waynesboro.

He decided to go to Kilby, since he didn't want to stay in Camden jail. Bruce Bonham of Selma, Crawford's lawyer, appealed Crawford's case all the way to the Alabama Supreme Court. The appeal was turned down.

Why did Crawford get a stiffer penalty than the men arrested with him? Sheriff Jenkins said, "It's not at all unusual to send a man to prison when he has been caught distilling three or four times. Besides, he was given six months after the sentencing to clean up his business."

Crawford was picked up at his home on June 10 of this year. "The deputy had a warrant, but it was all cancelled up so you couldn't even read it," said Mrs. Crawford.

Then, she said, on July 3 the family received a letter from a man who had been arrested. The letter said he had

to the bathroom whenever there is a special educational program. Miss Jackson has been in the program several months at St. John Baptist Church. Most of the time, she sits at home. Macon County has many handicapped children who "have not had a day of school in their lives," Mrs. Crawford said. "I know, because they come into the clinic. I ask them if they go to school and they say 'no.' And out in the rural areas there are many children we don't even get to touch with."

Many retarded children go to the regular schools. "The best year I was a teacher (1955)," Mrs. Leonard said, "I had a fourth grade out at Prairie

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## Macon County Group Proposes School for Handicapped Children

BY KERRY CRUDEN  
TUSKEGEE, Ala.—"I wish I could go to school and see what it feels like to sit in a classroom. I never had the opportunity to go to school like other children." This is the story Miss Willardine Jackson, a handicapped young lady, tells almost anyone who will listen.

When she spoke to Mrs. R. T. Leonard, a retired schoolteacher, Mrs. Leonard decided that Macon County's retarded and handicapped children needed a school of their own.

Mrs. Leonard brought the problem to the Youth Improvement Association, a local community group. She also requested an answer to the problem—a trade school for handicapped children.

The Youth Improvement Association plans to present the proposal to the Macon County Community Action Program in an attempt to get funds. Miss Jackson was very excited when she heard about Mrs. Leonard's idea.

Mrs. Leonard spent four years in the hospital. Now she can walk, but not without crutches. Also, she can not learn as fast as most people.

But Miss Jackson was luckier than most handicapped or retarded children. Mrs. Clara Cropper, a teacher at John Andrew's Institute Paralegal School, taught her how to read, write, and do some arithmetic.

The Institute Paralegal School takes children only up to age 18. When Miss Jackson had to leave the school, she wanted to continue her education at a regular school. She planned to go into the third grade.

But, she said, her mother, Mrs. Cora Jackson, "the superintendent at that time told me that she was unable to get on the bus by herself. He told it was too inconvenient to get her on each day."

For a year, Miss Jackson had some lessons at Tuskegee Institute. Mrs. Cropper had started giving her voice lessons in hospital, because she sang so well. And Miss Jackson's best grades were in music—she had an A all along.

All the end of her year at Tuskegee, the voice pupils gave recitals, and Miss Jackson was star performer. "What she did not go on at the Institute," Mrs. Jackson said, "it was too difficult to get her up and down the stairs. I got a complaint in my chest and I just couldn't do it."

Now Mrs. Jackson takes her daughter



MISS MAXINE HENRY

Image 9  
Source: The Southern Courier Archive, Volume 3: 1967, NO 32, <http://www.southerncourier.org/archives3.html> (accessed 5/25/14)

describes receiving hospital garments, which are sometimes “good,” sometimes “raggy.” Moreover, very few of the women are given panties and none of the men wear underwear. She closes this opening scene with a refrain that echoes throughout the article: “If you ask too many questions you are locked up for worrying them. Some patients are locked up because they go to patient canteen or other wards without asking. If there are court charges against you, you may be locked up.”

The author then launches into a detailed description of the three meals served at the asylum, how “the employees have butter for their breakfast” but the inmates do not, how at dinner “the vegetables are whatever is raised on the farm...sometimes they are not even washed clean,” and how at supper, “the powdered sweet milk is sometimes sour.” She notes that a patient can buy food at the canteen (if they are not being locked up for visiting it), but “the canteen is run by white people. The food you get there is thrown—not handed—to you, like you were a dog.” She then distinguishes between routines of work and recreation: for the former, if the expected inmates “are not there, they are looked for as if they were paid to work.” Recreation, however, is the only thing at Searcy supervised by the black attendants. Still, “usually, some patients are being punished, and can’t go.” This leads the author into an extended description of the abusive power of the attendant:

“If you talk back to an attendant or sass them (as they call it), you are given an electric shock treatment. All the attendant has to say is, ‘I want this patient shocked,’ and the patient is taken in for a treatment. The usual treatment is ten shocks, but sometimes it is more.

If patients refuse to eat the half-cooked or dirty food, they are sometimes given shock treatments. A lot of patients have been shocked and never awoken again.



When patients walk to the attendants and tell them they are sick, the attendants most times say, 'You off and crazy.' Patients have been kicked, slapped, and even stomped by some of the attendants. But other attendants are kind and understanding."

Part of the reason for the attendants' sovereignty undoubtedly lies in the fact that "there are no psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, or clinical psychologists at Searcy Hospital."

Finally, I will again quote the author at length, this time reproducing her two concluding paragraphs:

Searcy is a place that, if you are sent with your sanity, you will lose it. Some patients die of starvation or for lack of medicine.

To improve Searcy, it must be integrated. It should have trained nurses, attendants, and dietitians. It should employ more people trained for treatment of the mentally ill. The hospital should hire Negroes as social workers and secretaries, and for other responsible positions.

The first sentence, from which the article takes its title, appears to follow the sociological critique of institutional life. Along with the sentence immediately following, the author seems to be attributing mental difference to an effect of the institution, its brutality, degradation and privation. Yet the beginning of the second paragraph seems to broaden this critique to the state of segregation as a whole, even as it offers a demarcation of mental illness in the following couple of sentences. But perhaps the most interesting rupture held within this conclusion is how strongly it deviates from the previous format of the article. What began as a typical entry into the space and was followed by a typical day does not discuss how the author, or

anyone for that matter, would get out.<sup>180</sup> Indeed, the author never identifies herself in the text, either by signature or subject. Instead, she exists as another object amongst others, as a quantity that is denied a subjectivity even as she interpellates the reader as an inmate. It is these features that recall Dylan Rodríguez's words on contemporary prisons and the Middle Passage: "the prison is less a 'destination' point for the 'duly convicted' than a point of *massive human departure*—from civil society, the free world, and the mesh of affective social bonds and relations that produce varieties of 'human' family and community."<sup>181</sup> The author still exists within this space, cataloguing the high crimes against the flesh that occur within it, but pointing to a time when it will be abolished.

In the end I view neither of these texts as innocent or true representations, not as evidence of illness or revolt as they would appear in the psychiatric or antipsychiatric hermeneutics. I do not intend to ignore the elements in each which trouble me, whether it be the prior violence against a wife or the degree to which a newspaper article has been edited. Finally, I hope my analysis of the larger discourses behind these two texts has not also participated in "the slippage from rendering visible the mechanism to rendering vocal the individual" that Gayatri Spivak found problematic in Michel Foucault's reading of Pierre Riviere.<sup>182</sup> By

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<sup>180</sup> During my research, I found no discharge records. The clearest explanation of how one was to exit the asylums comes from the 1928 Annual Report of Central State Hospital in Virginia: "It is our purpose to sterilize a large number of cases during the coming year, as we feel that there are in the institution a very considerable number who might be discharged from the institution, but for the danger of propagating defective offspring." CSH, AR 1928, 13.

<sup>181</sup> Dylan Rodríguez, *Forced Passages*, 227.

<sup>182</sup> "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 285.

highlighting the prior texts of state violence and the Middle Passage that inform these two writings, I mean to work against a conception of witnessing that forecloses an analysis of how testimony is written before the event.<sup>183</sup> But this by no means forecloses the resiliency of these two inmates who were able to negotiate their status of mental death, to work against their interpellations as monstrous or animal-like in order to reach outside of the asylum. I look to these two texts not in order to place a body inside the cage, nor to provide for a more accurate representation of its bars, but in an attempt to learn how to destroy it.

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<sup>183</sup> As with writing in the general sense, these documents are “footprints of the trace that efface as they disclose” (Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 244).

## Chapter 2: Compounds of Madness and Race

### Governing Species, Disease and Sexuality in the Early Republic

If it be right and incumbent to subject children to the authority of parents and guardians, and idiots and lunatics to committees, would it not be equally right and incumbent to give the free negroes masters, until at least they arrive at years of discretion, which very few ever did or will attain?

--George Fitzhugh<sup>184</sup>

For their commencement presentation, two Harvard seniors held a debate on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1773, as to “*whether the slavery, to which Africans are in this province, by permission of law, subjected, be agreeable [sic] to the law of nature?*”<sup>185</sup> Printed later that year, the debate centered on the nature of African difference and contained, according to Larry Tise, “the most astute proslavery refutation of Revolutionary ideology in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>186</sup> “A” (Theodore Parsons) opened with a critique of slavery as a violation of the natural law of equality, denouncing the coercion of “our fellow-men...from the same common parent with you and me, and between whom nature has made no distinction,” with the exception of the minor physical differences produced by African climate.<sup>187</sup> “B” (Eliphalet Pearson) agreed that “Liberty to all is sweet” but argued that the actual “nature of society...[and] the universal rule of right, *the happiness of the whole*” requires a differential structure of freedom and subordination.<sup>188</sup> After noting that the sovereignty of the “Governor of

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<sup>184</sup> *Sociology of the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond: A. Morris, 1854), 88-9.

<sup>185</sup> [Theodore Parsons and Eliphalet Pearson], *A Forensic Dispute on the Legality of Enslaving the Africans...* (Boston: Printed by John Boyle for Tomas Leverett, 1773), 3-4.

<sup>186</sup> Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701—1840* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 30.

<sup>187</sup> [Parsons and Pearson], *A Forensic Dispute*, 5.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

the universe” and of the parent over the child do not require any kind of “voluntary contract,” he turns to the state of Africans in “their native country,” where they lack “every advantage for the cultivation of those principles of humanity...by which the human species is distinguished from the other parts of the animal creation.”<sup>189</sup>

Because “his condition here is so much more eligible than his condition there, his removal is to be esteemed a favor. And the constitution of our government, by whereby such removal is countenance and encouraged, is by no means to be esteemed reprehensible.”<sup>190</sup> The idea of liberty here is absurd: “who I beseech you, ever thought the consent of a child, an idiot [sic], or a madman necessary to his subordination? Every whit as immaterial is the consent of these miserable *Africans*, whose real character seems to be a compound of the three.”<sup>191</sup>

While I consider the tropes of government and natural law easily legible in the context of the political upheaval in the colonies, I am having trouble precisely locating these three figures of the child, idiot and madman and their relation to the fourth, the African. Perhaps this an allusion to Voltaire’s distinction between different black “species:” those of “first degree of stupidity” who “think only of the present and bodily wants” and those under the second, “a middle state between imbecility and infant reason,” who can “foresee by halves, without being able to form any fixed society.”<sup>192</sup> Here, Africans appear in the language of natural history as “a

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 11 and 25.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>192</sup> Tobias Smollett, William Fleming, Oliver Leigh and John Morley (eds.), *The Works of Voltaire: A Contemporary Version, Volume XXXIX*, (Pair: E.R. DuMont: 1901), 241-2.

species of man as different from ours as the breed of spaniels is from that of greyhounds,” yet measurable and ranked in terms of “our philosophy.”<sup>193</sup> Or perhaps “B” is referencing John Locke’s analysis of the faculties of the mind and the constitution of personhood. In a chapter from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* on the “first beginnings of human knowledge...and by what steps it makes its progress to the laying in and storing up those ideas out of which is to be framed all the knowledge it is capable of,” Locke includes madmen and idiots as examples of how the intellectual faculties of abstraction, comparison, etc., “if wanting or out of order, produce suitable defects in men’s understandings and knowledge.”<sup>194</sup> The implication may be that Africans do not possess the faculties required to become proper, reasonable persons and thus resemble the immaturity of the child, the disorder of the madman and absence of the idiot; Africans are the compound of those who cannot compound.<sup>195</sup> Finally, given the location and forensic status of the debate, this might be a citation of Massachusetts’s legal code of 1641, specifically article 52: “Children, Idiots, Distracted persons, and all that are strangers, or new commers to our plantation, shall have such allowances and dispensations in any Cause whether Criminall or other as religion and reason require.”<sup>196</sup> While this could enable a legal

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 240 and 241.

<sup>194</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: William Tegg and Co, Cheapside, 1749), Book II. Ch. XI, 95 and 94. Locke also articulates “the difference between idiots and madmen,—that madmen put wrong ideas together, and so make wrong propositions, but argue and reason right from them; but idiots make very few or no propositions, and reason scarce at all.” P. 95.

<sup>195</sup> See Colin Dayan, “Legal Terrors,” ” *Representation* 92, Fall 2005 and Raymond Martin, “Locke’s Psychology of Personal Identity,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 38(1), January 2000, 48-50.

<sup>196</sup> William H Whitmore, *The Colonial Laws of Massachusetts: reprinted from the edition of 1672, with the supplements through 1686 : containing also, a bibliographical preface and introduction, treating of all the printed laws from 1649 to 1686 : together with the Body of Liberties of 1641, and the*

responsibility for these three figures within a given town or community (paying a family to house and care for a distracted person with no relations, for instance), the association of child, idiots and madmen with the stranger references the more common custom of “warning out.” Under these laws, adapted from British regulations on vagabonds, reason and religion required new residents to be evaluated by town constables or other authorities. If they were judged likely to need public assistance, these strangers were driven off with greater or lesser degrees of physical coercion.<sup>197</sup> Here, the African joins the child, idiot and madman as well as the American Indian as an alien, admitted into the community at the settler’s benevolence, but always under threat of exile.<sup>198</sup>

Whatever the specific figures in this equation—what ratio of the child, idiot and madman is required to form the African—“B” is unconcerned with etiology of African inferiority: “whether this inequality be considered as arising from difference in natural capacity, difference in the means of improvement, or in disposition

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*records of the Court of Assistants, 1641-1644* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, City Printers, 1890), 45.

<sup>197</sup> See Albert Deutsch, *The Mentally Ill in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), 45-6, and Josiah Benton, LL.D., *Warning Out in New England: 1656-1817* (Boston: W.B. Clarke Company, 1911).

<sup>198</sup> The legal equivalency of these figures, with the exclusion of indigenous personage, reappears in *The State of Mississippi v. Jones* (1820), which decided that “murder can be committed on a slave.” As the court asked, “Is not a slave a reasonable creature?—is he not a human being? And the meaning of this phrase, *reasonable creature*, is a human being. For the killing a lunatic, an idiot, or even an unborn child, is murder, as much as the killing a philosopher; and has not the slave as much reason as a lunatic, an idiot, or an unborn child? All are in the king’s peace, except alien enemies, *flagrante belli*.” While they might not possess as much reason as a philosopher or judge, slaves are no longer killable aliens, as opposed to those who were being removed from the state. 1 Miss. 39, 1 Walker 83 (1821). For a more in depth reading of this case and the greater context of state-sanctioned violence see Andrew Fede, “Legitimized Violent Slave Abuse in the American South, 1619-1865” *The American Journal of Legal History*, 29(2), April 1985, 115-7.

properly to employ such means...whether it arises from nature or education, or any other supposeable [sic] quarter, it matters not.” What does is the fact that “some are found so far to excel others both in respect of wisdom and benevolence...that the general end, happiness, would be better promoted by the exercise of authority in the former, though necessarily involving subordination in the latter, than by the enjoyment of equal Liberty in each.”<sup>199</sup> “A” has no response to the second part of this argument, instead endeavoring to show “that stupidity is by no means the natural state of these people” and it is only upon being enslaved that “they sink into a state of lifeless insensibility.”<sup>200</sup> Disputing the cause, “A” accepts the effect, and leaves unquestioned the statements “B” makes concerning the nature of sovereignty. Some British colonists vocally contested this structure of authority and degraded status, but only insofar as it applied to them. As F. Nwabueze Okoye describes in “Chattel Slavery as the Nightmare of the American Revolutionaries,” American pamphleteers railed against the British deprivations of their rights and liberties as well as “their assumptions that Englishmen overseas were idiots, ‘unpolished,’ ‘inferior animals,’ a people whose obedience could only be secured by keeping ‘a strict watch over them.’”<sup>201</sup>

In this chapter I will attempt to discern the epistemic ground in revolutionary America that enables these figures to appear as coherent and equivalent by

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<sup>199</sup> [Theodore Parsons and Eliphalet Pearson], op. cited, 14-5.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 41-2.

<sup>201</sup> F. Nwabueze Okoye, “Chattel Slavery as the Nightmare of the American Revolutionaries” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 37(1) Jan. 1980, 9.



explicating the relationship between conceptions of the enslaved mind and the possibility of an American nation. I focus primarily on the writings of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Rush, Christopher McPherson and a doctor's cases notes concerning Rose, an enslaved woman suffering from "passions of the mind," to show how this compounding of the idiot, child, madman and slave is an essential part of the production of the proper US subject. While the first two slaveholders differed on the nature of human difference and the itinerary of the institution of slavery, they were united in a definition of blackness and citizenship as mutually exclusive. To Jefferson, enslaved men and women were a political and epistemological disruption; plagued by suspicions of their danger, Jefferson sought to anchor their difference in a natural and political history. Defining a citizen as a "man of ripe years and sane mind, who either contributes by his purse or person to the support of his country," Jefferson does not just offer proof of the substance of white superiority, but warns of a confused mixture of humans and other animals that threatens to mentally and physically destroy the state.<sup>202</sup> Rush seeks the proper means to manage the disorder of blackness by substituting segregation for slavery, but disagrees with Jefferson on the permanence of lack: "Slaves are stupid, because they have no wills of their own."<sup>203</sup> Rush offered manumission and inclusion, but this promise was contingent on the ability of black men and women to literally lose their blackness, which seemed

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<sup>202</sup> Thomas Jefferson to M. Coray, October 31, 1823, in H.A. Washington (ed.), *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1859), 319.

<sup>203</sup> Cited in Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 448.

eminently reasonable to doctor/statesman/abolitionist enraptured with the perfectability of man on American soil.

McPherson and Rose do not possess the same quantity of writing composed by or about them as do these two heads of state, but I will read them within and against the same archive. McPherson, a manumitted slave who became a significant property holder in Richmond, Virginia at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was dismissed by Jefferson as a madman. But McPherson articulated a religious vision of the republic similar to Rush's, contained in an autobiography composed of documents by other pens. Moreover, when he was sent by the Richmond authorities to the asylum at Williamsburg, he was promptly released. But this same asylum was the scene of Rose's restraint, even though she was not allowed inside on account of her mixed character of person and property. Her story is contained within a short paragraph taken from the notes of Alexander Galt, the visiting physician to the asylum, called to attend by her master in search of a straightjacket. I attempt to read the scene that prompted this—Rose's embrace of her mistress—with various texts on reproduction, medicine, and sodomy, some by Rush and Jefferson, to think about the coerced heterosexuality of slavery.

In a defense of Jefferson as a political thinker of radical democracy, Michael Hardt urges readers not to “reverse the polarity” of US exceptionalism by focusing on his personal life and placing him under the sign of a coherent racism.<sup>204</sup> I agree with Hardt for the most part; I am not trying to accuse or excuse Jefferson, Rush,

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<sup>204</sup> Michael Hardt, “Jefferson and Democracy,” *American Quarterly* 59(1) March 2007

McPherson, and Rose, but to approach them as texts in connections with others to formulate a theory of slavery and mental difference as and at the “origin” of the US state, to think the preconditions of the analogy presented by Fitzhugh at the start of this chapter. Or, to put it another way, how American citizenship came be abstracted into a white manhood from the heterogeneity of nations, cultures, bodies, species, natures, and others that lived and died with different degrees of freedom.<sup>205</sup> I will use a number of Jefferson’s writings, both public and private, not because I am interested in uncovering whether his Presidency or plantation reflected his authentic feelings, but to trace the production of “race” in the practices of domination and observation at and between these two sites. But I do not find him or Rush helpful for thinking about a democracy after slavery; rather, I look to McPherson and Rose who trace the limits of representation and restraint instituted by these two heads of state to think about different possibilities of health and freedom. I end this chapter by examining a definition of health as resistance advanced by Fredrick Douglas—an articulation that is not without its exclusions, but which attempts to undue the suture of sanity and whiteness in US nationality.

### **Natural History as Counterinsurgency**

You will have seen an account of an attempt at insurrection in this state. I am looking with anxiety to see what will be it’s [sic] effect on our state. We are truly to be pitied.

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<sup>205</sup> I am taking this phrase of abstracted white manhood from Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

--Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush (September 23, 1800)<sup>206</sup>

I start with Thomas Jefferson because I am following James McCune Smith, one of the original genealogists of anti-black racism, who traced Jefferson's articulation of black inferiority through the work of Charles White and of J. A. Smith to McCune Smith's contemporaries Samuel Morton and Josiah Nott, as well as the "unpardonable plagiarism" of Alexis de Tocqueville.<sup>207</sup> In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson, "the constructor of splendid machinery, the framer of laws, the successful financier, the acute philosopher—the one master of all this, with a slave-whip in his hand," founded an understanding of "race," beginning with a movement from corporeal difference to mental lack.<sup>208</sup> Seeking to explicate "the real distinctions which nature has made," Jefferson starts with the skin, "that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race."<sup>209</sup> After discussing hair, figure, lung capacity, scent and "other physical distinctions proving a difference of race" that are presumably as immortal and static as countenance, Jefferson turns to affect and behavior. Slaves appear to need less sleep, for "a black... will be induced by the slightest amusements

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<sup>206</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, "Founders Online," <http://founders.archives.gov/> (accessed 5/25/14). Jefferson is referring to a foiled slave insurrection in 1800, known popularly as Gabriel's Rebellion.

<sup>207</sup> James McCune Smith, "On the Fourteenth Query of Thomas Jefferson's Notes on Virginia" in John Stauffer (ed.), *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 266.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 265.

<sup>209</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* in Merrill D. Peterson (ed) *Thomas Jefferson: Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1985), 264-5.

to sit up till midnight, or later, though knowing he must be out with the first dawn of the morning.” They are brave and adventurous, yet this comes from “a want of forethought.”<sup>210</sup> They are “more ardent after their female,” but their love is mere “eager desire” and not “a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation.” Likewise, “their griefs [sic] are transient...less felt, and sooner forgotten.” A few sentences earlier, in the discussion of forethought, Jefferson mentioned “the whites” and it is presumed that they are able to remember their feelings as well as properly combine them.<sup>211</sup>

Summarizing this anatomy of difference, and in a transition to his analysis of the faculties of the black mind, Jefferson explains, “in general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection.”<sup>212</sup> The terms come from Locke, designating the internal or external sources which form simple ideas, but he did not employ them to evaluate an entire person or people. Moreover, he did not withhold reflection from animals as Jefferson proceeds to, after first noting blacks’ “disposition to sleep” when they are not laboring or being amused: “An animal whose body is at rest, and who does not reflect, must be disposed to sleep of course.”<sup>213</sup> Given the vibrant discourses on the “animal economy” in humans and other animals occurring

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<sup>210</sup> According to Lucia Stanton, Jefferson’s favorite example of this was his slaves’ tendency to cast off their blankets with the advent of summer, often losing them and thus requiring new ones with the coming of winter. As Stanton contends, “no slave in the Upper South took blankets lightly, so it is possible that Monticello’s blanket-tossers may have counted on Jefferson’s willingness to replace their loss. It is even more likely that some of these apparently thoughtless slaves had discovered a way to acquire extra blankets for warmth or sale.” “*Those Who Labor for My Happiness: Slavery at Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 23.

<sup>211</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *NSV*, 265.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 265-6.

in Scotland, France and the United States at the time, this a remarkable reduction of black and animal existences as well as life in general.<sup>214</sup> Jefferson's previous observation of their negligible sleep requirements makes black vacuity appear here as human absurdity, as more empty than the animal-as-automaton. From this point Jefferson moves to an analysis of the faculties of the mind, specifically memory, reason and imagination. Postulated by Francis Bacon in his description of the mind, these three faculties were also used by Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon to tease out the differences between humans and other animals.<sup>215</sup> Jefferson finds that blacks "in memory they are equal to whites; in reason much inferior...in imagination they are dull, tasteless and anomalous."<sup>216</sup> His evidence here is primarily aesthetic: the recently-emancipated Phillis Wheatley is offered as the failure of art, without any analysis or citation of her work. Instead, he points to warped black affect: "Misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches in poetry.—Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry." It is possibly too transient to be translated as art. Similarly, "their love is ardent, but it kindles the senses only, not the imagination. Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whately [sic]; but it could not produce a

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<sup>214</sup> Jefferson might be drawing from the French vitalist tradition, which could frame the relationship between sensation and reflection more developmentally. See Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). For more on Locke's rational animals, see Colin Dayan, "Legal Terrors."

<sup>215</sup> Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Barr's Buffon: Buffon's Natural History: Vol. V*, (London: J.S. Barr, 1792). For Buffon, the difference is not based in the absence or presence of these functions, but in various forms of sensation and reflection.

<sup>216</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *NSV*, 266.

poet.”<sup>217</sup> Unable to achieve a tender delicate mixture of sensibility and sensation, Wheatley can only be written, can only recite.

Jefferson also deploys a racially and historically comparative analysis at this point in order to demonstrate that black physical and mental “inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life.” Attempting to avoid “apocryphal” tales, Jefferson states he will “not follow them to Africa” but will use his experiential authority to measure blacks “on the same stage with whites.” Even though they exist in a state of slavery, blacks “might have availed themselves of the conversation of their masters;” if not, then at the very least “all have lived in countries where the arts or sciences are cultivated to a considerable degree.” But “the Indians, with no advantages of this kind” have displayed a genius “which only wants for cultivation” and are capable of “the most sublime oratory.”<sup>218</sup> This latter phrase recalls an earlier moment in the text where Jefferson offers a speech by Logan of the Iroquois Confederacy as superior to “whole orations of Demosthenes and Cicero.”<sup>219</sup> But African slaves to do not compare favorably to those of ancient Rome, despite the benefits the former receive in American colonies/states. Roman slaves were regularly tortured for confessions; “here it has been thought better never to resort to their evidence.” Cato segregated his slaves by sex and charged the men to access the women; “in this country the slaves multiply as fast as the free inhabitants.” Roman

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid, 266-7. For an excellent discussion of how Jefferson uses African American’s supposed failure to access the sublime to disqualify them from citizenship, see Matthew Cordova Frankel, “‘Nature’s Nation’ Revisited: Citizenship and the Sublime in Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia” *American Literature* 73(4), Dec. 2001

<sup>218</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *NSV*, 266.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 188.

slaves became artists and scientists, “but they were of the race of whites. It is not their condition then, but nature, which has produced the distinction.”<sup>220</sup> Though Jefferson will not follow the race of blacks to Africa, he will try them in Rome.

Jefferson ends his argument with an epistemological denegation that produces a modern conception of race, in the sense that it is indeterminate as a difference within one species or between two and necessitates taxonomic/political division. Jefferson acknowledges with “great diffidence” that his empiricism is incomplete “where it is a faculty, not a substance we are examining; where it eludes the research of all the senses...where the effects of those which are present or absent bid defiance to calculation.”<sup>221</sup> Jefferson here partly defers final judgment on black inferiority until the play of presence and absence is halted, until “the subject may be submitted to the Anatomical knife, to the Optical glasses, to analysis by fire, or by solvents.”<sup>222</sup> While this violent verification of difference by the destruction of the black body is yet to be completed, Jefferson has laid the foundation in his metaphorical dissections, peeling back the black skin to reveal mental lack. That Jefferson has already secured the truth, that it only awaits full excavation and verification, can be seen in the following passage:

To our reproach it must be said, that though for a century and a half we have had under our eyes the races of black and of red men, they have never yet been viewed by us as subjects of natural history. I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 268.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 269-70.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 269.



distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.<sup>223</sup>

Jefferson begins by dissimulating the turbulent history of hybridity and bondage in the British colonies (in America and the Caribbean) that occurred between Eurasians, indigenous and First Nation peoples, and Africans/creoles, all with varying nationalities, embodiments, and degrees of freedom. Instead, Jefferson presents a continuous period of surveillance by an unmarked “us” hovering over two distinct races, eyes that do not require optical glasses.<sup>224</sup> Jefferson thus invokes natural history sardonically, a simple change of view from his vantage. This is demonstrated by the shift in the next sentence to the legal language of suspicion (and its connotations of guilt), replacing the philosophical and medical term “faculty” with the more commercial-sounding “endowment.”<sup>225</sup> This legal-commercial optic is then

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid, 270.

<sup>224</sup> The eyes of Virginia’s governors only became focused on African (not black) slaves for 80-90 of those 150-170 years. For most of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the colony’s English and Scottish planters primarily utilized Christian European indentured servants. Other forms of labor became possible and desirable in 1660s and 70s due to the increase in life expectancy, the international competition in tobacco production, and uprisings, the most well-known being Bacon’s rebellion, when European and African freemen and servants torched Jamestown and sought to drive the Pamunkey, Occaneechi and other tribes from the frontier. The number of African and American indigenous slaves in the colony increased towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but the latter were difficult to capture and keep, while the former were primarily sold to the West Indies by the Royal African Company during its monopolization of the transatlantic trade from 1663-1698. When Virginia became dependent on African slave labor at the turn of the century, local legislatures and planters sought to utilize non-slaveholding Europeans as a police force, strengthening and separating definitions of whiteness and blackness with freedom and servitude, as opposed to the formation of a mixed or mulatto class that occurred in many Caribbean colonies. See Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume II: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (London: Verso, 2012); Barbara Fields, “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America,” *New Left Review* 181, May/June 1990; Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975), and Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944).

<sup>225</sup> “Endowment” also contrasts sharply with “capacity,” which in my experience is the most frequent substitute for “faculty” in studies of the mind during this period. Capacity signifies ability, power while endowment has the connotation of a gift received from elsewhere.

made equivalent with natural history as Jefferson utilizes the rhetorical strategy of “B” in the opening debate, namely, discounting the source of difference to emphasize its overwhelming presence. It also recalls an earlier moment in the text, where Jefferson’s aim was skin and not yet global race difference: “whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin...whether it proceeds from the colour of the blood, the colour of the bile...the difference is fixed in nature and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us.” Here Jefferson adopts the language of medicine and natural science—Jefferson only uses the term negro a few times in the text—only to dismiss it in front of the fact of blackness. In regards to passage on racial distinction as a whole, Jefferson deflects debates on the nature of race and the itinerary of difference by emphasizing the presence of inferiority.<sup>226</sup>

Yet Jefferson continues to deflect this thought of origin in a manner that confuses and expands his deployment of race. Following the sentence in which he voices his suspicion, Jefferson writes, “It is not against experience to suppose, that different species of the same genus, or varieties of the same species, may possess different qualifications.” Drawing from Bruce Dain’s excellent analysis of this passage, these “sentences do not fit together,” as the two new distinctions destabilize the previous one.<sup>227</sup> Is a distinct race a different species or a variety within the same? Qualification in the sense of a condition, a limit or a quality? Although he had just

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>227</sup> Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002) 30.

bracketed the search for origins to present difference, Jefferson abruptly shifts to natural historical language to speculate (from a qualified experience) about the polygenesis/monogenesis debate.<sup>228</sup> Jefferson blends this tension between “confidence and equivocal disingenuousness” in the next sentence: “Will not a lover of natural history then, one who views the gradations in all races of animals with the eye of philosophy, excuse an effort to keep those in the department of man as distinct as nature has formed them?”<sup>229</sup> The confusion in this sentence—whether race signifies species or variety, whether it is the classification of humans or the humans themselves that require separation—is precisely Jefferson’s point. For 150 years, Jefferson and his compatriots have observed and enforced nature’s distinctions. The chain of being is the pre-existing order and the contemporary project of the United States; American slavery is philosophy made flesh. Yet it is also an effort to supplement nature that necessarily fails to secure its object, as Derrida discussed with Rousseau.<sup>230</sup> If racial difference is preformed and not the effect of condition, then why does its materialization require such an extensive effort at classification and governance and when will this be completed?

The request for absolution, while disingenuous (how could the lover of natural history not want its perfection?), indicates how Jefferson’s ordering of bodies and minds is an international project. The *Notes* are a response to a questionnaire from

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<sup>228</sup> Although he is not cited at this point, Jefferson was an avid reader of Henry Home, Lord Kames, who placed the separation of humans into different species at the fall of the tower of Babel, as opposed to the pre-Adamite theory of multiple creations. See David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 1993).

<sup>229</sup> Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind*, 31 and Jefferson, *NSV*, 270.

<sup>230</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974)

the French delegation in Philadelphia; the chapter that contains the majority of his thoughts on African slaves, Query XIV, is an attempt to answer, “The administration of justice and description of laws?” But its invocations of natural history as a contested, political activity harken back to the longest chapter of the text, Query VI, “A notice of the mines and other subterraneous riches; its trees, plants, fruits, etc.” Jefferson spends the majority of this space on animals, human and nonhuman, in a critique of the Comte de Buffon’s portrait of the American continents as wet, cold and subject to a “general contraction of animated Nature”—as degenerate compared to Europe.<sup>231</sup> A significant part of Buffon’s explanation for this difference, the weak state of the native inhabitants, contained an implicit invitation for settler colonialism. The “wandering savages...existed as creatures of no consideration in Nature, a kind of weak automatons, incapable of improving or seconding her intentions.”<sup>232</sup> They were too “scare” and had “neither stopped the torrents, nor directed the rivers, not drained the marshes.” Thus, “the earth remains in a frigid state, and is incapable of producing the active principles of Nature.”<sup>233</sup> Jefferson responds by accepting the role of a civilizing settler but objecting to this portrait of the colonial space as lack. Instead, he presents a strong and virile collection of nonhuman animals as well as indigenous people who may be eligible for inclusion within the European subdivision of the species.

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<sup>231</sup> Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Natural History, General and Particular: Third Edition, Vol V*. (London: Printed for A. Strahan and T. Cadell in the Strand, 1791), 130.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*, 135 and 136.”

Jefferson counters Buffon's reliance on travel narratives and "fables" with his experience, proper reason and native informants.<sup>234</sup> At a crucial point in his argument, following a series of tables comparing the weights of "quadrupeds" unique and common to North America and Europe, Jefferson includes the bones of the Mammoth as proof that life in North America has not contracted. Jefferson argues for the creature's continued existence on two grounds, the first being "the traditionary [sic] testimony of the Indians," but then states that this "would be adding the light of a taper to that of a meridian sun." This latter brilliance flows from his understanding of a stasis with allusions to the great chain of being: "such is the oeconomy of nature, that no instance can be produced of her having permitted any one race of her animals to become extinct; of her having formed any link in her great work so weak as to be broken."<sup>235</sup> Jefferson does not expand upon this philosophy, whether he is offering a view of a system in an equilibrium or noting a divinely enforced natural law.<sup>236</sup> Within the context of the chapter, it appears as a critique of Buffon's vision of nature as "a perpetually living work, a constantly active worker," with living "forces that balance one another, merge and oppose each other."<sup>237</sup> Jefferson's defense of American Indian virility follows the same lines: "he is neither more defective in ardor nor more impotent with his female, than the white reduced to the same diet and

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<sup>234</sup> Jefferson, *NSV*, 183.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>236</sup> For a more extensive analysis of this crucial moment in Jefferson's text, see Chiara Cillerai, "The Eloquence of Nature in Notes on the State of Virginia," *Early American Literature*, 41(1), 2006. For more on the indigenous subject as a "vanishing mediator" in this text as a whole, see Jonathan Elmer, "The Archive, the Native American and Jefferson's Convulsions," *Diacritics* 28(4), Winter 1988.

<sup>237</sup> Cited in Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster*, 14.

exercise.”<sup>238</sup> Jefferson offers counter examples to Buffon’s portrait of indigenous masculinity, such the ability the men to grow what Londa Scheibinger calls “that majestic beard,” or he articulates different explanations, linking an instance of “cowardice” to the “effect of subjugation and ill treatment.”<sup>239</sup> Although Jefferson does not explicitly invite indigenous men into the republic, there is a sense that this inclusion would correct their deficiencies. As Jefferson states in regards to the “unjust” treatment of women in Indian nations, “it is civilization alone which replaces women in the enjoyment of their natural equality.”<sup>240</sup> Similar to the conclusion of his section on black difference, Jefferson ends his assessment of the Indian of North America with the call for further study, as “more facts are wanting.” Yet he is confident “we shall probably find that they are formed in mind as well as body on the same module as ‘Homo sapiens Europaeus,’” the latter designation accompanied by a citation of Linnaeus.<sup>241</sup>

Jefferson’s clarity here is a stark contrast to his suspicions in Query XIV, where the disorder of the black body and mind is linked to a confusion of classification. Given his vacillation between reductive empiricism and totalizing speculations, it may seem that Jefferson simply could not follow the debates over systems of classification and their disruptions at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>242</sup> Yet it

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<sup>238</sup> Jefferson, *NSV*, 184.

<sup>239</sup> Londa Schiebinger, *Nature’s Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 120 and Jefferson, *NSV*, 185.

<sup>240</sup> Jefferson, *NSV*, 186-187.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*, 187.

<sup>242</sup> See Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997)

is also possible to read Jefferson's ambiguous statements on natural difference as a critique of Buffon's work on human variety. Jefferson's citation of Linnaeus during his defense of American indigenous peoples has the paradoxical effect of introducing a formal division between them and *Homo sapiens Europaeus*, even as he argues for a potential structural similarity. Buffon refused to make such distinctions, arguing external differences were merely superficial: "the skin, the hair, the features, and the size, have varied, but the internal form has not changed."<sup>243</sup> Buffon also did not offer a strict categorization of human subspecies based on color or geography in his "elaborately subdivided survey of humanity."<sup>244</sup> For instance, Buffon begins his description of Africa with the statement "there is as much variety in the race of blacks as in that of whites," then divides blacks into two principle races, Negroes and Caffres, and then speaks of further subdivisions based on location, physical characteristics and differences in manners and disposition.<sup>245</sup> Jefferson's citation of Linnaeus in this context appears as an attempt to return to more global divisions, manifested throughout his *Notes* as a monolithic trinity of red, white and black that consolidates the heterogeneities of bodies, natures and nations under his eyes.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Barr's Buffon: Buffon's Natural History: Vol. IX*, (London: J.S. Barr, 1797), 317.

<sup>244</sup> Harriet Ritvo, op. cited, 121.

<sup>245</sup> Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Barr's Buffon: Buffon's Natural History: Vol. IV*, (London: J.S. Barr, 1792), 276.

<sup>246</sup> In a letter written some 20 years after *NSV*, Jefferson identifies as a nominalist in regards to systematic classifications: "Classes, orders, genera, species are not of [Nature's] work. Her creation is of individuals." "Arbitrary lines" are needed for the "uniting of all nations under one language, in Natural history. This had been happily effected by Linnaeus, and can scarcely be hoped for a second time." Taxonomies are thus not eternal truths, but political necessities. Thomas Jefferson to John Manners, 22 Feb. 1814, National Archives and Records Administration, "Founders Online," <http://founders.archives.gov/> (accessed 5/25/14).

Jefferson also attempts to displace Buffon's primary evidence for the unity of the human species, "that the White, Laplander, and Negro, can unite and propagate the great family of human kind."<sup>247</sup> In Query XIV, in the sentence following his description of black skin as eternal monotony, Jefferson notes "their own judgment [is] in favour of the whites, declared by their preference in them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan for the black women over those of his own species."<sup>248</sup> As the subject of the previous sentences was the beauty of the "two races" as a whole, Jefferson is making the desire of black men and women equivalent to that of the male Oranootan, the early British term for the chimpanzee. The fantasy of interspecies mating was commonly figured as sexual assault and had a variety of meanings to European naturalists, from emphasizing the continuity between humans and apes to dehumanizing black women who supposedly tempted or welcomed the encounter. The potential for offspring from the interaction had yet to be conclusively determined.<sup>249</sup> Jefferson plays on this ambiguity as he makes the difference between white and black as uniform as the difference between species. He then proceeds to stress and confuse this distinction as well. As he continues, "the circumstances of superior beauty, is thought worthy attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs and other domestic animals; why not in that of man?"<sup>250</sup> Jefferson now blends unstable separations between race and species with those of human and nonhuman:

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<sup>247</sup> Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Barr's Buffon: Buffon's Natural History: Vol. IX*, (London: J.S. Barr, 1797), 316.

<sup>248</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *NSV*, 265.

<sup>249</sup> See Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 94-8.

<sup>250</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *NSV*, 265.



the black race ravishes the white as a different species, therefore man must be bred as a domestic animal. The juxtaposition of a violent desire with a beauty only possibly through the proper management of propagation makes breeding the primary discipline of domestication. An arrest of degeneration, slavery is aesthetic perfection.<sup>251</sup> Yet, as with Jefferson's other vision of the realization of philosophy and the chaining of being, the distinctions made by Nature and perfected by Anglo-American men threaten to collapse. In this schema, is the desire of whites for blacks also a species crossing violence? Is it the failure of human governance, an experience of a different sublime, legal or permissible sodomy? What would the aesthete, the naturalist, or the planter as breeder of natural history term the children of a slave and a master when that slave is also the stepsister of the master's wife?<sup>252</sup>

In defining the state of nature as a state of equality, John Locke argues there is "nothing more evident, than that Creatures of the same species and rank promiscuously born to all the same advantages of Nature, and the use of the same

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<sup>251</sup> There is perhaps another critique of Buffon in this passage, for the naturalist decried the "evils arising from slavery" in regards to the degeneration of humans and domesticated animals. *Barr's Buffon: Buffon's Natural History: Vol. IX*, (London: J.S. Barr, 1797), 322. Comparing European and North American quadrupeds, Jefferson supplies a table (IIIId) that ranks American domesticated animals as greater in weight than their European counter parts. Then he admits that "some of these, in some parts of America, have become less than their original stock." Yet he attributes this to the "poverty of the owner" who relies on "the spontaneous productions of the forest and waste fields." In contrast, the proper farmers "have imported good breeds from Europe, and have improved their size by care." Because these changes also occur in Europe, it is "against that rule of philosophy, which teaches us to ascribe like effect to like causes...[to] impute this diminution of size in America to any imbecility or want of uniformity in the operation of nature." It is the intelligence and the management of the American farmer that enforces the rules of philosophy and enhances natural beauty, but this is only possible when the fields and forests are ordered as a plantation. *NSV*, 180-1.

<sup>252</sup> Jefferson would eventually call them free, as opposed to the nearly 200 other slaves he owned at the time of his death. But he would give them this status in different fashions: his sons were formally emancipated in his will while his daughters were allowed to "run away," presumably because they could pass as white. See Lucia Stanton, *op. cit.*, 8 and 69. Benjamin Rush would term them all infected. See below.

faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without Subordination or Subjection.”<sup>253</sup> Jefferson implicitly cited this passage in the Declaration of Independence; in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he qualifies blacks for slavery by denying them full use of human faculties and questions their place as creatures.<sup>254</sup> But blacks were not only excluded from equality under the law, they had to be exiled from American soil, “removed beyond the reach of mixture.”<sup>255</sup> While Jefferson posited a stasis in regards to natural systems, he followed Buffon in government: “Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves are its only safe depositories. And to render even them safe their minds must be improved to a certain degree.”<sup>256</sup> This passage comes from the end of Query XIV, in a discussion of public education, yet it also incorporates Jefferson’s fears in the later Query XVIII. Here, in an attempt to explain “The particular customs and manners that may happen to be received in the state?” Jefferson delivers his strongest condemnation of the institution of slavery:

The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise in the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other...[slavery] transforms those into despots, and these into enemies, destroys the morals of the one part, the amor patriae of the other...I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever...<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 269.

<sup>254</sup> For a reading of *NSV* as an explication of the Declaration, see Alexander Boulton, “The American Paradox: Jeffersonian Equality and Raical Science,” *American Quarterly* 47 (1995).

<sup>255</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *NSV*, 270.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 288-9.

Jefferson offers a similar jeremiad at the outset of his discussion of black difference, where annihilation is not the result of divine intervention but the abolition of slavery: given “deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites [and] ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained,” emancipation without the deportation of the ex-slaves will “produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of one or the other race.”<sup>258</sup> The mammoth may not disappear, but a species or variety of humanity could in a racial apocalypse. Even though Jefferson believes grief is transient for the individual black man or woman, as a nation that has no love of country they are in a state of war with those who have enslaved them.<sup>259</sup>

Michael Hardt draws from Jefferson’s letters on the health of Shay’s Rebellion and on the necessity of violence in the French Revolution as proof of the statesman’s “affirmation of the primacy of resistance in opposition to the primacy of sovereignty” as well as the “right of the multitude [to] constantly exert is priority over government.”<sup>260</sup> He attempts to reconcile these statements with those in the previous paragraph by approaching Jefferson primarily as a political theorist whose work occasionally becomes “displaced onto a biological terrain.”<sup>261</sup> In relation to black men and women, “racial differences are so strongly present in his mind that they

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>259</sup> For more on this conception of black slaves as a captive nation in Jefferson’s work, see Peter S. Onuf, “‘To Declare Them a Free and Independent People’: Race, Slavery and National Identity in Jefferson’s Thought” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 18(1), Spring 1998.

<sup>260</sup> Michael Hardt, “Jefferson and Democracy,” 65.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid, 45.

seem to blind him to the common and cause him to lapse into the conviction that difference implies hierarchy and subordination.”<sup>262</sup>

I would argue that there is no separate “biological” terrain, for Jefferson’s theories of natural history and politics are distinct but occupy the same space—not the state of nature as political fiction but the plantation as practice of order and production.<sup>263</sup> I find it difficult to restrict Jefferson’s considerations of whiteness to the political without reference to nature, and thus make “race” synonymous with blackness, redness and biology. Jefferson’s writings on blackness are not a mistake or a distraction from his true philosophy, whether those writings appear in the context of natural history, plantation management or in an attempt to found a penal colony for insurgent slaves while President of the United States. The year Jefferson took office, Richmond, Virginia, barely escaped occupation by a multitude organized by slave artisans and mechanics and inspired by the Haitian and French revolutions.<sup>264</sup> In this case, he did not affirm resistance but sought to find a place beyond the reach of mixture to deport and confine the insurgents after the massive executions “could not but excite sensibility in the public mind.”<sup>265</sup> But he could not simply “produce lands beyond the limits of the US to form a receptacle for these people” because “it is impossible not to look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>263</sup> I am inspired here by Britt Marie Rusert, *Shackled in the Garden: Ecology and Race in American Plantation Cultures*, PhD Dissertation, Department of English, Duke University, 2009.

<sup>264</sup> See Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers, 1963) 101-2.

<sup>265</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Rufus King, July 13, 1802, in William B. Parker and Jonas Viles (eds.) *Letters and Addresses of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: the Unit Publishing Co., 1905), 146.

expand itself beyond those limits, & cover the whole Northern, if not Southern continent with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, & by similar law; nor can we contemplate, with satisfaction, either blot or mixture on that surface.”<sup>266</sup> Jefferson’s desire to clean the continent from the stain of blackness is not a eugenicist biologism, but its precondition.

### **Slavery as Pesthouse**

I am now preparing a paper for our Society in which I have Attempted to prove, that the black Color (as it is called) of the Negroes is the effect of a disease in the Skin of the Leprous kind. The inferences from it will be in favor of treating them with humanity, and justice, and of keeping up the existing prejudices against matrimonial connexions [sic] with them.

--Benjamin Rush to Thomas Jefferson (February 4, 1797)<sup>267</sup>

But where Jefferson fears judgment, Benjamin Rush experiences paradise. Finding himself transported one night to a remarkably scenic and cultivate country, Rush happens upon a religious ceremony. “This country, I found, was inhabited only by negroes” and his presence causes panic.<sup>268</sup> Yet a “venerable looking man” soon approaches and explains to Rush that this is the “*paradise of the negro slaves*” where they “enjoy an ample compensation in our present employments for all the miseries we endured on earth.” But the memory of that time lives on: “Our terror,” explains the man, “was entirely the sudden effect of habits which have not yet been eradicated

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<sup>266</sup> Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe , 24 November 1801, National Archives and Records Administration, “Founders Online,” <http://founders.archives.gov/> (accessed 5/25/14)

<sup>267</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, “Founders Online,” <http://founders.archives.gov/> (accessed 5/25/14). The “Society” Rush speaks of is the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia.

<sup>268</sup> Benjamin Rush, “Paradise of the Negro Slaves—A Dream,” in *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical: Second Edition* (Philadelphia: Printed by Thomas and William Bradford, 1806), 305.

from our minds.”<sup>269</sup> Then the man recognizes Rush, embraces him, leads him to the religious assembly and presents a procession of four ex-slaves. These four are only briefly described physically—an old man with “wool as white as snow,” a “decent looking woman”<sup>270</sup>—but are instead “individualized only by the atrocities committed upon them by their masters,” as Dana Nelson phrases it.<sup>271</sup> After telling stories of abuse and murder, the slaves ask Rush to convey their forgiveness to their former masters or deliver spiritual advice, such as “his wealth cannot make him happy.”<sup>272</sup> But the fourth woman’s narrative is interrupted by the appearance of “a little white man,” who is revealed to be the recently-deceased abolitionist Anthony Benezet.<sup>273</sup> As the entire assembly hurries to embrace him, Rush wakes up.

While this paradise is intended as a reward, with purgatory waived on account of the magnitude of suffering on earth, Rush’s separate country resembles Jefferson’s vision of successful emancipation. But here it is the ex-slaves that tremble with anxiety, a habit that will apparently stay with them until the final judgment. Rush also observes this terror in “An account of the DISEASES peculiar to the negroes in the West-Indies, and which are produced by slavery.”<sup>274</sup> Attempting to counter portraits of content slaves, Rush discusses “the singing and dancing, to which the negroes in the West-Indies are so much addicted” not as genuine happiness, but as

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 306.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid, 307 and 308.

<sup>271</sup> Dana Nelson, *National Manhood*, 180.

<sup>272</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical: Second Edition* (Philadelphia: Printed by Thomas and William Bradford, 1806), 308.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 309.

<sup>274</sup> In *American Museum*, 4(1), July 1788.

“mirth” connected with “grief.” These cultural productions are not simplistic expressions of base or religious desire, as Jefferson might argue, but “physical symptoms of MELANCHOLY OF MADNESS” and “certain proofs of their misery.”<sup>275</sup> Grief is eternal, not transient, and desire is impossible instead of animalistic; Rush sees disintegration and destruction where Jefferson experiences emptiness.<sup>276</sup>

But the white mind did not remain unaffected by the institution of slavery, as Rush also diagnoses “The Negro Mania,” a disease once spread throughout the nation but “now confined chiefly to the southern states.”<sup>277</sup> It consists of a mistaken belief that only black slaves, created by God for hard labor, can cultivate southern fields.

As Rush contends,

“It is true, if the owners of the soil in the Carolinas and Georgia, cultivated their lands with their own hands, they would not be able to roll in coaches, or to squander thousands of pounds yearly in visiting all the cities of Europe, but they would enjoy more health and happiness in a competency acquired without violating the laws of nature and religion.”<sup>278</sup>

Slavery is here marked as anti-nationalist, as limited to specific states and manifested in a European decadence. It thus resembles the other disorders described in “On the Different Species of Mania,” such as Liberty Mania, where “men expect liberty without law—government without power,” and Monarchical Mania, with madmen

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>276</sup> For more on figurations of black melancholia in abolitionist literature see Terri L. Snyder, “Suicide Slavery and Memory in North America” *The Journal of American History* 97(1), June 2010, 51-3. For a foundational (to my thinking) analysis of these celebrations as a staged “disavowal of the captives’ pain” see Sadiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 36.

<sup>277</sup> Benjamin Rush, “On the Different Species of Mania,” in Dagobert D. Runes (ed) *The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 212.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, 213.

“who hold it to be criminal to depose tyrants.”<sup>279</sup> The veracity of the Negro Mania diagnosis, however, is currently under review: Sari Altschuler reads this passage as clearly satirical and chides modern scholars, as well as the editor of *The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush* who placed the piece in a section entitled “On Natural and Medical Sciences,” for having “missed the joke.”<sup>280</sup> But when Betty Plummer refers to “negromania” as “a form of mental illness” in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, she cites a letter where Rush used the term and added in parenthesis “for certainly it is a species of madness.”<sup>281</sup> Moreover, in the explicitly medical text “An Account of the Influence of the Military and Political Events of the American Revolution upon the Human Body,” Rush linked the deaths of some British loyalists to a kind of hypochondriasis he termed *Revolutiana*. But a disease he named *Anarchia* was potentially more devastating, as it consisted of “the excess of the passion for liberty...which could not be removed by reason, nor restrained by government. For a while, [the afflicted] threatened to render abortive the goodness of heaven to the United States.”<sup>282</sup>

Whether this would have seemed a contradiction to Rush is debatable; for the “divine physician,” literature and the medical sciences were not mutually exclusive

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid, 213 and 214.

<sup>280</sup> Sari Altschuler, “From Blood Vessels to Global Networks of Exchange: the Physiology of Benjamin Rush’s Early Republic” *Journal of the Early Republic* 32(2), Summer 2012, 231.

<sup>281</sup> Betty L. Plummer, “Benjamin Rush and the Negro” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 127(6), Dec. 1970, 96.

<sup>282</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations: Vol. I, Third Edition* (London: Reprinted for C. Dilly, in the Poultry, 1794), 226-7.



and disease was not restricted to individual minds and bodies.<sup>283</sup> Where Jefferson presents the body and the mind as segmented, stable and transparent, with intelligence separable from imagination and internal differences reflected on the surface, Rush drew from emerging theories of the nerves as a network of sensation. Sympathy as a physiological mechanism, the connection and organization of bodily organs in the nervous system, was in a metonymic, not metaphoric, relationship with sympathy as a rhetorical effect that united citizens in a republic.<sup>284</sup> Nations depended upon healthy citizens, whose bodies were not divided between immaterial souls and physical matter, but existed as collections of internal and external sensations. Governments could integrate or disorder these sensations, and it was Rush's belief that the new republic was uniquely able to do so in a manner that realized Christianity. With the overthrow of the tyrannical regime and the reinvention of institutions,

it is possible to produce such a change in [man's] moral character, as shall raise him to a resemblance of angels—nay more, to the likeness of God himself...Hitherto the cultivation of the moral faculty has been the business of parents, schoolmasters and divines. But...this principle should be equally the business of the legislator—the natural philosopher—and the physician.<sup>285</sup>

This citation comes a 1786 presentation to the American Philosophical Society entitled “An Inquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty,” which has been alternatively referred to as a precursor to phrenology, the discovery of personality disorders, the birth of American psychiatry and the foundation of

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<sup>283</sup> Rush was termed the “divine physician” mockingly by an artisan audience member of one of his talks. Cited in Sarah Knot, *Sensibility and the American Revolution*, 208.

<sup>284</sup> The metaphoric/metonymic analysis is from Sari Althschuler, op cited, 215.

<sup>285</sup> Benjamin Rush, *An Inquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty* (Philadelphia: Haswell, Barrington and Haswell, 1889), 24-25.

psychiatry proper.<sup>286</sup> Rush has also been placed at the origin of the prison, public education, the modernization of the American army, the temperance movement, and other institutions constitutive of the governance of the United States.<sup>287</sup>

But his work on slavery was inconsistent, it existed in tension with his project for the physical and moral perfection of the American citizenry. Rush alternates between condemnations of and justifications for slavery, struggling with a program of emancipation before advocating for the segregation of blackness as part of its cure. While he counters Jefferson's vision of immutable inferiority, Rush advocates a complementary form of control, where sympathy becomes separation.<sup>288</sup>

Following his colleague and friend Samuel Stanhope Smith, Rush counters definitions of black inferiority based in species difference by emphasizing the interplay of physical existence, the state of society and the malleability of affect; however, his portrait of lack in Africa, vice in slavery and difficulty in manumission conforms in effect with Jeffersonian racial stratification.<sup>289</sup> Against an author who places Africans "below the ordinary rank of human Creatures," Rush argues that the

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<sup>286</sup> See Eric T. Carlson and Meribeth M. Simpson, "Benjamin Rush's Medical Use of the Moral Faculty," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 39, Jan. 1 1965 and Thomas Szasz, *The Manufacture of Madness* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1970).

<sup>287</sup> See Eric T. Carlson, M.D., "Benjamin Rush on Revolutionary War Hygiene," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 55(7), July-August 1979; Donald J. D'Elia, "Benjamin Rush, David Hartley, and the Revolutionary Uses of Psychology," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 11(2), Apr. 13 1970; Robert R. Sullivan, "The Birth of the Prison: the Case of Benjamin Rush," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 31(3), 1998; and Colleen E. Terrell, "'Republican Machines': Franklin, Rush and the Manufacture of Civic Virtue in the Early Republic," *Early American Studies* 1(2), Fall 2003.

<sup>288</sup> I take this last phrase from Jason Frank's excellent piece, "Sympathy and Separation: Benjamin Rush and the Contagious Public," *Modern Intellectual History*, 6(1), April 2009.

<sup>289</sup> Samuel Stanhope Smith, *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species: Second Edition* (New-Brunswick: Published by J. Simpson and Co. and Williams and Whiting, New-York, 1810).

“Heat of the Climate in Africa, by bringing on Indolence of Mind, and Body, exposes [the Negroes] at all Times to Slavery, while the Fertility of the Soil renders the Want of Liberty a less Evil to them.”<sup>290</sup> Climate and the vastness of the continent also prevent the formation of a “State of Society,” which explains African “Insensibility to the Ties of Nature, Friendship, and Gratitude.”<sup>291</sup> Rush also contends that the “state of slavery in America” is “so foreign to the human mind, that the moral faculties, as well as those of the understanding are debased, and rendered torpid by it. All the vices which are charged upon the Negroes in the southern colonies... Idleness, Treachery, Theft, and the like, are the genuine offspring of slavery.”<sup>292</sup> This latter statement appears as a critique of slavery as a civilizing instrument, but Rush effectively posits an unbroken continuity of debasement for the African slave in the Americas. Moreover, it continues after the abolition of slavery, as Rush argues that those “men used to slavery... are ever afterwards unfit for Liberty.”<sup>293</sup> Instead of a total emancipation Rush seeks a generational manumission, where young slaves of an unspecified age are “educated in the principles of virtue and religion... taught to read, and write—and afterwards instructed in some business” and then liberated after an unspecified amount of time.<sup>294</sup> As for those who have “acquired all the low vices of

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<sup>290</sup> Benjamin Rush, *A Vindication of the Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements, on the Slavery of the Negroes: Second Edition* (Philadelphia: Printed and Sold by John Dunlap, 1773), 24 and 26.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>292</sup> Benjamin Rush, *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements, on the Slavery of the Negroes: Second Edition* (Philadelphia: Printed and Sold by John Dunlap, 1773), 2.

<sup>293</sup> Benjamin Rush, *A Vindication of the Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements, on the Slavery of the Negroes: Second Edition* (Philadelphia: Printed and Sold by John Dunlap, 1773), 10.

<sup>294</sup> Benjamin Rush, *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements, on the Slavery of the Negroes: Second Edition* (Philadelphia: Printed and Sold by John Dunlap, 1773), 20.

slavery...[it is] for the good of society, that they should continue the property of those...from whom they contracted those vices.”<sup>295</sup>

While Rush believes that he can recreate man in the image of God, he fears the effects that a liberated slave could have on the state of society. Furthermore, though he condemns those who produce vice in their property, Rush diagnoses slave-owners primarily in terms of error not moral degeneration. In contrast to Jefferson’s unleashed passions, and Rush’s own discussions of European tyranny’s pathogenic properties, the Negro Mania that only affects slaveholders in the South is primarily a mistake. They appear similar to “persons equally sane upon all subjects except one,” as opposed to those in “phrensy...[with] the mind being *constantly* in a state of alienation and derangement.”<sup>296</sup> Also in contrast to Jefferson, Rush did not believe that American indigenous people could become part of the republic and “that in a few centuries they will probably be entirely extirpated.”<sup>297</sup> Rush feared the tendency of “the philosophers of Europe to celebrate the virtues of the savages of America,” for it could “depreciate the advantages of civilization” and Christianity in “the minds of weak people.”<sup>298</sup> In correction, Rush presented a list of Indian vices that reads as the inversion his ideal citizen: unclean, idle, gluttonous, cruel, “their women perform all their work,” etc.<sup>299</sup> Rush did appreciate certain aspects of Indigenous life and

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid, 19-20.

<sup>296</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Sixteen Introductory Lectures, to Courses of Lectures upon the Institutes and Practice of Medicine* (Philadelphia: Published by Bradford and Innskeep, 1811), 371 and 366.

<sup>297</sup> Benjamin Rush, “Medicine Among the Indians of North America,” in Dagobert D. Runes (ed), *The Selected Writings...*, 280.

<sup>298</sup> Benjamin Rush, “An Account of the Vices Peculiar to the Indians of North America,” *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical: Second Edition*, 256.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, 258.

medicine (such as an absence of certain forms of madness, which I referenced in regards to Foucault in my previous chapter), but he regretted that “even the influence of CHRISTIAN principles has not been able to put a stop to the mortality” that dooms them, which he primarily attributed to the “mischief of spirituous liquors” as well as a “too sudden” adoption of “the European diet, dress and manners.”<sup>300</sup> African enslavement, in contrast, preserved life in debasement, and through a transition, if gradual and not threatening the stability of society, the enslaved may be allowed into the republic.

After a number of articles and presentations on slavery, Rush finalized his emancipation program in a 1797 paper, “Observations Intended to Favour a Supposition that the Black Color (As It Is Called) of the Negroes Is Derived from the Leprosy,” a text which was not widely cited until its contemporary resignification as a hyper-transparent, and laughably failed, pathologization of racial difference.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Benjamin Rush, “Medicine Among the Indians of North America,” in Dagobert D. Runes (ed), *The Selected Writings...*, 280.

<sup>301</sup> Thomas Szasz ended his influential chapter on Rush with an examination of the article, which he terms an “Orwellian parody of medicine.” *The Manufacture of Madness*, 158. Winthrop Jordan noted, “Rush seemed totally unaware of the irony involved in transforming Negroes into lepers” in text arguing for their inclusion. *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 519. Dana Nelson offers a pithy summation of the text: “For Rush, difference is the disease.” *National Manhood*, 57. Yet Rush is not simply applying a stable disease label on an unmarked body, just as Jefferson’s confusion of species in definition of citizenship is not reducible to rationalist or biological innatism. As mentioned above, “animal life” and the body were a dynamic system in a metonymic relation with the body politic; disease came from imbalance, licentiousness and withdrawal. In tracing blackness to leprosy and the promise of a cure, Rush sought to not only prove that “the whole human race [is] descended from one pair” but “remove a material obstacle to the exercise of that benevolence,” as he says at the essay’s conclusion. “Observations Intended to Favour a Supposition that the Black Color (As It Is Called) of the Negroes Is Derived from the Leprosy,” *Transactions from the American Philosophical Society*, 4, 1799, 297. Rush’s project of altering skin tone did not spring sui genesis out of his racial fantasies, but emerged out late 18<sup>th</sup> century displays of monstrous mixtures with “partially albinic Africans, known as ‘pied blacks’...among the most common human components of such assemblages.” Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid*, 135. Henry Moss, who Rush met and mentions in the essay, was well

Rush's target here is not simply color "as it is called" but blackness itself. Leprosy is not one of the "local diseases of the skin" but a disorder with a depth and duration that surpasses "madness, and consumption."<sup>302</sup> It is associated with changes in skin color, but also enlarged lips, flattened noses and "woolly heads."<sup>303</sup> Leprosy "includes a morbid insensibility in the nerves," which is akin to blacks' ability to "bear surgical operations much better than white people...nor does any mental disturbance ever keep them awake."<sup>304</sup> Lepers have "strong venereal desires;" Negroes' desire is so uniform that "even slavery in its worst state does not always subdue the venereal appetite."<sup>305</sup> Rush intimates that this desire may reawaken and transmit its supposedly dormant source as he briefly discusses two white women, one from North Carolina and the other in Pennsylvania, who acquired some of the "color and features" of their black spouses. "In both these cases," Rush concludes, "the women bore children by their black husbands."<sup>306</sup> Black men literally infect white women, and their children keep the condition alive.

As he ends the essay, Rush believes he has revealed "all the claims of superiority of the whites over the blacks...[to be] founded alike in ignorance and

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known throughout the republic for such a condition, and was able to leverage this fame to gain enough money to purchase his freedom. See William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America, 1815-59* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 5-6. But Rush's essay is still hysterical.

<sup>302</sup> Benjamin Rush, "Observations Intended to Favour a Supposition that the Black Color (As It Is Called) of the Negroes Is Derived from the Leprosy," *Transactions from the American Philosophical Society*, 4, 1799, 297, 294.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 292. Here Rush is citing Benjamin Moseley's *Treatise upon Tropical Diseases, on Military Operations: and on the Climate of the West Indies*.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

inhumanity.” But the truth of blackness “should teach white people the necessity of keeping up that prejudice against such connections with them, as would tend to infect posterity with any portion of the disorder.”<sup>307</sup> Rush follows Jefferson in a call for the government of reproduction, not as the taming of cross-species desire in service of beauty but as quarantine. Black countenance may not be eternal, but it is contagious. Yet a future cure for blackness will fulfill one of the fundamental rights of humanity, as it can both “produce a large portion of happiness in the world” by removing a justification for the enslavement of black men and women as well as adding “greatly to *their* happiness” as “there are many proofs of their preferring [the color] of the white people.”<sup>308</sup> Until that day, black subjects may sleep soundly, untroubled by reflection or other mental disturbances—unless they are sharing their beds with the uninfected.

### **Justice at the End of the Republic**

In early 1812, John Adams wrote to Thomas Jefferson concerned about “Prophecies” which were “unphilosophical and inconsistent with the political Safety of States and Nations.” Adams had recently come into possession of two books, one by Nimrod Hughes and another by Christopher McPherson, which foretold of the death of one-third of humanity in the coming of the Millennium later that year. This disturbed Adams greatly: “I Should apprehend that two Such Mulattoes might raise

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid, 295.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid, 297.

the Devil among the Negroes.”<sup>309</sup> In his response, Jefferson wrote he did not know Hughes, a white Virginian who published a mathematical proof of the date of the Second Coming, but he had known McPherson for 20 years:

He is a man of color, brought up as a bookkeeper by a merchant, his master, & afterwards enfranchised. He had understanding enough to post up his ledger from his journal, but not enough to bear up against Hypochondriac affections and the gloomy forebodings they inspire. He became crazy, foggy, his head always in the clouds... Macperhson [sic] was too honest to be molested by any body, & too inoffensive to be a subject for the Mad-house; altho', I believe, we are told in the old Book that 'every man that is mad, & maketh himself a prophet, thou shouldest put him in prison & in the stocks.'<sup>310</sup>

Like David Hume's parrot, Jefferson believed McPherson was intelligent enough to transcribe notations between two different sources, but his insanity revealed the inherently fragile state of his mind.<sup>311</sup> Jefferson does not mention that McPherson had worked as a clerk for Congress, was a significant property owner in Richmond and founded a night school for freemen and slaves. Jefferson was also wrong on a number of other points: McPherson was molested, put in jail and sent to asylum at Williamsburg in 1811. In that year he also wrote his memoirs, *A Short History of the*

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<sup>309</sup> John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 10 February 1812, National Archives and Records Administration, "Founders Online," <http://founders.archives.gov/> (accessed 5/25/14). Adams also asked and worried about Tenskwatawa, "Prophet of the Wabash." In his response, Jefferson gave a brief description of Tenskwatawa's rejection of "the ways of the Whites" and the eventual "hostilities," when the US army killed as many as 50 of his followers in an unprovoked attack otherwise known as the Battle of Tippecanoe. "I suppose his views were then changed," Jefferson concludes. Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 20 April 1812, National Archives and Records Administration, "Founders Online," <http://founders.archives.gov/> (accessed 5/25/14).

<sup>310</sup> Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 20 April 1812, National Archives and Records Administration, "Founders Online," <http://founders.archives.gov/> (accessed 5/25/14).

<sup>311</sup> "In JAMAICA indeed they talk of one negroe [sic] as a man of parts and learning; but 'tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly." David Hume, cited in Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black*, 253. Benjamin Rush discusses hypochondria as a mental distress which could consist of a partial derangement on one or many subjects. Melancholia is a subset of the condition. He does not conceive of the disorder in terms of strength or weakness of the intellect or will as Jefferson appears to. See *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind*, 72-96.



*Life of Christopher McPherson, Alias Pherson, Son of Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords: Containing a Collection of Certificates, Letters, &c.*, a copy of which he sent to Adams along with Hughes' text.<sup>312</sup>

As Alex Bontemps has discussed, contemporary scholars have read McPherson as an expression of various social forces: conflicting racial roles, social mobility and class stratification, “as a champion of his people brought down by racism,” and as “a free black version of [Nat] Turner.”<sup>313</sup> In my brief overview of his text, I wish to highlight how it articulates a struggle over color, property and madness with a vision of justice that fulfills and exceeds the present state. The autobiographical “Short History of the Author’s Life” consists of only 10 of the text’s 26 pages, with the rest composed of certificates, timelines, endorsements, and letters written by McPherson, his former employers and associates, and other officials. In the autobiographical section, McPherson clearly indicates when and why each was written or collected, presenting the entire work as a comprehensive archive, as opposed to the foggy ramblings by a man with his head in the clouds.<sup>314</sup> But the work is not simply a “posting up” of events and documents, as McPherson divides a full

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<sup>312</sup> Christopher McPherson, *A Short History of the Life of Christopher McPherson, Alias Pherson, Son of Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords: Containing a Collection of Certificates, Letters, &c.: Second Edition* (Lynchwood: Published by Christopher McPherson Smith, 1855). I am using an electronic transcription from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, “Documenting the American South,” <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/mcpherson/menu.html> (accessed 5/25/14).

<sup>313</sup> Alex Bontemps, *The Punished Self: Surviving Slavery in the Colonial South* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 157 and 160.

<sup>314</sup> This has enabled historians to easily confirm most of the incidents McPherson describes. Yet certain events and figures, like his wife and children, are effaced; for instance, his will contained a provision for the purchase and emancipation of two children by different enslaved women, who were unmentioned in his publication. See Edmund Berkeley Jr., “Prophet Without Honor: Christopher McPherson, Free Person of Color” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 77(2), April 1969.

explication of his religious visions and predictions across his autobiography and different letters written years apart. McPherson references various spiritual events in his memoirs but only describes the content of his visions half way through the text in a letter with no recipient. He defers a disclosure of the date of the Second Coming until letters to heads of state located at the close the volume. The text appears not as a transparent archive or jeremiad, but as document of spiritual, political, and literary disjunctures.

McPherson moves through his early life quickly, taking only one page to describe his servitude under the wealthy tobacco merchant and investor David Ross, his employment as a clerk for the American army during the revolutionary war, his emancipation in 1792, his first vision and the revelation that “these United States were the new Zion,” his move to Philadelphia and work as a Congressional clerk, as well as his return to Virginia and marriage to “a lady of my own color” whose name is never given.<sup>315</sup> He does not mention that, upon returning to Richmond and working as a clerk in the office of the Virginia High Court of the Chancery, he “purchased a number of lots in Henrico County near the city in an area that was later to become quite popular,” making him wealthy and able to purchase several residences, a farm and a portion of a ship.<sup>316</sup> McPherson focuses instead on his struggles with city authorities and his failed petitions for a new black cemetery, for an exception to a

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<sup>315</sup> Christopher McPherson, *A Short History...*, 5.

<sup>316</sup> Edmund Berkeley Jr., “Prophet Without Honor”, 185.

new law “restricting free people of color from using hired carriages,” and for the return of a letter in which he detailed his Millennial predictions.<sup>317</sup>

In March of 1811, McPherson took out a series of advertisements for a “Night school...for male adults of color...and with the consent of their owners, Slaves.”

Intended for the “wide expansion of light and knowledge among this class of people founded upon the pure principles of Morality and Religion,” the advertisements were promptly suppressed and McPherson was brought before the court as a “nuisance.”<sup>318</sup>

As McPherson describes,

This transaction brought fresh to mind, the many foils experienced since the year 1800, in the repeated attempts I had made to obtain justice; and although ‘man is man, and all the sex are one;’ yet I consider that under existing circumstances, in the State of Virginia, a man of colour at *present*, had but a slender chance of success, in going to law with weighty officers of the land.<sup>319</sup>

To protest, McPherson began walking the streets “bareheaded” in a “conspicuous” manner, hoping to draw the attention of passersby and provide an opportunity to explain his complaints.<sup>320</sup> Instead, he was arrested on May 23<sup>rd</sup> while running errands in Richmond, spent three weeks in jail before being deemed a lunatic and sent to the asylum at Williamsburg. During this time, “my estate was put into the hands of others—my notes were protested at bank...my property seized by the sherrifs [sic] for

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<sup>317</sup> Christopher McPherson, *A Short History...*, 6. The colored burial ground in Richmond at that time was also used for white criminals and was subject to flooding by the James River. See Edmund Berkeley Jr., *op. cited*.

<sup>318</sup> Cited in Edmund Berkeley Jr, “Prophet Without Honor,” 187.

<sup>319</sup> Christopher McPherson, *A Short History...*, 7.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid*.

pretended claims, and sold for less than half cost—my workmen in the country left their work—my family [was] thrown into confusion, poverty and distress.”<sup>321</sup>

During his weeks in jail, McPherson composed a series of twelve letters addressed to various world leaders, such as Napoleon, King George III, and President James Madison (the latter of whom McPherson had met in 1800 when delivering a packet of letters and books for Thomas Jefferson),<sup>322</sup> announcing the coming of God’s “impartial justice” and commanding the foreign leaders to end all wars, withdraw from their overseas colonies and form a constitution on the model of the US.<sup>323</sup> On June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1811, McPherson arrived at the Public Hospital for Persons of Insane and Disordered Minds. As I will discuss below, the Williamsburg asylum accepted free black inmates since its opening in 1773, but in very small number (no more than 2-3 every other year until 1840).<sup>324</sup> In judging a prospective inmate, a Court of Directors would assess the warrants for insanity written by local officials to determine if the subject was insane, then evaluate whether the subject was a danger to society as well as the possibilities of cure. It was an explicitly legal process; the asylum’s visiting

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>322</sup> See Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 4 April 1800, and Christopher McPherson to James Madison, 13 April 1800, National Archives and Records Administration, “Founders Online,” <http://founders.archives.gov/> (accessed 5/25/14)

<sup>323</sup> Christopher McPherson, *A Short History...*, 38. . As opposed to the insurgent theology of Denmark Vesey and David Walker, McPherson does not explicitly reference slavery, although he might be following Locke in defining the latter as the preservation of a state of war. Nor does the massive death toll created by the Second Coming—“one-third of mankind”—appear focused on any specific nation or color (Ibid). The prophecy that so frightened Adams actually resembles Benjamin Rush’s vision of America as Utopia, but made universal. See Douglas R. Egerton, ““Why They Did Not Preach up This Thing:’ Denmark Vesey and Revolutionary Theology” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 100(5), Oct. 1999.

<sup>324</sup> I am taking the figures from Todd L. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: the Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 259.

physician was not present.<sup>325</sup> According to the document enclosed in his text, McPherson “was brought before the court, and examined, and the court being of opinion, as well from his examination before them, as from the depositions taken and returned, that he ought not to be confined in the said hospital.” Attached is a note explaining that the “foregoing is a true copy of the original papers, in the case of Christopher McPherson, sent to the hospital, upon a supposition that he is a person of unsound mind” and signed by the clerk of the Court.<sup>326</sup>

McPherson ends his memoir with a list of lawsuits he had or would soon initiate against the master of the police, the doctor who initially declared him insane, and “every magistrate of the city of Richmond, who sat on the bench on my trial, as to the charge of lunacy.” He had faith in his vindication, for the juries to recognize “the true, real-established, and declared representative of Christ Jesus the Lord of Glory, in the actual stead of himself, petitioning them for justice—who wants nothing more from them than pure and impartial justice, and justice only.”<sup>327</sup> The records for these lawsuits have not been found; instead, the courts document the sale of his remaining properties.<sup>328</sup> McPherson was an impossible citizen, or rather a person made untenable by the removal of his property, the loss of his family, and a denial of his sanity—a mental death denied by the asylum but used as a condition for his

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<sup>325</sup> Shomer S. Zwelling, *Quest for a Cure: The Public Hospital in Williamsburg, Virginia, 1773-1885* (Williamsburg: the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1985), 10-1.

<sup>326</sup> Christopher McPherson, *A Short History...*, 24. They are signed by the Clerk of the Court of Directors.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>328</sup> Edmund Berkeley Jr., “Prophet Without Honor,” 189. McPherson died in New York in 1817. His wife died a year before him. The text appears to have been republished by a relation named Christopher McPherson Smith.

disenfranchisement by the Richmond authorities. To reverse some of Jefferson's description, he was too honest for the asylum, but too offensive to be recognized as a subject of representation. He was at the foundation of the republic and could not experience its justice in the present as a man of color, but had faith in its return.

### **The Labor of Straitjackets**

In a footnote, Benjamin Rush presents an exception to the lack of affective ties produced by Africa's climate and state of society: "Two Negro Men a few Years ago in the Island of St. Croix were observed to be much affected upon being sold apart. Their Masters lived at a Distance from each other. They both ran away at once, and after being absent two Weeks, were found in a lonely place, hanging dead in each others Arms, on the Limb of a Tree." There is no discussion of the men's desire for one another; the footnote is attached as proof to the sentence "The Natives of Angola generally seek to destroy themselves."<sup>329</sup> These two enslaved men occupy a conflicting place in Rush's text: they are an exception to a rule and the example of another. They reveal the possibility of African affection as well as its perverse end. They are assumed to be natives of Angola who die in St. Croix; they are not American.

American revolutionaries responded to critiques of their hypocrisy, such as Samuel Johnson's famous question "How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?" with an attempt to distinguish themselves from the supposedly crueler West Indian masters. Under the temperate governance of the

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<sup>329</sup> Benjamin Rush, *A Vindication of the Address...* 29.

United States, enslaved men and women “populate as fast as the whites do, and are rather more healthy,” a Baptist minister observed in Virginia.<sup>330</sup> In contrast, the death rates of slaves in West Indian colonies were upheld as proof that their masters believed “it was much cheaper to work slaves to death and buy replacements from Africa than to ‘breed’ a new generation from infancy.”<sup>331</sup> Yet some the planters in the Chesapeake and Carolina lowcountry appear to cite the West Indian discourse on slave health and sexuality found in physician and planter manuals, travel narratives and laws.<sup>332</sup> I am thinking specifically of Thomas Jefferson’s concern that his “overseers do not permit the women to devote as much time as necessary to the care of their children: that they view labor as the 1st object and the raising of their child but as secondary.” In contrast, Jefferson understands “the labor of a breeding woman as no object, and that a child raised every 2 years is of more profit than the crop of the best laboring man. In this, as in all other cases, providence has made our interests & our duties coincide perfectly...it is not their labor, but their increase which is the first consideration with us.”<sup>333</sup>

Jefferson is articulating a different kind of breeding than the aesthetic production of race described above, as his focus shifts momentarily from the partners

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<sup>330</sup> Cited in Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 85. For more on the displacement of slavery’s cruelty onto the Caribbean see F. Nwabueze Okoye, “Chattel Slavery as the Nightmare of the American Revolutionaries” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 37(1) Jan. 1980, 6.

<sup>331</sup> David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 116.

<sup>332</sup> For an excellent overview of this discourse see Britt Marie Rusert, *Shackled in the Garden: Ecology and Race in American Plantation Cultures*, PhD Dissertation, Department of English, Duke University, 2009,

<sup>333</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Joel Yancey, 17 January 1819, National Archives and Records Administration, “Founders Online,” <http://founders.archives.gov/> (accessed 5/25/14)

of enslaved women to the increase of his property. But even though the central metaphor has shifted from domestic animals to crops, the plantation remains as the foundation for controlling reproduction and/as maximizing production. Enslaved women's nonreproductive labor was an object, despite Jefferson's disavowal. Women were the central workforce on Jefferson's plantation, and most others in the Chesapeake; and his contracts with overseers explicitly prohibited them from keeping a "woman out of the crop for waiting on them."<sup>334</sup> Moreover, the desires of both enslaved men and women similarly strained the master's identity of interest and duty, as "nobody feels more strongly...the desire to make all practical sacrifices to keep man and wife together who have imprudently married out of their respective families" than Thomas Jefferson. Although the financial sacrifices are his, the fault lies in the imprudence of slaves who form affective attachments "abroad," outside of his plantation. Thus, in a letter to an overseer, he expressed a complementary feeling: "There is nothing I desire so much as that all the young people in the estate should intermarry with one another and stay home. They are worth a great deal more in that case than when they have husbands and wives abroad."<sup>335</sup> Interest and duty need to be enforced through the surveillance and coercion of slave affect and sexuality; in order to be accumulated as capital, enslaved men and women have to be restricted within the material, economic and affective grounds of the plantation. This is not disciplinary process that targets enslaved men and women in the same way; neither

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<sup>334</sup> Cited in Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 196.

<sup>335</sup> Cited in Lucia Stanton, *Those Who Labor...* 5.



does it appear biopolitical, as the “right of seizure: of things, time, bodies and ultimately life itself” is the right of the master.<sup>336</sup> And this seizure is not the master’s right alone; it can also be a profession.

The following case comes from a collection of the work Dr. Alexander Galt, the visiting physician to the Williamsburg asylum from 1800-41, published by his son, John M. Galt II. It comes from case notes probably not intended for circulation, despite their mobilization by a young medical professional who had recently become the superintendent of that asylum. The Public Hospital for Persons of Insane and Disordered Minds was the first public mental institution in the American colonies, founded at the behest of Governor Francis Fauquier, who believed that “every civilized Country has an Hospital for these People...to endeavour to restore them their lost reason.”<sup>337</sup> Located between the College of William and Mary and the state capital building, the hospital described by Jefferson as a “rude, misshapen pile” of bricks opened its doors in 1773.<sup>338</sup> Between its founding and the date of the case below, 1819, the asylum treated 161 inmates, 5 of whom were free black men and women. Free black inmates were accepted into the hospital for the same reason slaves were denied: it was founded for “persons.”<sup>339</sup> But in the following case,

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<sup>336</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 136.

<sup>337</sup> Cited in Norman Dain, *Disordered Minds: The First Century of Eastern State Hospital in Williamsburg, Virginia 1766-1866* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1971), 7.

<sup>338</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *NSV* 278.

<sup>339</sup> Norman Dain, *Disordered Minds* 19. I am getting the numbers from Todd L. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: the Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 259. Christopher McPherson is not counted here because he was never admitted.

Alexander Galt is called to attend to a frenzied slave named Rose by a master in search of the means to keep her from embracing his wife.

Galt begins by noting “Rose, a servant, æt. 43” and then summarizes the general case: “a state of phrenzy” followed by “the most violent convulsions.” The narrative begins, “She ran into the house, and embraced her mistress most tenderly, and talked in a very wild strain. The master supposed she was deranged, and ran to the Lunatic Hospital for a strait-jacket, with which he immediately invested her.” But the “convulsions were so violent that the strait-waistcoat could not confine her. She screamed aloud when they came on; and tossed her body side to side.” Galt indicates his presence at this point—I assume he was summoned when the master procured the means of restraint—by advising veneration, “but no one would venture to approach.” A possible explanation for the disorder arises: “The owners supposed that poison had been given to her. She had been anxious to have for a husband a young blasksmith [sic] in the neighborhood, to whom the master and mistress had denied admission to the yard.” As a result of “this refusal,” Rose “ran off, and staid till night before last,” but no date is given for her initial departure. Galt then administers the typical number of cathartics and purgatives and returns the next day to examine the passage and the state of the patient, who “appeared perfectly composed.” Galt notes the appearance of her tongue (“moist and clean”) and skin (also “moist”) and ends, “She had on the

waistcoat, and I could not feel the pulse at the wrist. Convulsions from passions of the mind. 1819.”<sup>340</sup>

“Passions of the mind” is an atypical phrase in the contemporaneous medical discourse that emphasized nerves and sympathies; it may be reference to a humoral body, the original target of bleeding, purges and blistering and not quite eclipsed by the new corporeality.<sup>341</sup> But there are also religious and sexual connotations to the phrase and Galt’s descriptions of the convulsions are ambiguous, leaving the question of what could not be contained by restraints that remained a day after the event. Galt wrote this six years before the birth of Jean-Martin Charcot; hysteria in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was an amorphous diagnosis that could indicate a sexual origin of derangement among others.<sup>342</sup> Yet Galt does not use the term in this instance, nor does he classify Rose’s violent convulsions as epileptic. As Dea Boster has effectively demonstrated, epilepsy’s association with “an uncontrolled body gave the diagnosis a particular significance when it was applied to slaves.”<sup>343</sup> Mental passion may encompass both fits and mania for Galt, but the etiology of Rose’s disorder is further complicated by the attempt by Rose’s owners to displace the cause of her

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<sup>340</sup> John M. Galt II (ed), *Practical Medicine: Illustrated by Cases of the Most Important Diseases*, (Philadelphia: Ed. Barrington & Geo. D. Haswell, 1843), 320.

<sup>341</sup> See Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution*, 69-79 and Nancy Tomes, *The Art of Asylum Keeping: Thomas Kirkbride and the Origins of American Psychiatry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 23-31

<sup>342</sup> For a description of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century diagnosis of hysteria as “a hodgepodge of disparate and usually temporary symptoms,” see Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: the French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1987), 323-4. Benjamin Rush distinguishes hysteria from hypochondriasis by limiting it to women and linking it physical causes, as opposed to the mental causes of hypochondriasis. See *Medical Inquiries and Observations Upon the Diseases of the Mind*, 74.

<sup>343</sup> Dea H. Boster, “An ‘Epileptic’ Bondswoman: Fits, Slavery, and Power in the Antebellum South,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 83(2) Summer 2009, 272.

condition away from their house onto a native or enslaved healer or conjuror. I feel confident making that latter association because, at an early point in the text, Galt treats an enslaved man with dysuria that his elder brother attributes to being “tricked, as the negroes call it, which I suppose means poisoned” and “that he must have a *Negro Doctor*.”<sup>344</sup> Galt rejected this suggestion and appears to dismiss Rose’s supposed poisoning, but these are not idle discussions given the context.

In 1748, the Virginian legislature passed a law declaring, “whereas, under the pretence of practicing physic, Negroes have prepared medicine by which many persons have been murdered or have languished, it is enacted that if any Negro, or other slave, shall prepare, exhibit or administer any medicine whatsoever, he shall be guilty of felony and suffer death without benefit of clergy.”<sup>345</sup> This law was not only produced by white fear of poison, however, as it was partially the result of the Governor’s emancipation of James Papaw in 1729 for revealing “many wonderful cures...in the most inveterate venereal Distempers,” an act that inspired a number of other enslaved healers.<sup>346</sup> The reference to “Negro, or other slave” includes all black men and women regardless of their degree of freedom within the realm of suspicion, but it also indicates the presence of American indigenous healers as slaves. The suppression of these heterogeneous health cultures, while appropriating certain practices and knowledges, was the condition for the emergence of the Southern

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<sup>344</sup> John M. Galt II (ed), *Practical Medicine*, 296.

<sup>345</sup> June Purcell Guild, LL.M., *Black Laws of Virginia*, (Westminster: Heritage Books, 1995), 155.

<sup>346</sup> Cited in Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 625. See Todd L. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery* 175.

medical profession, as I will discuss in the next chapter. Here, it appears as the alibi of Rose's owners, a cause of her disorder that lies outside of their household, the result of her elopement in desire and body.

With Rose's case, Galt does not avoid the tender embrace between her and her mistress, nor does he ignore her owners' discomfort with a younger suitor. Nor does he try to remove the jacket he provided. His notes preserve a scene of rebellion, an embrace after a refusal, that can be read as "exposing the domination and same-sex eroticism as the undeclared basis for heterosexuality and sexual normalization" in the antebellum South, to use Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman's words in a very different context.<sup>347</sup> Where Abdur-Rahman is drawing out the submerged theories of sexual violence in foundational slave narratives, Galt is an active participant in the subjection of Rose, restraining her violent convulsions, purging the passions of her mind. His son, John M. Galt II, continues this work by publishing it in 1843, two years after he becomes superintendent of the asylum. In this latter context, the scene of an enslaved women's queer frenzy and its repression serves as an advertisement of the asylum as a supplement of slavery. The discourse of control around black sexuality had a different kind of visibility in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as agricultural periodicals contained guides and concerns about the management of slaves. For example, an anonymous Mississippi planter discussing techniques to maximize the efficiency of his labor force confess, "As to their habits of

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<sup>347</sup> "'The Strangest Freaks of Despotism': Queer Sexuality in Antebellum African American Slave Narratives" *African American Review* 40(2) Summer 2006, 225.

amalgamation and intercourse, I know of no means by which to regulate or to restrain them; I attempted it for many years by preaching virtue and decency, encouraging marriages, and by punishing, with some severity, departures from marital obligations; but it was all in vain.”<sup>348</sup> The younger Galt offers this text, the asylum, his knowledge and practice as a promise, an answer to the master’s desire; the jacket is the restraint of those queer black habits. Like Rose, they do not need to be confined within the asylum to be subject to its violence.

Rose’s master could have run to the constable, but this might have had negative consequences for the mistress and could have killed Rose. Working with a committee to formulate Virginia’s criminal code in 1778, Thomas Jefferson literalized Cesare Beccaria’s critique of the death penalty in favor of proportional punishments, writing a “Bill Proportioning Crimes and Punishments.” Some crimes were to be punished with hard labor, others by the crime itself in an Old Testament parody where poisoners were to be poisoned and those guilty of maiming were to be maimed in turn.<sup>349</sup> In this text, Jefferson groups and punishes a certain set of crimes in the following way: “Whosoever shall be guilty of rape, polygamy, or sodomy with man or woman, shall be punished; if a man, by castration, a woman, by boring through the cartilage of her nose one half inch in diameter at the least.”<sup>350</sup> Virginian courts of oyer and terminer had been punishing enslaved men for attempting to rape

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<sup>348</sup> A Mississippi Planter, “NEGROES—Management of Upon Southern Estates,” *The Industrial Resources, Etc., of the Southern and Western States* 2 1852 331

<sup>349</sup> Louis Compton, “Homosexuals and the Death Penalty in Colonial America,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 1(3) 1976

<sup>350</sup> Thomas Jefferson, “Bill Proportioning Crimes and Punishments,” in Merrill Peterson (ed.), *Thomas Jefferson* 355-6.

free white women with castration since 1769.<sup>351</sup> Polygamy was a sign for the uncontrollable sexuality and habits of amalgamation in African slaves.<sup>352</sup> The English buggery law was not usually interpreted in the American colonies as criminalizing sexual practices between women; before Jefferson's attempt to correct this, only the New Haven colony included "any woman...abusing the contrary part of a grown woman" or attempting to "change the naturall use into that which is against nature" as an offense punishable by death from 1655-65.<sup>353</sup> Nose slitting was a less common punishment than ear cropping; both were originally directed against white indentured servants as well as African and indigenous slaves, but became racialized as the "preferred methods of physical coercion during the seasoning process" of newly imported enslaved men and women.<sup>354</sup> In a footnote, Jefferson separates sex with nonhuman animals from the category of sodomy because "bestiality can never make any progress; it cannot therefore be injurious to society..." He does not speak further about the unnatural reproduction of those who sodomize "with mankind," but I believe it reappears in *Notes on the State of Virginia* as miscegenation, the wild interspecies mixture of black and white that betrays beauty and reason.<sup>355</sup> Jefferson's bill did not become law; while he was an ambassador in France in 1792, the Virginia

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<sup>351</sup> See Philip Schwarz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

<sup>352</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1999), 29.

<sup>353</sup> Cited in Louis Compton, "Homosexuals and the Death Penalty," 281. John Cotton tried to include women's sodomy with men's as a capital offense in the Massachusetts colony's first body of laws in 1641.

<sup>354</sup> Alex Bontemps, *The Punished Self*, 116. From most accounts, the nostrils were cut, not the cartridge.

<sup>355</sup> Thomas Jefferson, "A Bill..." 356.

general assembly passed an act against the “detestable and abominable vice of buggery” that still carried the penalty of death, but expanded the possible criminal to “he or she so offending.”<sup>356</sup> In 1800, a felony committed by a free person was no longer a capital offense; thus an 1819 statute limited buggery by free persons to one to ten years imprisonment and “if the person so offending be a slave, he or she shall be adjudged a felon, and shall suffer death without the benefit of clergy.”<sup>357</sup>

Virginia’s sodomy law was a slave code.

### **Conclusion**

At the end of his response to “the Notts, the Giddens, the Agassiz, and Mortons” who discover difference and inferiority in every measurement of the black body, Fredrick Douglass articulates a definition of health as resistance that I find both promising and troubling.<sup>358</sup> Throughout the work, Douglass situates the ethnological argument, discussing it in political, historical and scientific contexts.<sup>359</sup> For instance, Douglass laughs at the work of Charles Hamilton Smith, who notes the “voice of the negroes is feeble and hoarse in the male sex.” Pointing out “the fact, that an oppressed people, in addressing their superiors—perhaps I should say, their oppressors—usually assume a minor tone,” Douglas concludes “the learned

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<sup>356</sup> Virginia Statutes at Large, Ch. 32, 1792.

<sup>357</sup> Virginia, Crimes and Punishments, Ch. 13, 1819. I am unsure how often this was enforced. Compton includes an account of the trial and execution of William Cornish, a sea captain, for buggery in 1624. I have also found an appellate case concerning a white man and a mare in Virginia 1812. *Commonwealth v. Thomas* 1 Va. Cas. 307 (1812).

<sup>358</sup> Fredrick Douglass, *The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered* (Rochester: Printed by Lee, Mann & Co., 1854), 10.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid*, 10



ethnologist must be hard pushed, to establish differences.”<sup>360</sup> After spending the text attempting to show that the negro and white man are of the same species, Douglass concludes by arguing that they will also remain within the same country. He posits three ways that “the blacks can disappear from the face of the country:” colonization, extermination or extinction. Nothing could “induce the colored citizen to leave his native soil” after “his tears and blood” have been mixed with it; “the influence of Christianity, and the power of self-interest” would forestall the apocalypse feared by Jefferson. As for “dying out,” one only has to look at “the history of the negro race” to observe “their tenacity of life, their powers of endurance, their malleable toughness.”<sup>361</sup>

Douglass asserts the resilience of blackness against these attempts to enforce a subjection through the terrorism of slavery or the ethnological expulsion from the human species: “The ten thousand horrors of slavery, striking hard upon the sensitive soul, have bruised, battered, and stung, but have not killed. The poor bondsman lifts a smiling face above the surface of a sea of agonies, *hoping on, hoping ever.*” But Douglass disavows those who do not survive, which he groups racially. Continuing, “His tawny brother, the Indian, dies, under the flashing glance of the Anglo Saxon. *Not* so the negro; civilization cannot kill him. He accepts it—becomes a part of it.”<sup>362</sup> By referring to the Indian as brother, Douglass is signaling that he is not conceiving of this difference ethnologically, separating African and indigenous Americans as

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid, 35-6.

species. Neither is the division appear to be the result of different regimes of violence and subjection, as both peoples confront the same civilization. The factor here seems to be a kind of health, a “manhood of the negro” that gives one brother the ability to hope and survive, and dooms the one without it to disappear in a glance.<sup>363</sup> This is not the same move that Rush performs when he disavows genocide in diagnosing disease, undisciplined gender, and damnation; nor is Douglass’ deployment of manhood equivalent to Jefferson’s classification of the Indian’s healthy masculinity, which served to highlight his distance from *Homo sapiens Europaeus* as much as his similitude. Douglass is presenting “civilization” here as a violence that doubly fails its perpetrators: not only does it fail to kill the negro, he appropriates it. But his aside on the failure and extinguishment of his family member is hard for me to hear without a dismissive tone.

I end with this passage not to accuse this abolitionist living under and struggling against the constant threat of violence and I do not intend to ignore his identification as Indian in different contexts. As John Stauffer has described, Douglas and other abolitionists attempted to learn from native conceptions of nature, violence and sociality to overcome white supremacy, “to dismantle the unquestioned cultural dichotomy of savagery and civilization. They justified and accepted savagery as a means of vanquishing slavery and thus advancing civilization. They found in the symbol of the Indian grounds for violently attacking a corrupt civilization.”<sup>364</sup> I am

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>364</sup> John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 183.

raising this issue here not to dismiss Douglass's experience of health and struggle, but to emphasize the inability to separate settler colonialism and chattel slavery in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> abolitionist struggle, and to question how well I analyzed this imbrication in this chapter. I began this project as a whole with the intention of centering the development of present systems of violence within the legacy of slavery. But, as I tried to demonstrate in this chapter, the institution of slavery required separations from those made free as much as those conquered. All of those terms should be under scare quotes; this process never succeeded despite its present operation. I worry about the legibility of such an analysis when I read arguments that consider "the structural position of the Indian slaveholder" as proof that "freedom from the rule of slave law requires only that one be considered nonblack...blackness serves as the basis of enslavement."<sup>365</sup> In this text, Jared Sexton presents a promising critique of Achille Mbembe's necropower in subsuming chattel slavery to a type of colonial sovereignty. But in the above passage, he makes settler colonialism and African slavery unequivocal, so that the exchange of enslaved Choctaw from Carolina for enslaved Africans from Barbados is only understandable as a transatlantic circuit, not as a minor instance of the trans-American indigenous trade essential to conquest and the Middle Passage.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Jared Sexton, "People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery" *Social Text* 28(2) Summer 2010, 36.

<sup>366</sup> See Alan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: the Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 299-314

But Douglass's rearticulation of resistance as a practice of health and as a critique of antiblack discourse strikes at the cornerstone of US nationality and citizenship that I have been profiling in this chapter. I began by examining a set of analogies provided by Fitzhugh and participants in a Harvard debate that linked blackness to madness, immaturity, and idiocy. But rather than seek out the proper equation of these figures of disorder and lack, I turned to writings by founders of the US government to understand the precondition for these equivalences. Jefferson linked blackness to mental lack and uncontrollable desire by way of species, presenting a political and natural disruption in need of control and governance. Rush performed much the same operation with reference to disease, warning of a debased blackness that threaten to infect individual and social bodies, thus perverting the holy mission of the republic. I then examined two texts that exposed the contradictions of citizenship and sexuality in the nation founded upon both freedom and slavery. McPherson responds to his exclusion from citizenship and sanity not in the explosion of enmity fantasized by a trembling Jefferson, but by promising the republic's arrival with divine justice. Rose's sexuality was surveilled and regulated long before her husband was denied by her masters and the passions of her mind were bled out by a physician. But the straightjacket could not contain her, and the embrace given to her mistress revealed and threatened slavery's central apparatus of compulsory heterosexuality.

The portrait of life, endurance, toughness and hope that Douglass provides works against the pathologization of blackness enacted by Jefferson and Rush and

repeated by the 19<sup>th</sup> century ethnologists. It also incorporates the struggles of McPherson and Rose, who were bruised, battered, and stung, but not killed. But I am unsure as to whether Douglass would include the two Angolan men who choose to die together rather than serve apart in his schema. I also do not know if Douglass would disavow the subject of my next chapter, Davy (Walker), a sixteen-year-old slave who died in the same asylum that dismissed McPherson and supplied the straightjacket for Rose. In Chapter Three, I use Davy (Walker)'s admission and treatment notes to examine the legal, economic, political and medical institutions that composed slavery and marked him as insane. I will shift my focus away from the revolutionary period to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and look more at specific discursive practices than broad epistemic conditions. But my work in Chapter Two on citizenship, race, health and sexuality serves as the backdrop for my close reading of the texts of Davy (Walker)'s life and death and enables my analysis of madness and the internal slave trade.

## Chapter 3: Worse than Useless, Too Much Sense

### Enslaved Insanity in Plantations, Courtrooms and Asylums

1851. Resolution 22. A Negro slave, William, a felon, convicted in Fauquier and his punishment commuted to transportation has since become lunatic and unsaleable, is ordered to be removed from the penitentiary to the Eastern Lunatic Asylum for reasons of humanity as well as other considerations.

--Virginia House of Delegates<sup>367</sup>

Davy (Walker), patient number 644, entered the Eastern Lunatic Asylum (ELA), Williamsburg, Virginia, on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1853. While the diagnostic registers of the asylum did not note a new inmate's race, the parenthesis around his last name betray his status as property. He was accompanied by a "Mr. Spencer Walker," possibly the sixteen-year-old slave's owner and possibly his father, and met by the Superintendent of the Asylum, Dr. John Galt II.<sup>368</sup> Compared to the admission notes for the white patients, which could go on for pages and could contain statements from multiple witnesses, Davy (Walker)'s entry is terse. In answering Galt's 16 admission questions, Mr. Walker described how Davy had been "a good boy and worked well until two years since," but then began "running away,

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<sup>367</sup> June Purcell Guild, LL.M., *Black Laws of Virginia*, (Westminster: Heritage Books, 1995), 89.

<sup>368</sup> I have been unable to locate a Spencer Walker in the Virginia Census around this time (1840-60). There is a Spencer Walker listed in 1820 and 1830 in Gloucester County, a tobacco plantation district near the asylum. His color is marked as W but he is not recorded as a slaveholder. Another Spencer Walker is listed in the 1880 census as a 65 year-old black man who "works on a farm" in Appomattox County. Since there are no parenthesis around Spencer's last name in the admission record, I assume the man who brought Davy (Walker) to the asylum was his owner. I speculate that it could have been his father as the admission notes end with "His father also stated that..." yet this might be something relayed by Mr. Walker to the staff, not said by him. Or, Mr. Walker might be present only in a letter delivered with the new inmate by his enslaved father, although Galt usually indicted when the testimony was written. Alternatively, Spencer Walker might have been a freeman married to Davy's enslaved mother.

threatening his mother, killing cats and painting himself with poke-[berries?] (Phytolacca decandra).” To the question, “Is his derangement evinced on one or several subjects?” Mr. Walker responds, “Disease seems to consist of the refusal to work and running away, as his replies are always the same; when put to work he is sure to quit in some short time.” “Has he shewn any disposition to commit violence to himself or others?” “Threatened his mother and resisted the son of the overseer.” As to what “curative means have been pursued, and their effect,” the short answer, “No treatment, except being whipped.” The last sentence of the statement reads: “His father also stated he exhibited insanity by stripping off his garment, and that he considered the mental disturbance to have arisen from his having been accustomed to [bring?] many a basket of hot corn [head? bread?] on his head, a daily task, to the laborers out at work in the fields.”<sup>369</sup>

While the ELA, formerly the Public Hospital for Persons of Insane and Disordered Minds, accepted both white and black inmates since its inception, it did not officially admit slaves until 1846, when John Galt II gained the legislative approval he had sought for five years. Enslaved men and women had been the hospital’s infrastructure since they built it, as the asylum’s Court of Directors were generously compensated for leasing their property to work as orderlies, cooks, etc. Galt depended upon this labor more than the previous asylum physicians, his father Dr. Alexander Galt and grandfather Dr. John Galt Sr., as he sought to replace their

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<sup>369</sup> Patients, Register of, 1853-1854. Series 1, Volume 29. Records of Eastern State Hospital, 1770-2009, State government records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. I had trouble reading Galt’s handwriting, so there are undoubtedly some errors.

regimes of restraint, isolation and the liberal use of purgatives with a new method of moral treatment. Aimed at restoring the patient's reason through kind regulation instead of corporeal correction, moral treatment required strict classification and constant surveillance of the inmate population; to this end, Dr. Galt II began utilizing the slaves as attendants. While he believed that only white attendants could have the proper moral influence on white inmates, Galt had trouble hiring them and eventually concluded that slaves were appropriate for some of population, such as the "weakened and irredeemable" minds of the demented.<sup>370</sup>

But Davy (Walker) appears to have resisted this new regime of discipline; like his admission notes, his monthly treatment updates were brief and often blank. His first, written on the day of his admission, described him as "in a torpid, absent condition of mind, and can scarcely be induced to reply to interrogation." For the next few years, these notes center on his capacity to work. November 30th: "Has been torpid and listless, doing nothing in the way of work." December 31st: "Begins to engage in work a little more." September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1854: "He has been placed in the kitchen," where, like the laundry, white patients refused to work on account of the black and enslaved staff.<sup>371</sup> October 30th, 1854: "He works." July 31st, 1855: "He is entirely silent now; continues to work."<sup>372</sup> But Davy (Walker) was not an ideal

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<sup>370</sup> Patients, Register of, 1853-1854. Series 1, Volume 29. Records of Eastern State Hospital, 1770-2009, State government records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia and Norman Dain, *Disordered Minds: the First Century of Eastern State Hospital in Williamsburg, Virginia, 1766-1866* (Virginia: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1971), 83. On Galt's moral treatment and his dependence on inmate and enslaved labor, see 74-84.

<sup>371</sup> Norman Dain, *Disordered Minds*, 83.

<sup>372</sup> Patients, Register of, 1854-1855. Series 1, Volume 30. Records of Eastern State Hospital, 1770-2009, State government records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.



inmate and was thrice described as “mischievous.” In one instance, sometime in January, 1857, “While walking out with the servant appointed to attend the coloured patients in this exercise, he swallowed a cup of spirits,” possibly brandy, which Dr. Galt II often used in combination with opium. He then disappeared towards the college and was later found unconscious. After being brought back to his room, he was visited by the superintendent, who gave him a mustard emetic, then coffee and then “a mixture... consisting of calomel, Laudanum and sweet spirits of [nitre?].” The incident “left no perceptible change in any aspect whatsoever.”<sup>373</sup> In the final ledger of the asylum available in the Library of Virginia’s archives, there is only one entry for him on October 31st, 1858: “Remains torpid, abstracted, demented, silent—except sometimes talking to himself. Is manageable.” And underneath it, written in a different pen: “Died March 1, 1863.”<sup>374</sup>

This chapter is an attempt to expand Davy (Walker)’s records. My first temptation was to reverse their contents; as these notes seem authored by Samuel Cartwright, who diagnosed a “disease causing slaves to run away,” I considered constructing a counter-narrative of rebellion and escape. But I believe it is more productive to unravel his different classifications and forms of confinement by tracing their constitution to multiple locations and forces, not by revealing a stable subject underneath who can only rebel or submit. Approaching the material and epistemic

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<sup>373</sup> Patients, Register of, 1856-1857. Series 1, Volume 31. Records of Eastern State Hospital, 1770-2009, State government records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>374</sup> Patients, Register of, 1858-1859. Series 1, Volume 33. Records of Eastern State Hospital, 1770-2009, State government records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

violence of slavery as transparent has encouraged some historians to reproduce it, such as the one on the hunt for “clues about male slave psychology,” who confidently states, “masters ordinarily had less reason to fear open rebelling from their female property: the women could be coerced with threats against their men or their young.”<sup>375</sup> This is less a replication of slaveholding discourse, which could be this gleefully ignorant in its most propagandist enunciation but not in “ordinary” counterinsurgency, than a transferential relationship with the master’s position that takes sexual violence for granted. Other historians perform a related operation as they continue to interrogate enslaved witnesses in an effort to finally suppress the Denmark Vesey uprising.<sup>376</sup>

Instead of writing a speculative biography, I will try to understand how this case was written before Davy (Walker) entered the asylum grounds in the diverse discourses and technologies that compose the system of slavery in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century United States. First, I profile a factory on Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello plantation as a prefiguration of the management discourse in midcentury agricultural periodicals, aimed at controlling enslaved character and kinship. Second, I analyze the formation of the Southern medical profession in the suppression of black health cultures, primarily through an interrogation of Samuel Cartwright’s writings and

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<sup>375</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Mask of Obedience: Male Slave Psychology in the Old South” *The American Historical Review* 93(5) Dec., 1988, 1229. In this article, Wyatt-Brown attempts to revive Stanley Elkin’s understanding of the Sambo stereotype as an accurate reflection of slave personality in order to interrupt celebrations of “the riches of black culture,” 1230. It is among the worst things I have read.

<sup>376</sup> Michael P. Johnson, “Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58(4), Oct 2001.

context. Third, I give an overview of legal cases where the mental disorder of property violated warrants for soundness, an archive that blends the managerial and medical discourse while unveiling the violence of the slave trade. Fourth, I return to the asylum, discussing the different theories of black madness in relation to the 1840 census and the practice of John M. Galt II. To conclude the chapter, I present another case study of black insanity that troubles the hope for a cure, and then end by considering how abolitionist and insurrectionist communities articulate a different kind of sense.

The displacement of a slave named William, sent to the ELA for “proper corrective treatment” that would enable his sale out of the state, foregrounds the connections between confinement, madness and the market in the antebellum South.<sup>377</sup> Although I will be looking at a number of overdetermined concepts and forces, if there is something like a last instance in this chapter, I believe it is the internal slave trade. The inter- and intra-state sale of enslaved men and women, and the commercial, medical and legal infrastructure that accompanied it, was a major reason why the sanity of the slave became an object of management and valuation. This trade also helps to explain why Maryland and Virginia, major exporters of enslaved men and women to the Deep South, were the only two states that accepted enslaved inmates into their mental asylums. But new conceptions of madness arose in this context that outlived the circumstances of their origin. Enslaved mental

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<sup>377</sup> Virginia House of Delegates, *Journal of the House of Delegates of Virginia for the session of 1850-1*, (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1850), 425.

disorder was composed of elements from managerial conceptions of morality and character, legal definitions of health and insanity, medical interventions on disease and mental illness, and more dispersed materializations of labor and violence. The mentally ill slave became the ground for the emergence of personality disorder as a psychiatric and criminological entity.

And it is a ground covered in blood. This was a hard chapter to write; I have tried to avoid making a spectacle out of suffering or reproducing violence through absence.<sup>378</sup> I have attempted to counter the vast discourse on enslaved men and women not by presenting fully constituted subjects who may have refused or internalized the master's speech, but by pointing to the "fadeout points" in that discourse as well as my work.<sup>379</sup> But I am still overwhelmed at times by the presence of violence and at others by its dissimulation, and continue to struggle with representations of enslaved agency and disintegration. As Bryan Wagner observes, "slavery's indignity is not about being turned from a person into a thing but rather about being in a position where it does not matter if you are a person or a thing."<sup>380</sup> To those who owned and directed the plantations, asylums, courtrooms, hospitals, factories, swamps and other spaces discussed in this chapter, it fundamentally did not

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<sup>378</sup> See Fred Moten, *In the Break* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 2-5.

<sup>379</sup> Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 239.

<sup>380</sup> Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power after Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 74.

matter whether enslaved men and women were sane or insane. In Davy (Walker)'s case, this indeterminacy included life and death.<sup>381</sup>

### **The Value of Character**

Benjamin Rush was not able to convince Thomas Jefferson to join or publically support the early abolitionist movement, but he may have influenced life at Monticello in another fashion. Jefferson met frequently with Rush when he lived in Philadelphia while serving as George Washington's Secretary of State from 1790-3. During this time, Rush and other reformers were attempting to convert the Walnut Street jail into "the first penitentiary in the world."<sup>382</sup> Rush had laid the foundation for this transformation in 1787 with his popular paper "An Enquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments upon Criminals, and upon Society," where he critiqued the current system of public punishment for producing "a more feeble union of the great ties of government."<sup>383</sup> Rush offered an alternative vision of a more rigorous system

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<sup>381</sup> For William, this also encompassed the location of confinement. Virginia had begun transporting enslaved felons in 1801, primarily to assuage the costs of punishment, which included compensation paid to the master on the execution of the slave. Between its start and 1864, the state of Virginia sold 983 enslaved men and women out of the country, usually to Florida and Cuba. See Philip J. Schwarz, *Slave Laws in Virginia* (Athens: the University of Georgia Press, 1996), Chapter 4. From 1823 to 1827, the state also sold forty four free black convicts into slavery. See Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 61-2. There was a William (Spencer) admitted to ELA in 1852, but I did not see his admission notes because the 1852-53 records were unavailable when I visited the archive (although they are currently listed in the ELA collection on the library's website: Library of Virginia, "A GUIDE TO THE RECORDS OF EASTERN STATE HOSPITAL, 1770-2009" <http://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=lva/vi03031.xml> accessed 5/25/14) He is not described as a convict in the treatment records; they note him as "refusing to work," "sings a good deal," and "again confined for striking" in 1853-4. After that, his entries are mainly left blank. In 1858, he is no longer listed in the register of patients; there is no notation of his discharge the previous year. I cannot find a record of his sale or death.

<sup>382</sup> Negley K. Teeters, cited in Lucia Staton, "'Those Who Labor for My Happiness: Slavery at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello' (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 77.

<sup>383</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical: Second Edition* (Philadelphia: Printed by Thomas and William Bradford, 1806), 143.

of control hidden inside a prison, consisting of “bodily pain, labour, watchfulness, solitude, and silence,” whereby the criminal would be broken down and remade a docile, Christian citizen.<sup>384</sup> In 1790, the Pennsylvanian legislature moved hard labor indoors and authorized the construction of a block of solitary cells inside the Walnut Street jail, which was only a few blocks away from Jefferson’s residence.<sup>385</sup>

After returning to Monticello in 1794, Jefferson established a nail manufactory near the slave quarters along the plantation’s central street, Mulberry Row. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson critiqued the “degeneracy” and “corruption” of European manufacture, saying, “while we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff.”<sup>386</sup> But Jefferson experimented with industrial production at the nailery, assigning “a dozen little boys from 10. to 16. years of age,” to work for 10 to 14 hours a day and to be housed together away from their families.<sup>387</sup> Jefferson visited the shop daily, measuring the weights of nail rods and nails in order to calculate and rank each worker’s efficiency. He saw a need for corporeal punishment in this operation: after Jamey Hubbard escaped and was captured for the second time, Jefferson “had him severely flogged in the presence of his old companions, and

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>385</sup> See Adam J. Hirsch, *The Rise of the Penitentiary: Prisons and Punishment in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>386</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* in Merrill D. Peterson (ed) *Thomas Jefferson: Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1985), 201.

<sup>387</sup> Thomas Jefferson cited in Lucia Staton, *Those Who Labor...*, 79.

committed to jail.”<sup>388</sup> But he preferred a different technique: according to the visiting duc de La Rochefoucauld-Linacourt, Jefferson “animates them by rewards and distinctions,” offering the most productive laborers special rations or new clothes.<sup>389</sup> As Jefferson wrote to his son-in-law while he was away serving as President, “it would destroy their value in my estimation to degrade them in their own eyes by the whip. This therefore must not be resorted to but in extremities. As they will be again under my government, I would chuse they should retain the stimulus of character.”<sup>390</sup> But when such management failed, Jefferson sought to destroy the offending slave without completely losing his investment. When a slave named Cary supposedly assaulted another nailery worker, Jefferson concluded “it will be necessary for me to make an example of him in terrorem to others, in order to maintain the police so rigorously necessary among the nailboys.” He was to be sold to the “negro purchasers from Georgia” or somewhere so distant it would be “as if he were put out of the way by death.”<sup>391</sup>

Britt Marie Rusert has astutely demonstrated how Jefferson disavows yet depends upon the centrality of the plantation to American agriculture, natural history and government in *Notes on the State of Virginia*. By ordering crops and bodies, the plantation was “a central management tool for controlling teeming tropical

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<sup>388</sup> Cited in Philip J. Schwarz, *Slave Laws in Virginia*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 45. I do not believe there was a jail on the plantation, so Jefferson is probably referring to one in Charlottesville.

<sup>389</sup> Cited in Lucia Staton, 79.

<sup>390</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph, 23 January 1801, National Archives and Records Administration, “Founders Online,” <http://founders.archives.gov/> (accessed 5/25/14)

<sup>391</sup> Cited in Lucia Staton, 15-6.

reproductions that continually threatened to undo the reproduction of the temperate republic.”<sup>392</sup> Jefferson’s experiment with the factory possessed a particular financial urgency in this regard, as he was responding to a crisis affecting the entire Chesapeake region that consisted of falling tobacco prices, the destruction produced by the Revolutionary War, and the environmental effects of a century of mono-crop agriculture. Like a number of other planters, Jefferson switched to grain production, which required new forms of agricultural and labor management, such as the transition from a year-round gang system of cultivation to more seasonal work.<sup>393</sup> The nailery was intended to provide another source of income as well as transform the new surplus of laborers into a more valuable kind of slave.

Various Southern agricultural periodicals that began to emerge in the 1820s would formalize a system of control similar to Jefferson’s, aimed at increasing a slave’s character and value. These texts sought a new science of agricultural production, one that maximized the yields of soil, livestock and enslaved labor; they often included “plantation management” columns that served as a space for slaveholders to share successful and unsuccessful strategies.<sup>394</sup> One planter argued, “the lash is unfortunately too much used... a negro at twenty-five years old, who finds he has the marks of a rogue inflicted when a boy, (even if he is disposed to be

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<sup>392</sup> Britt Marie Rusert, *Shackled in the Garden: Ecology and Race in American Plantation Cultures*, PhD Dissertation, Department of English, Duke University, 2009, 81.

<sup>393</sup> See Lorena S. Walsh, “Plantation Management in the Chesapeake, 1620-1820” *The Journal of Economic History* 49(2) Jun. 1989.

<sup>394</sup> See Jamene Brenton Stewart, *Informing the South: On the Culture of Print in Antebellum Augusta, Georgia 1828-1860*, PhD Dissertation, Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2012. Jefferson’s writings on these matters were not published until later.



orderly) has very little or no inducement to be otherwise.”<sup>395</sup> Another required his overseers to refrain from verbal abuse: “My negroes are never to be *scolded* or *browbeaten*... With some it has the effect of making them hardened, perverse, stubborn scoundrels: others again will be rendered stupid and foolish by it. And it always has the inevitable tendency to make them less valuable.”<sup>396</sup> “The negro women are all harder to manage than the men,” another master noted, “it is particularly necessary to elevate their notions of honesty and character as much as possible.”<sup>397</sup> Terror and physical coercion are still central to the maintenance of slavery, but they are to be systematized in the service of value. Or to put it another way, captive flesh is still ungendered in Hortense Spiller’s sense, but the character of enslaved men and women has become a means for making their bodies productive in divergent ways.<sup>398</sup>

For another master, “the most important part of management of slaves, is always to keep them under the proper subjection. They must obey at all times, and under all circumstances, cheerfully and with alacrity.” Their “unconditional submission... is precisely similar to the attitude of a minor to a parent or a soldier to his general.”<sup>399</sup> This technique of investment and control has usually been described

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<sup>395</sup> R. King, “On the Management of the BUTLER Estate, and the Cultivation of the Sugar Cane,” *The Southern Agriculturalist* 1, December 1828, 525

<sup>396</sup> Harris Smith Evans, “Rules for the Government of the Negroes, Plantation, &c at Float-Swamp, Wilcox County, South-Alabama,” *The Southern Agriculturalist* 5, May 1832, 231. A significant number of these texts were aimed at disciplining overseers, due to their centrality in the management of enslaved labor.

<sup>397</sup> H.C. “On the Management of Negroes,” *Farmers’ Register* 1, 1834, 564.

<sup>398</sup> Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” in *Black, White and in Color*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>399</sup> Unnamed master from Charlotte County, “Management of Slaves, &c” *Farmer’s Register* 5(1), 1837, 32.

as “the emergence of paternalism” and linked to the rise of evangelicalism, humanitarianism, property rights and “a more affectionate family environment.”<sup>400</sup> But masters and mistresses struggled to institute this latter economy and enforce its affects amongst their subjects, in regards to both slave kinship and the whole plantation as a familial unit. One planter articulated his “*imperium in imperio*” in the following fashion:

It is the duty of Christian masters to promote virtuous and fixed attachments between the sexes, and, while encouraging marriages, to guard it with all the forms of consent...Servants ought, as far as possible, to be divided into families, and thus there is an opportunity for family government...Local as well family associations, thus cast about him, are strong yet pleasing cords binding him to his master...He is made happier and safer: put beyond discontent, or the temptations to rebellion and abduction.<sup>401</sup>

Thus, the affective ties of family were not necessarily the result of “close and regular contact between master and slave,” but a technique of government, an attempt to separate and settle enslaved men and women in the affective systems of the plantation.<sup>402</sup> The constitution of family units also served as the condition for maximizing reproduction, for, in the words of a “family book of medicine,” to make slaves “increase rapidly, and raise a great many children...the planter who wishes his negroes to be healthy, must not allow them to indulge in their natural propensities.” The author had been discussing food and housing, but here gestures at other naturally unproductive acts practiced by slaves. He continues, “if more system and discipline

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<sup>400</sup> Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 284.

<sup>401</sup> H.N. McTyeire, D.D., “Plantation Life—Duties and Responsibilities,” *De Bow’s Review* 4(3), September 1860, 362-3

<sup>402</sup> Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 296.

(like regulations in an army), were pursued on plantations, the conditions of the negroes, as well as that of the planter, would be materially improved, and the percentage of the latter... would be much increased.”<sup>403</sup> The directions are both vague and clear: curtailing the natural queerness of enslaved men and women increases their number and the percentage of the planter’s profit, a discourse I examined in regards to the legal and medical discourses on slave sexuality in the previous chapter.

I have chosen to call the investment in and control of enslaved character “management” to distinguish this process from orthodox interpretations of paternalism and Foucaultian conceptions of discipline. Instead of a shared set of ideas and morals that enabled a kind of reciprocity between masters and servants, paternalism emerged in “the controlled politics of sentiment,” for “managing slavery through sentiment did not represent an erosion of power but its enhancement,” to follow Shannon Lee Dawdy’s analysis.<sup>404</sup> Struggles over affect were an essential part of the new strategy of management, which shifted away from punishing a slave’s “impudent” acts to enforcing a productive character.<sup>405</sup> But I have a hard time considering this character as identical with the soul that imprisons the body in the

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<sup>403</sup> J. Hume Simons, M.D., *The Planter’s Guide, Family Book of Medicine; For the Instruction and Use of the Planters’ Families, Country People and All Others Who May Be Out of the Reach of Physicians, Or Unable to Employ Them* (Charleston, McCarter & Allen, 1848), 209-10.

<sup>404</sup> Shannon Lee Dawdy, “Proper Caresses and Prudent Distance: A How-To Manual from Colonial Louisiana,” in Ann Stoler (ed.), *Haunted by Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 156. Also see Walter Johnson’s outstanding reading of paternalism as something masters bought and sold in the slave trade in *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 111-2.

<sup>405</sup> For more on the late 17<sup>th</sup>, early 18<sup>th</sup> century concept of slave impudence, see Alex Bontemps, *The Punished Self*, Chapter 7.

disciplinary subject advanced by Michel Foucault. I began with the contrast between Rush's penitentiary and Jefferson's factory to highlight the tension between their chief products, respectively, the reformed citizen and the valuable slave. The enslaved young men of Monticello were never to become the "republican machines" Rush hoped to tune in prison; their value lay not in a docile embodiment brought about by discipline and penance, but in their functions as laborers and commodities, united and enriched through character. The motivated laborers in the nailery were intended to be both self-regulating and fungible; their stimulus underwritten by the invasion or exchange of their bodies. Moreover, in the broader discourse of slave management, enslaved men and women were only partially individuated; they were less "biographical unities" than coerced families, a patriarchally and heterosexually circumscribed kinship operating as a form of government continually suspended by the violence and commerce.<sup>406</sup>

I am curious if or how Davy (Walker)'s symptoms could have been understood in this discourse as a failure of character and/or as madness. Answering the prompt concerning the "indications" of insanity, Spencer Walker lists "running away, threatening his mother, killing cats and painting himself with poke-[berries]." The first three appear to mark him as unmanageable: Davy (Walker) does not properly labor or accept his existence as property, refuses the affective and

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<sup>406</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 254. For more on how the Southern paternalist discourse on black "habits of amalgamation" legitimated the separation of families in commerce, see Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 211-6.

governmental ties of family, and abuses animals that are an important part of the plantation's economic and emotional environment. Each of these was expected to a greater or less extent in management discourse; hence instructions to bind a slave to affective and economic systems of property, kinship and agricultural labor. What can appear as violence is also determined by these expectations; it is impossible to decide whether Davy (Walker) threatened to actually physically harm his mother or if the master or overseer observed something he could only interpret as the promise of violence. A similar aporia arises in his supposed destruction of two or more cats that may or may not have belonged to his owners, which seems to be offered as a symptom of insanity but not a form of violence. Responding to the prompt about "disposition to commit violence," Spencer Walker repeats "Threatened his mother" and then adds "resisted the son of the overseer," but he does not include the death of nonhuman animals.<sup>407</sup> Why or how does "killing cats" appear as distinct from the "violence" of resisting authority? Are they different expressions of the same insanity or symptoms of multiple origins? Is violence defined by humanness or worth?<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Patients, Register of, 1853-1854. Series 1, Volume 29. Records of Eastern State Hospital, 1770-2009, State government records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>408</sup> I have slighted the role of nonhuman animals in this section, partially because I have not fully worked out their place in the plantation system as well as American slavery as a whole. Eugene Genovese sees in the antebellum South "a paradox: an abundance of livestock and an inadequate supply of meat and work animals." He finds the root in an underdeveloped livestock industry resulting from "the combination of careless treatment and the lack of accessible, geographic concentrated markets that might have encouraged animal husbandry on a large scale." See "Livestock in the Slave Economy of the Old South: A Revised View," *Agricultural History* 36(3), July 1962, 143 and 145-6. Disturbingly, Genovese is following the masters in blaming enslaved keepers for not properly caring for nonhuman animals, manifested in the common advice in agricultural publications to employ mules instead of horses in plantation work as the former was supposedly able to better withstand the abuse of slaves. For a much more productive reading of the interspecies relationship between mules and enslaved laborers in Southern agriculture, one that draws from agricultural manuals as well as black folklore, see George B. Ellenberg, "African Americans, Mules and the Southern Mindscape, 1850-

I am unsure about the precise relation between unmanageability and insanity, either in a spectrum or as mutually exclusive states. Was Davy (Walker) primarily understood as incorrigible for rejecting plantation governance or as sick, his actions out of his own control? Davy (Walker)'s pre-asylum classification of insanity may have emerged after what is recorded as the initial "curative" treatment—whipping—failed to produce the expected results, but I have not found any equation or system of measurement for determining when insurgency or incompetence becomes madness instead of moral failure, or if moral failure is a symptom or kind of insanity. Later in this chapter, I will show how Southern courts confronted these issues and where they were unable to decide upon the proper measurements or draw precise boundaries. And as I will discuss shortly, there were multiple health cultures at work on the plantation; although Davy (Walker)'s only non-asylum treatment is recorded as corporal punishment, others by enslaved healers might have been utilized. These had good reason to be hidden from the master and the Virginia authorities, but they could have influenced the master's decision to involve the asylum, especially if they were taken as another symptom.

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1950," *Agricultural History* 72(2), Spring 1998. As for cats in particular, they had been a primary means for cities and farms to contain rodents since Europeans began settling the North American continent. But they were also affective companions and existed within the politics of sentiment on the plantation as the following passage from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century diary of Sally Fairfax, identified only as a "little colonial girl," makes painfully clear: "On friday, the 3d of Janna, that vile man Adam at night killed a poor cat, of rage, because she eat a bit of meat out of his hand & scratched it. A vile wretch of new negrows, if he was mine I would cut him to pieces, a son of a gun, a nice negrow, he should be kild himself by rites." "Diary of a Little Colonial Girl," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 9(2), October 1903, 213. I do not know if, why, how or when Davy (Walker) killed the cats, but this could have been understood by plantation managers and doctors as an unmanageable/insane extension of the "careless treatment" of the enslaved towards animals, not as a form of sabotage or resistance.

Even if Davy (Walker) was judged insane and unmanageable for a plantation's primary labor, it does not necessarily follow that he would be expelled. Jefferson might have been unable to incorporate him into his factory, but the nailery ultimately struggled to make a profit and Jefferson shifted his attention to a textile factory, which, like most of the textile industry in the South, he used to make coarse clothes for his slaves. He staffed it with "a few women, children and invalids who could do little in the farm." If not here, Davy (Walker) might have been sent to work in the vegetable garden with older men, whom Jefferson referred to as his "senile corps."<sup>409</sup>

### **Policing Medications**

In July 1851, a month into an outbreak of cholera that had claimed 40 enslaved men, women and children on William Minor's sugar plantation on the Louisiana coast, Samuel Cartwright was finally "invested with full power to do as I please."<sup>410</sup> Earlier that year, Cartwright had delivered his findings on the "diseases and physical peculiarities of the negro race" to the Medical Associations of Louisiana, and the report that was still being republished in various Southern medical and agricultural journals. At the Waterloo plantation, he took the opportunity to experiment with a colleague's method of "making an impression upon the mind as

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<sup>409</sup> Cited in Lucia Stanton, "*Those Who Labor...*" 11.

<sup>410</sup> Samuel Cartwright, "Remarks on Dysentery Among Negroes," *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 11(2), September 1854. I am reconstructing the dates by consulting J. Carlyle Sitterson's "The William J. Minor Plantations: A Study in Ante-bellum Absentee Ownership," *The Journal of Southern History* 9(1), Feb 1943, which mentions the outbreak but not Cartwright's cure.

well as the body, by breaking the chain of those superstitious influences which render epidemics so fatal among negroes.”<sup>411</sup> To this end,

I took about three hundred negroes, sick and well, a mile or two back into a dry, open place in the swamp... They encamped in the open air and built fires, although the weather was warm, and some booths were directed to be made over the sick to protect them from the sun and the rain. The ashy-colored, dry skin conjurers, or prophets, who had alarmed their fellow-servants with the prophecies that the cholera was to kill them all, and who had gained, by various tricks and artifices, much influence over their superstitious minds, were by my orders, at twilight, called up, stripped, and greased with fat bacon, in presence of the whole camp—a camp without tents or covering of any kind... After being greased, the grease was well slapped in with broad leather straps, marking time with the *tam tam*, a wild African dance that was going on in the centre of the camp among all those, who had the physical strength to participate in it. This procedure drove the cholera out of the heads of all who had been conjured into the belief that they were to die with the disease; because it broke the charm of the conjurers by converting them, under the greasing and slapping process, into subjects for ridicule and laughter, instead of fear and veneration. The next morning, by times, all who had been able to join in the dance the over night, were ordered into the cane-field to work... They remained in the camp at night, and labored in the fields by day for some six weeks before they were brought back to the houses, and during all that time they enjoyed good health.<sup>412</sup>

Cartwright concludes by critiquing the “four or five well-read and excellent physicians” who had been failing to contain the epidemic before his arrival. These doctors had erred in letting the choleric slaves rest instead of “giving them a good meal of fat pork, and sending them out in the sun to work to promote their digestion, and thereby improve their strength. There is no cruelty in such a procedure. The

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<sup>411</sup> Samuel Cartwright, “Remarks on Dysentery...” 147. The colleague is Dr. Atchison, who I am unable to find in any other publication.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid, 148-9. The Waterloo plantation diary entry for September 10, 1851, reads “a great deal of sickness on the place for the last six weeks have averaged 25 in the Hospital—Intermittant [sic] & Dingue fever influenza & grippe.” Cited in J. Carlyle Sitterson, “The William J. Minor Plantations,” 67.



cruelty lies in treating convalescent negroes like white convalescents.”<sup>413</sup> But the pageantry of Cartwright’s episode in the swamp indicates that the cure of disease is not just a matter of the proper *materia medica*; health in enslaved populations is inseparable from the dispossession of black health cultures, here disavowed through a minstrel performance by the white anthropologist-doctor who assumes the conjurers and not himself to be the object of laughter. In the absence of proper subjection, all black illness is mental illness.

Apologists for slavery gesture to the presence of physicians on the plantation as evidence of the master’s paternal care and affection. When the doctor is revealed to be Samuel Cartwright, historians must perform a complicated set of denials to redeem Southern medical professionals as possessing “a certain somatic equality at the bedside... white male doctors took up bodies in this way regardless of sex or race.”<sup>414</sup> Cartwright, an apprentice of Benjamin Rush and the Assistant Surgeon General of the Confederacy, was no marginal figure, nor was his work particularly original. Instead, he attempted to synthesize the ethnological work of Samuel Morton and Josiah Nott, strategies presented in the plantation management genre,

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>414</sup> Steven M. Stowe, “Seeing Themselves at Work: Physicians and the Case Narrative in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century American South” *The American Historical Review* 101(1), Feb. 1996, 65. Here and in *Doctoring the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), Stowe relies on the tautological claim that because scientific racism was not articulated until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, antebellum medical professionals were not scientific racists. Stow thus attempts to dissimulate how its elements were first practiced on bodies that were not just taken up but, like the enslaved women and children J. Marion Sims experimented on without anesthesia, were held down screaming. See Laura Briggs, “The Race of Hysteria: ‘Overcivilization’ and the ‘Savage’ Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology” *American Quarterly* 52(2) June 2000 and Stephen C. Kenny, “‘I can do the child no good’: Dr. Sims and the Enslaved Infants of Montgomery, Alabama” *Social History of Medicine* 20(2) July 2007.

interpretations of the Hebrew Bible, Thomas Jefferson's and Benjamin Rush's writings on race and the body, geopolitical conspiracy theories about the British East Indian Company funding Northern abolitionism, and the Southern medical profession's consideration of the distinctiveness of health and disease in the region into an understanding of white and black physiologies and socialities as antipodal.<sup>415</sup> Or, in a word, drapetomania. The "disease causing slaves to run away" was "as much a disease of the mind as any other species of mental alienation" and arose at the intersection of black physiological difference and white managerial mistake.<sup>416</sup> For Cartwright, the black corporeal composition of

defective hematosis, or atmospherization of the blood [Cartwright's synthesis of Thomas Jefferson's observations about deficient black lungs and Benjamin Rush's understanding of all disease as fever and all insanity as an effect of blood vessels in the brain], conjoined with a deficiency of cerebral matter in the cranium [Morton's measurements of African skulls], and an excess of nervous matter [which causes a lymphatic temperament, or the much noted black insensibility]...is the true cause of that debasement of the mind, which has rendered the people of Africa unable to take care of themselves.<sup>417</sup>

Drapetomania arose when white masters ignored slaves' physical and mental need to be "*the submissive knee-bender*" (Cartwright's translation of Canaan in reference to the Hebrew verb Canah), and either punished them too severely and erratically or granted them the respect and responsibility of white persons.<sup>418</sup> Submission is health

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<sup>415</sup> For a summary of Cartwright's influences see James Denny Guillory, "The Pro-Slavery Arguments of Dr. Samuel A. Cartwright" *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 9(3) Summer, 1968. Cartwright described white and black physiologies as antipodal in "Philosophy of the Negro Constitution" *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 9 September 1853.

<sup>416</sup> Samuel A. Cartwright, "Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race" *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 8, May 1851, 707

<sup>417</sup> Ibid, 693.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid, 709.

and bondage is materia medica; abolition is so contrary to reason that it can only be conceived of as a British plot to sabotage cotton production.<sup>419</sup> Cartwright thus reverses Rush's analysis of blackness: "observation has proved that, so far from the black color being caused by disease, the blackest negroes were always the healthiest, and the thicker the lips and the flatter the nose, the sounder the constitution."<sup>420</sup> Hence the ashy color of the prophets; hence the simulation of savagery under white control.

Historians of medicine in the antebellum South note the lack of a standardized textbook or pedagogy on racial difference and treatment, thus concluding that works like Cartwright's were "perfect for southern sectional polemics and useless to the practitioner."<sup>421</sup> But this textbook was constantly being written and performed by a range of practitioners that included physicians, masters, mistresses, overseers, traders, hirers, and judges who defined the contours of black health in hospitals, medical schools, private offices, homes, courtrooms, slave markets and on plantations. Physicians in particular occupied a precarious position in this medical assemblage as they struggled to establish their professional authority, compete with alternative medical practices, and contain epidemics in Southern cities and plantation country. As Cartwright hyperbolically proclaimed, "the owners of slaves consider it safer, in most cases, to trust to the empiricism of overseers" instead of physicians utilizing the

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<sup>419</sup> See Samuel A. Cartwright [uncredited], "East India Cotton," *Southern Quarterly Review* 1 April 1842

<sup>420</sup> Samuel A. Cartwright, "Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race" *Southern Medical Reports* 2 1851, 427.

<sup>421</sup> Todd L. Savitt, "Black Health on the Plantation," in Ronald L. Numbers and Todd L. Savitt (eds.) *Science and Medicine in the Old South* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 338.

“false abolition theory” learned in Northern medical schools that “the negro is only a lampblack white man.”<sup>422</sup> By the 1830s, this had coalesced around an articulation of a “characteristically southern medicine” that took account of the region’s distinct environment and population.<sup>423</sup> For example, Charleston’s Medical College of South Carolina, originally established in 1823, announced in 1834 in the *Colombia Telescope* that “the Faculty deemed it advisable to adopt some plan which would enable them also to exhibit such modifications of diseases as are peculiar to the negro race.” To this end, “an Infirmary for negroes was last year established in a building adjacent to the College, where the Faculty...will place their patients and pursue their own mode of treatment. This Infirmary will always be open to the students, and a full history of every case will be cheerfully furnished.”<sup>424</sup> As Stephen Kenny has effectively detailed, this was one of the “over-forty individual doctors, physician-partnerships, medical colleges and institutes” that “announced or advertised facilities available for the treatment of Negro/slave patients” in the South between 1828 and 1865, the majority located along the major routes of the internal slave trade.<sup>425</sup> Such practice could be incredibly lucrative: in 1845, one doctor noted a colleague in Louisiana “received a salary of \$1,200 a year for attending on a single plantation.”<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> “Report on the Diseases...” *Southern Medical Reports* 2 1851, 423. As the vast majority of the managerial discourse advised masters to closely monitor their overseers to prevent the devaluation of their slaves, I question the extent of this empirical faith.

<sup>423</sup> James H. Cassedy, “Medical Men and the Ecology of the Old South,” in Ronald L. Numbers and Todd L. Savitt (eds.) *Science and Medicine in the Old South* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 176.

<sup>424</sup> Cited in Stephen C. Kenny, “‘A Dictate of Both Interest and Mercy’?: Slave Hospitals in the Antebellum South” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 65(1), January 2010, 16-7.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid*, 12

<sup>426</sup> Daniel Drake, M.D., “Diseases of the Negro Population,” *The Western Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 3, January 1846, 166.

There was no general consensus among Southern physicians on the precise indications or structures of black physiology, yet conceptions of slave health as soundness and treatment as the suppression of slave cosmology became hegemonic. Sharla Fett's *Working Cures* remains the definitive account of the struggles over health on the plantation, in the pages of agricultural and medical texts, and in the fugitive spaces where "communities in slavery nurtured a rich health culture."<sup>427</sup> I will attempt to explicate her analysis of soundness, surveillance and suppression by way of a managerial text published in a medical journal. The editor of *Southern Medical Reports* introduces Thomas Affleck's "On the Hygiene of Cotton Plantations and the Management of the Negro Slaves" by explaining that, although he is an "unprofessional gentleman...[he] is one of the most scientific agriculturalists to be found in the Southern States." His article follows one by Cartwright, which together are to be the start of a yearly series that "will promote the true interest of the master, and ameliorate the condition of the slave."<sup>428</sup> The text is mainly composed of Affleck's answers to a number of questions posed by the editor on the common Southern concerns of the proper housing, clothing and food for slaves, "the principle diseases from which negroes suffer in your region," and enslaved reproduction.<sup>429</sup> Affleck's longest answer, on child mortality, demonstrates how managerial and medical practices were applied asymmetrically against enslaved women: Affleck

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<sup>427</sup> Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>428</sup> E.D. Fenner, M.D., Introduction to Thomas Affleck "On the Hygiene of Cotton Plantations and the Management of the Negro Slaves" *Southern Medical Reports* 2 1851, 429-30.

<sup>429</sup> Thomas Affleck "On the Hygiene of Cotton Plantations..." 432.

recommends employing a “careful old woman” in the nursery and limiting suckling to every three and a half to four hours, bringing the children out to a “large, dry, airy shed” in the fields for such a purpose. He also complains of the lost children smothered by the mother “who sleeps so dead a sleep as not be aware of the injury to her infant” and attributes the majority deaths in the first nine to ten days to “the most unskillful management of negro midwives.”<sup>430</sup>

We see in this planter’s discourse the “conflicts inherent in the dual definitions of slave women’s soundness” as well as the slave-owner’s dependence on and disavowal of enslaved health care.<sup>431</sup> “Soundness” was primarily a legal category referring to the absence of disease that Southern physicians rearticulated in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in medical assessments of the slave’s “performance of the usual duties of his calling, viz: hard labor,” according to a Georgian physician and professor of physiology in 1858.<sup>432</sup> I will speak more about this process shortly; here I wish to emphasize Fett’s crucial point that soundness was more capacious than generally assumed, applying simultaneously to women’s hard labor in the field and the nursery. Limitations on the frequency of breast feeding were aimed not only at preserving the health of the infant but in maximizing all forms of mother’s labor. Enslaved women were figured here as deceptive, using children to avoid other forms of work, as well as incompetent and unable to adequately care for the children of the

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid, 435.

<sup>431</sup> Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures*,

<sup>432</sup> Juriah Harris cited in Walter Fisher, “Physicians and Slavery in the Antebellum Southern Medical Journal” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* XXIII(1) January 1968, 39

plantation, exemplified in the common charges in medical and managerial discourse of smothering and destructive health practices.<sup>433</sup> Although enslaved women were charged with the health of the children, and often the entire enslaved community, their failure is apparent in regards to these examples and another major cause of child mortality discussed by Affleck, Cachexia Africana. As he continues, “Dirt-eating is frequent among young negroes, and always kills them, if not cured.” Affleck is unsure of the disease’s cause, mentioning but not confirming “the constant use of molasses,” speculating on its status as a “morbid state of the stomach,” and noting that even “those under the best care are liable to it.” Most children are “infected at from two to ten years, Say [sic] one child in forty eats dirt,” but it is potentially devastating: “One dirt-eater upon a plantation, will infect the whole.”<sup>434</sup>

Cachexia Africana was a condition that served as the evidence of A.P.

Merrill’s claim that “no class of people more urgently require, that the physician who attends them in their diseases, should rightly understand their mental characteristics” because “no people can be more completely under the the [sic] influence of the mind

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<sup>433</sup> Cartwright saw in the nursery another proof that “the negro requires government in everything... They let their children suffer and die, or unmercifully abuse them, unless the white man or woman prescribe rules in the nursery for them to go by... The care that white women bestow on the nursery, is one of the principle causes why three hundred thousand Africans, originally imported into the territory of the United States, have increased to four millions.” “Dr. Cartwright on the Caucasians and the Africans,” *DeBow’s Review* 25, July 1858, 55. For a discussion of this discourse in the context of enslaved women’s use of cotton roots as birth control see Liese M. Perrin, “Resisting Reproduction: Reconsidering Slave Contraception in the Old South” *Journal of American Studies* 35(2), 2001. The dynamic of requiring and effacing enslaved women’s labor expanded beyond reproduction as they were the disavowed foundation for most forms of health care on the plantation, serving as the nurses in plantation hospitals and rootworkers and conjurers outside of the master’s purview. See Fett, *Working Cures*, Chapter 5 and Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman? Female Slave in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), Chapter 2.

<sup>434</sup> Thomas Affleck “On the Hygiene of Cotton Plantations...” 435

in sickness, than the negro race.”<sup>435</sup> Since the late-18<sup>th</sup> century West Indian planters and physicians had published a number of references to a disease alternatively titled cachexia, malacia or pica Africanorum, mal d’estomac and dirt-eating, but it was absent in the United States until W.M. Carpenter presented it in a 1844 issue of the *New Orleans Medical Journal*.<sup>436</sup> Carpenter, a professor of materia medica in the Louisiana Medical College, represented Cachexia Africana as a raging epidemic: “there have been instances, in this State, of large planting establishments being entirely broken up by the extensive mortality, resulting among the slaves, from this habit.” The medical profession did not recognize this threat partially due to the lack of medical training and reference books concerning “the colored population of the Southern States.”<sup>437</sup> But it was also a factor of the deceptive nature of the disease itself, which affected only the black population and caused “an invincible crazing for earthy substance...neither bolts nor bars, nor punishment, nor the certainty that it will inevitably end in their death” could curtail the practice. Quoting F.W. Cragin, “the

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<sup>435</sup> A.P. Merrill, M.D., “An Essay on some of the Distinctive Peculiarities of the Negro Race,” *Southern Medical and Surgical Journal* 12(1), January 1856, 90.

<sup>436</sup> I take the various names from John Forbes, Alexander Tweedie, and John Conolly (eds.) *The Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine, Volume II* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper, and Baldwin and Cradock, Paternoster-Row, 1833), 137. John S. Haller, Jr. gives the most in depth history of the diagnosis, but he tends to treat the West Indian and American discourse on the condition as identical. See “The Negro and the Southern Physician: A Study of Medical and Racial Attitudes 1800-1860” *Medical History* 16(3), July 1972. Robert W. Twyman mentions that some “poor white trash” were described as “clay-eaters,” but his analysis and citations are brief. See “The Clay Eater: A New Look at an Old Southern Enigma” *The Journal of Southern History* 37(3), Aug. 1971. The only article I can find on the subject in a US medical journal before Carpenter’s publication is F.W. Cragin’s “Observations on Cachexia Africana or Dirt-Eating” *American Journal of the Medical Sciences* 17(34), Feb. 1836. But this text refers to it as a disease of the West Indies and South America, focusing on the author’s experience in Surinam, and it was not widely cited before Carpenter’s work.

<sup>437</sup> W.M. Carpenter, “Observations on the Cachexia Africana, or the habit and effects of dirt-eating in the negro race” *The New-Orleans Medical Journal* 3, August to October 1844, 148.



only appreciable signs of mental activity exhibited during the course of the disease, are the crafty and cunning plans which the patient most subtly [sic] matures, and as stealthily executes, to procure his desired repast.”<sup>438</sup> Besides the ingestion of clay, mud, plaster, dust, tobacco pipes, etc., the disease could be seen in certain physical and behavioral symptoms like a desire to avoid work, bowel disruptions, dry skin and the whitening of the palms, lips and gums. But, with the exception of earthly consumption, these were also common to “an anaemic condition” and “disease of the heart.”<sup>439</sup> To acquire confirmation the physician had to be rigorous: “the patient frequently exhibits the greatest that [sic] and skill, in throwing his interrogator ‘on the wrong scent’, and if they are aware of the drift of the questions, no artifice can lead them to a confession.” Carpenter thus recommended the physician-cum-detective “take them by surprise” and examine the suspect’s feces, the absence of earthly matter in which would not necessarily exclude the diagnosis.<sup>440</sup>

Reviewing a number of publications from the British colonies in the Caribbean and one from South America, Carpenter has trouble specifying the most likely cause of the disorder. It could be linked to “unwholesome and insufficient food” or “irregularity in eating;” it would therefore be more prevalent in slaves given to indolence or running away.<sup>441</sup> It also resembled that “peculiar state of mind ...the gloomy fatalism which is seen in individuals of the negro race, who imagine

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid, 150 and 154.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid, 159.

themselves to be, what they term ‘tricked,’ or under the influence of the Obean.”<sup>442</sup> Quoting John Hunter, it could be “more of a mental than corporeal affection.”<sup>443</sup> But it could also be related to swampy areas, imitation, or “severity of treatment, giving rise to depressing emotions and to a sense of degradation,” sometimes accompanied with “improper and inadequate fare.”<sup>444</sup> Samuel Cartwright did not experience any confusion about the condition’s origin; he saw dirt-eating as symptom and grouped it with another recently uncovered black disease, Struma Africana, under the title negro consumption.<sup>445</sup> Although medical professionals considered this latter disease to be a form of tuberculosis, Cartwright found it in a different location:

The seat of negro consumption is not in the lungs, stomach, liver or any organ of the body, but in the mind, and its cause is generally mismanagement or bad government on the part of the master, and superstition on the part of the negro. The patients themselves believe they are poisoned; they are right, but it is not the body, but the mind that is poisoned.<sup>446</sup>

Cartwright linked consumption to the influence of conjurers who “inculcate a belief in their miraculous powers to bring good or evil upon those they like or dislike.”<sup>447</sup> I have already detailed one of Cartwright’s grotesque methods for purging that poison. Carpenter, in contrast, struggled with the proper course of treatment. Before settling on a “close wire mask,” he mentions that “some persons, viewing the habit as

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid, 158-9.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>445</sup> See Lunsford P. Yandell, M.D., “Remarks on Struma Africana, or the disease usually called Negro Poison, or Negro Consumption” *The Transylvania Journal of Medicine and the Associated Sciences* 4 1831.

<sup>446</sup> Samuel A. Cartwright, “Report on the Diseases...” *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal*, 705.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid, 706.

voluntary crime, rather than an irresistible propensity, arising from disease, have employed the most severe measures.” He concludes that “this treatment cannot be too strongly [sic] depreciated” without ever naming it.<sup>448</sup> Some masters understood dirt eating as an attempt to return to Africa though suicide; John Williamson, a surgeon who worked in Jamaica, describes the recommended method “to check that spirit...as negroes imagine that if decapitation be inflicted after death, the transition to their native country cannot follow, a humane principle leads the proprietor to have the head of such a negro placed in some prominent situation.”<sup>449</sup>

Carpenter was mistaken in understanding this practice as only punishing a voluntary subject. Colin Dayan has analyzed “the ‘spectacle’ of the suicides’ impaled heads” as a practice that “ushered in a new colonial form of life that demanded unexpected forms of death...The proximity of the common and the sacred, and the apparently arbitrary relation of the two, is a risky, fabulous, and very fleshy matter.” “The residue that I will call *mind*” emerges in this conflict, eventually moving from the terrorized slave to the depersonalized criminal who is dead in law.<sup>450</sup> I would add that this mind is not only conceived as terrorizable, but fundamentally sick. As Dr. Robert Shannon concluded about this cure in his 1794 medical manual, “the negroes have the utmost horror and dread of their bodies being treated in this manner...the efficacy of this expedient, which can only operate upon the mind, is strong proof, that

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<sup>448</sup> W.M. Carpenter, “Observations on the Cachexia Africana...” 166.

<sup>449</sup> John Williamson, M.D., *Medical and Miscellaneous Observations Relative to the West India Islands, Volume 1* (Edinburgh: Printed by Alex Smellie, Printer to the University, 1817), 93.

<sup>450</sup> Colin Dayan, “Legal Terrors” *Representation* 92(1) Fall 2005, 45-6.

the disease, in its origin, is a more mental, than corporeal affection.”<sup>451</sup> We see an origin of the criminal and the mental inmate, inherently raced and institutionalized, formed by the violence that Cartwright cites in his cure for cholera. The grotesque simulation of Africa as savagery within a mile of a plantation was an attempt to reorient the agent of terror from the bodies of enslaved healers to the mystical force of the master. Like the display of unreturning heads, Cartwright sought to demonstrate “how profoundly whites both understood and perverted the mysteries of the spirit.”<sup>452</sup> His aims were similarly “humane,” an effort to provide a mental antidote to a bodily poison, a cure for madness that does not involve the removal of the head. Not that such punishments were absent from his scene of the cure, for the state enabled the master’s and the physician’s monopolization of materia medica through the promise of death. I am thinking here of Virginia’s 1748 prohibition of slave’s use of medicine under penalty of death discussed in the previous chapter. Although Louisiana law did not contain the same circumscription, nor did it regulate apothecary sales to slaves as did South Carolina and Georgia, it punished the use of poison by the enslaved with death or life imprisonment at hard labor.<sup>453</sup> Cartwright did not need to perform any decapitations because the state had assumed that function.

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<sup>451</sup> *Practical Observations on the Operation and Effects of Certain Medicines in the Prevention and Cure of Diseases to Which Europeans are Subject in Hot Climates, and in these Kingdoms* cited in John S. Haller, Jr. “The Negro and the Southern Physician...” 241.

<sup>452</sup> Colin [Joan] Dayan, *Haiti History and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 248.

<sup>453</sup> See Shala Fett *Working Cures* 165 and Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994).

All of which is to say that Davy (Walker)'s "painting himself with poke [berries?]" is undecidable as an act of insanity, a form of treatment, a kind of violence, and many other things. *Phytolacca decandra* or *americana*, or common pokeweed is a strong-smelling herbaceous plant with inked-juiced purple berries native to the east of North America.<sup>454</sup> Like so much else in the Americas, scholars have a hard time deciding to which nation or culture pokeweed properly belongs. Larry Mitch states that the Lenape peoples "probably were the first to use pokeweed in medicine."<sup>455</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary attributes the first publication on the plant to John Clayton, a British plant collector in Virginia who mentioned "poake-root, i.e. *solanum bacciferum*, a strong purge, and by most deemed poison" in a 1687 description of Appomattoc medical practices.<sup>456</sup> Shala Fett sees in it a demonstration of the complexity of African American herbalism: "The berries crushed in alcohol were given for rheumatism, a decoction of pokeweed tops made an external remedy for boils, and the new leaves were eaten as a spring tonic," all of which required special care "for the roots could be fatally poisonous."<sup>457</sup> I have been able to find ten references to the plant in the WPA interviews: five ex-slaves discuss it as a treatment for rheumatism, three for use as dye for clothes, one as food and another explained "if

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<sup>454</sup> Patients, Register of, 1853-1854. Series 1, Volume 29. Records of Eastern State Hospital, 1770-2009, State government records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>455</sup> Larry W. Mitch, "Common Pokeweed," *Weed Technology* 8(4), Oct-Dec 1994, 888.

<sup>456</sup> "A Letter from the Rev. Mr. John Clayton, afterwards Dean of Kildare in Ireland, to Dr. Grew, in Answer to several Queries relating to Virginia, sent to him by that Gentleman, A.D. 1687" in Charles Hutton, George Shaw, and Richard Pearson (eds.) *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London: Vol. VIII* (London: Printed by and for C. and R. Baldwin, New Bridge-Street, Blackfriars, 1809), 331.

<sup>457</sup> Shala Fett *Working Cures* 74

you'll take poke root and cut it in small pieces and string it and put it around a baby's neck it will cut teeth easy."<sup>458</sup> I have also been able to locate it in various 19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> century medical manuals for physicians or planters, where it is recommended in the treatment of rheumatism, cancer and syphilis, but not as a purgative or cathartic on account of its toxic qualities.<sup>459</sup>

The application of poke berries to Davy (Walker)'s body could have been an act of healing that, if applied by his mother or another enslaved healer, may also have been a crime deserving of death. I have not seen pokeweed mentioned with madness; given that the suppression of black healing practice was the very definition of health, order and productivity advanced by physicians, masters, etc., perhaps I was never meant to. Even if I could find a specific reference to pokeweed as a treatment of insanity in either white or black discourse, I would hesitate to apply that to Davy (Walker)'s case for some of the same reasons I have trouble making Cachexia Africana and pica synonymous.<sup>460</sup> Namely, applying contemporary psychiatric and

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<sup>458</sup> Lou Smith, Oklahoma Narratives, Volume XIII, The Library of Congress, "Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938," <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html> (accessed 5/25/14), 305. For rheumatism see Joseph William Carter, Indiana, V; Mittie Freeman, Arkansas, II; Harriet Miller, Georgia, IV; Gus Smith, Missouri, X; and Annie Young, Oklahoma, XIII. For dye see Sam and Louisa Everett, Florida, III; Duncan Gaines, Florida, III; and Bert Luster, Oklahoma, XIII. For food see Bill McNeil, South Carolina, XIV.

<sup>459</sup> See for example James Ewell, *The Planter's and Mariner's Medical Companion* (Philadelphia: Printed by John Bioren, 1807), 89 and Thos. S. Blair, M.D., *A Practitioner's Handbook of Materia Medica and Therapeutics* (Philadelphia: The Medical Council, 1907), 178-80.

<sup>460</sup> Some historians have come close to making them identical. Harriet A. Washington argues that the "disorder, which is called pica today, is not racially specific and the cravings it inspires were probably related to the rampant malnutrition among slaves," which undoubtedly determines the phenomenon, but it is not necessarily the last instance. See *Medical Apartheid* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), 36. Richard Sheridan notes that just as causes of dirt-eating eluded plantation doctors, "so are modern authorities puzzled by the practice," which does not manufacture a consensus but still makes the conditions and the doctors equivalent. See *Doctors and Slaves: A Medical and Demographic History of Slavery in the British West Indies, 1680-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 217.

medical diagnoses onto antebellum bodies effaces the struggles over current definitions—pica for instance is proving hard to discipline as iron-deficiency and/or part of the obsessive compulsive spectrum—as well as prior ones in a transferential relation.<sup>461</sup> I am still not quite sure how to speculate responsibly about the possibility that Davy (Walker) defined his experience as madness, or how any other enslaved men or women defined or treated it. But if there was a practice of healing occurring at this time it was likely dissimulated, especially if the participants knew of Delphy, an enslaved woman “regarded as a conjuror” and executed by the state of Virginia almost 50 years earlier for attempting to poison her mistress with a “decoction of pokeroot.”<sup>462</sup> It is possible that his owner, who may be Mr. Spencer Walker, who could be his father, may have interpreted a community healing practice as an individual symptom of insanity. It is also possible that his father mentions the form of Davy (Walker)’s labor because he had read Affleck’s warning that slaves’ practice of carrying heavy baskets on their heads “when the muscles are relaxed by fatigue, cannot but be injurious, and *is* a cause of sickness and accidents” and might understand Davy (Walker)’s condition as the effect of poor management in need of professional correction.<sup>463</sup>

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Utilizing contemporary diagnostic categories is not necessarily repressive—considering the practice in the context of different regimes of nutrition is a promising start—but neither is it an unveiling of ideological mystification. Rescued as the victims of a contemporary disease, enslaved men and women are denied the act of self-destruction as escape.

<sup>461</sup> See Zainab Ali, “Pica in people with intellectual disability: a literature review of aetiology, epidemiology and complications” *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability* 26(2), 2001

<sup>462</sup> Trial of Delphy, cited in Shala Fett, *Working Cures* 163.

<sup>463</sup> Thomas Affleck, “On the Hygiene of Cotton Plantations...” 484.

Davy (Walker)'s owner may have read Cartwright, too; the classification of whipping as treatment could be a sign that this was interpreted as a case of dysaesthesia aethiopsis, "or hebetude of the mind and obtuse sensibility of body." This was commonly called "rascality" because its victims slighted their work, raised disturbances with their overseers and "seem to be insensible to pain when subjected to punishment." Cartwright explained that these actions were not intentional on the part of the slave, but were the "natural offspring of negro liberty," as was easily observed in the unenslaved: "to narrate its symptoms and effects among them would be to write a history of the ruins and dilapidation of Hayti."<sup>464</sup> Treatment consisted of proper subjection as well as the stimulation of the skin to "assist in decarbonizing the blood," which was accomplished by washing the patient "with warm water and soap; then, to anoint it all over with oil, and to slap the oil in with a broad leather strap; then to put the patient to some kind of hard work in the open air and sunshine."<sup>465</sup> While many contemporary commentators have pointed to the presence of the whip as treatment, they have not addressed its specific form. Also utilized against the conjurers in the cholera cure, the broadness of the leather distinguishes it from the thin strip in bull and cow whips, as well as from the cat-o-nine tails, the switch and the paddle. It most closely resembles the "flopping paddle," composed of a strip of leather "about as broad as the palm of the hand" attached to a wooden handle, primarily used by slave traders because it would cause incredible amounts of pain but

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<sup>464</sup> Samuel Cartwright, "A Report on the Peculiarities..." *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 710-1.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, 712.



not lacerate the skin and leave the physical signs of disobedience.<sup>466</sup> Cartwright is perhaps better understood as physician of the slave trade first and the plantation second, as much of his theory and technique seems to originate in the slave markets of the cities where he practiced, Natchez and New Orleans. The use of bathing and oil to enhance the appearance of health, the darkness of the skin as an indication of strength, the measurement of labor as the classification of disease—all of these Cartwright holds in common with many of those who bought and sold thousands of enslaved men and women in those two cities each year.<sup>467</sup> Indeed, drapetomania was less an original diagnosis than a citation of the Louisiana Civil Code, specifically Article 2505: “The vices of character which give rise to the redhibition of slaves, are confined to the cases in which it is proved: that the slave has committed a capital crime; or, that he is addicted to theft; or, that he is in the habit of running away.”<sup>468</sup> Davy (Walker) did not need to be sent to an asylum to be marked insane; he merely had to be sold.

### **Screaming Commodities**

In 1842, the Supreme Court of Arkansas dismissed the insanity of a slave named Sophia, thus overturning a previous reversal of exchange between buyer and seller. On June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1839, she had been sold by Pyeatt to Spencer for \$650 with a warranty for health and soundness. In the spring of 1840, Spencer attempted to return

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<sup>466</sup> John Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life Sufferings and Escape of John Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Now in England* (London: L.A. Chamerovzow, 1855), 114.

<sup>467</sup> I am heavily indebted here to Walter Johnson’s analysis of how race was materialized, performed and recorded in the New Orleans slave market and his discussion of Cartwright in this context. See *Soul By Soul*, Chapter 5.

<sup>468</sup> See Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law...* 131.

her; when Pyeatt refused, Spencer sued for a breach of warranty, arguing that Sophia was insane and asking to be reimbursed for her price and the money spent in “her board and sleep, and in trying to have her cured.”<sup>469</sup> When the case went before a jury, each of the six witnesses offered different accounts of the time and amount of her sanity. One “who lived and worked at Pryeatt’s”—an overseer, I assume—stated that she had a “vicious, bad disposition, but not deranged as far as the witness could know.” Still, “she frequently talked to herself, and would laugh without any one speaking to her.” Another witness, the brother of Sophia’s original master, described her as “sound in mind” and “an obedient, good house servant.” He had only seen her twice after she was sold to Pyeatt, once finding her in the woods having run away from her new owner. As he took “home,” she seemed “obstinate;” when the witness told her to walk faster or be whipped, “she looked wild as negroes usually do, when threatened. She said that she had run away because she wanted to go to her children.” A third witness, who is only described as having “staid a day at Pyeatt’s,” viewed her as “obstinate and disagreeable, because she wanted to go to her children. She seemed much devoted to her children.”<sup>470</sup>

The witness with the strongest opinion of Sophia’s insanity—“she is deranged and valueless”—first met her as she was being whipped by Spencer and spends most of his or her testimony describing the scene. A few days after Spencer bought her from Pyeatt, “he had her *stripped* and *staked down* on the ground; her feet and hands

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<sup>469</sup> *Pyeatt v. Spencer*, 4 Ark. 563 (1842).

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 564.

extended and fastened at the stake; and her face downwards.” Between the following two sentences, there appears to be a missing description of the reason for Sophia’s punishment:

He appeared calm and deliberate, and was whipping her at intervals, using a cowhide, with a plaited buckskin lash about fifteen inches long. He asked her what made her do so, and she said that Bedford and Buchanan told her, that if she staid there, she would be whipped to death.

Buchanan “sold the slave to Pyeatt,” as another witness states, and I assume that he is her original owner. Bedford is unmentioned in the appellate case report, but he could be Buchanan’s brother, the second witness. I believe their promise of her violent death “made her” her attempt to escape shortly after being sold to Spencer. But instead of expanding upon the context of Sophia’s torture, the witness moved closer and “examined the negro, *and found her to look wild.*” Then Spencer “*took salt and a cob, and salted her back.*”<sup>471</sup>

The final witness appears to be a physician, possibly the one hired to effect Sophia’s cure. After testifying that he found her to be deranged, the witness proceeds to expound upon the nature of madness: “Derangement is produced from various causes.” The whipping Sophia received “would not produce it in one case in a thousand. Strong attachment for her children and grief at being separated from them, with severe chastisement, would be more likely to produce it.” The jury “found that the negro was unsound, when sold, and that Pyeatt knew it” and awarded Spencer

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<sup>471</sup>Ibid, 563-4. Whoever wrote this case report—a clerk I presume, possibly the judge—almost exclusively uses italics in this witness’s description of Spencer’s punishment. Although Sophia is described as wild elsewhere in the report, its emphasis here links it to the effects of torture.

\$718; the appellate court held the “opinion that the proof fails to establish the facts of insanity” and reversed. In his decision, Judge Dickinson made it clear that he was the true victim of this case: “It is with pain and sensibility that the court feels itself constrained to remark that whatever seeming wildness and aberration of mind might be perceived in the slave, it is but reasonable to suppose, was caused by grief and the excessive punishment of her owner.”<sup>472</sup>

Asylums in the Free States either rejected black patients or housed a handful of them in separate, nonessential spaces; the majority of asylums in the Slave States followed the same policy when they began to materialize in the last couple of decades before the civil war.<sup>473</sup> Courthouses are the largest depositories of black madness, primarily preserved in the records of breach of warranty trials. As with the other institutions I have been discussing in this chapter, courtrooms struggled with the proper definitions and regulations of enslaved minds. For those she served, Sophia appears and disappears as deranged in relation to indolence, wildness, kin, violence, grief and value. A look of wildness could function as a general racial trait or the sign of an underlying madness; her devotion to her children, a slave’s indolence or a shattering melancholy. Her insanity was legible to the jury but unproven to the judge,

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<sup>472</sup> Ibid, 570. He did not feel compelled to discuss the current or future location of Sophia’s “home.” One of the witnesses says that Spencer sold her in 1839 and then saw her working for yet another man. She may have been returned to Spencer at some point, who then attempted to return her to Pyeatt in 1840. Or perhaps she escaped.

<sup>473</sup> There were notable exceptions to this trend, but the asylum in Williamsburg was unique in its sustained nonsegregation of patients by race before the 1840s. For an effective overview of asylum policies towards and populations of African Americans in the antebellum US see Gerald N. Grob, *Mental Institutions in American: Social Policy to 1875* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 243-256.

who could not quite reconcile the extent of the disease and the necessity of the master's "uncontrolled authority over the body...to render the submission of the slave perfect."<sup>474</sup> Other courts displayed similar problems measuring the value of violence or sanity as well as defining the mental health and ability of chattel. I will briefly look at some attempts to fix the parameters of character, sanity, intelligence and management, particularly through abstractions of gender and value, in order to think about how Davy (Walker) could have been appraised.

In a lengthy "Lego-Medical Memorandum" on the soundness of slaves intended to assist their readers' practice in the courtroom, the editors of the *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* conclude early on that "all these definitions are vague, insufficient and unsatisfactory."<sup>475</sup> As opposed to the Civil Code of Louisiana, which drew from Roman law to formulate a general principle of redhibition as well as a specific list of defects or vices that could nullify the sales of humans and other animals, doctors in South Carolina had to shift through different series of statutes and cases that had only recently begun to consider humans as chattel.<sup>476</sup> Up to this point, the authors had been following the conclusion in *Stucky v. Cylburn* that "the same definition, as to physical unsoundness, will apply as well to a negro as to a horse," but were unable to discern a foundation amongst the various references to disease, infirmity, secret maladies, perfect in structure, good in all

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<sup>474</sup> *State v. Mann*, 13 N.C. 263 (1829).

<sup>475</sup> D.J. Cain and F. Peyre Porcher, "Lego-Medical Memorandum" *The Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 7(1) January 1852, 76. The author is uncredited and I am assuming that the journal's editors wrote the piece, which is continued from an earlier edition I cannot locate.

<sup>476</sup> See Jenny Bourne Wahl, *The Bondsman's Burden: An Economic Analysis of the Common Law of Southern Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

particulars, etc.<sup>477</sup> The authors finally decide that “a horse is sound, if not laboring under such disease or infirmity, or symptoms of approaching disease or infirmity, as to incapacitate him for the safe performance of all reasonable work, of a character for which he was purchased.” To extend this to human slave, who like “the domesticated animal is necessarily in an artificial state,” the authors invoke the principle “a sound price implies a sound commodity” and summarize thirty five rulings on slave sales, often in vague and insufficient terms.<sup>478</sup> For example, they present two foundational rulings in the following fashion: “23. The doctrine of implied warranty does not extend to the moral qualities of the slave. (Smith vs. McCall...) 24. Warranty of the soundness of a slave includes soundness of the mind as well as soundness of the body (Stinson ads. Piper...).”<sup>479</sup> The authors do not specify which qualities are considered moral as opposed to mental or bodily or whether a moral malady could be the evidence or cause of an unsound mind or body. This silence is partially an effect of those rulings, as the first sought to forestall these kinds of questions and the second took them for granted.

Ariela Gross has productively read the decision in *Smith v. McCall* as an attempt to foreclose considerations of slave subjecthood at the moment of her total objectification as property in law.<sup>480</sup> In *dictum*, Judge Nott considers the “impossibility of establishing a scale by which the moral qualities” of a slave could

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<sup>477</sup> *Stucky v. Cylburn*, Cheves L. (S.C.) 186 (1840)

<sup>478</sup> D.J. Cain and F. Peyre Porcher, “Lego-Medical Memorandum” 79.

<sup>479</sup> D.J. Cain and F. Peyre Porcher, “Lego-Medical Memorandum” 82.

<sup>480</sup> Ariela J. Gross, *Double Character: Slavery and Mastery in the Antebellum Southern Courtroom* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006), 72, and “Pandora’s Box: Slave Character on Trial in the Antebellum Deep South” *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 7(2) 1995.

be measured because, strictly speaking, she does not have any: “The character of a slave depends so much upon the treatment he receives, the opportunities he has to commit crimes, and the temptation to which he is exposed.” Slave character is an effect of the master, who adequately cares for his property or allows it to degenerate through neglect or abuse. Slave non-morality in the absence of regulation is figured as criminality and/of sexuality, but as Nott continues, its primary measure is monetary: “A vice which would render him worthless in one situation, would scarcely impair his value in another. A habit that would render him useless to one man, would scarcely be considered a blot upon his character in the hands of another.” Vice and habit appear interchangeable—making all slave desire addiction—as do questions of character and value. But Judge Nott worries that this instrumentalization of human existence might spread beyond its proper object: if this calculation “should be extended to one fault, it must be to all, from the highest crime...to the smallest deviation...Such a decision from this court, when publically known, would be worse than opening Pandora’s box upon the community.”<sup>481</sup> Gross reads this as anxiety over the legal recognition of enslaved persons’ “volition as moral agents,” enabling black men and women to testify against their betters, to a certain degree.<sup>482</sup> But Nott may also have been concerned that the violence and techniques of objectification essential to the operation of slavery would be directed against the non-enslaved, calculating the value of the master or judge. But he was “satisfied” to exclude moral

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<sup>481</sup> *Smith v. McCall* 1 McCord, 224 (SC 1821).

<sup>482</sup> Ariela Gross *Double Character* 96.

qualities from an implicit warranty for soundness. Seeing as how sellers could still issue express warranties for moral qualities, and that Louisiana and Mississippi sometimes required newly imported slaves to have written certifications for being of “good moral character” and “not in the habit of running away,” Nott did very little to close the subject.<sup>483</sup>

*Smith v. McCall* was also an attempt to limit the sound-price rule, where a slave’s price served as an implicit warranty of his soundness. By the time of the case, 1821, the merchant-friendly *caveat emptor* had become the rule in the Northern States, but was only sporadically applied in the South during the 1840s and was practically absent in South Carolina and Louisiana.<sup>484</sup> Although these two states were divided by their legal traditions, they were connected as two essential nodes in the American slave trade, with New Orleans housing the single largest market in the US and South Carolina transforming from the only state importing slaves from Africa and the Caribbean when the international trade was abolished (and for some time after) to the second largest exporter of human commodities in the 1830s.<sup>485</sup> To analyze a complex legal process somewhat reductively, *caveat emptor* favored the practices of the growing market economy in the North and would have greatly supplemented the commercial enterprise of Southern slave traders, but the sound price rule, Louisiana’s

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<sup>483</sup> The quotes are from Louisiana’s certificates, which were only required from 1829-31. Mississippi’s law requiring certificates was in effect from the state’s founding to the civil war, but only sporadically enforced. See Steven Deyle *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 54 and 306, n27.

<sup>484</sup> I am drawing from Andrew Fede, “Legal Protection for Slave Buyers in the US South: A Caveat concerning Caveat Emptor,” *The American Journal of Legal History* 31(4), Oct. 1987.

<sup>485</sup> See Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 12.



redhibition statutes and other legal supports for the buyer further advanced the accumulation of the planter class.<sup>486</sup> These protected and encouraged the tremendous investment in and accumulation of slaves—as Steven Deyle has calculated, in 1860 “the only form of capital worth more than slaves nationally was land, and within the southern states the slave population had greater market value than the land they worked.”<sup>487</sup> Legal bias for slave purchasers also regulated the incredible volume of human traffic: between 1820 and 1860, there were an estimated 256,611 slave sales in South Carolina alone.<sup>488</sup> Where the buyer beware doctrine tended to forestall litigation, disputes over slave sales required judges to determine what a seller knew and represented at the time of the sale, which called for multiple witnesses (over fifty in *Johnson v. Wideman* discussed below) and the expert testimony of physicians.<sup>489</sup> But the legal, commercial and medical policing of soundness was also a function of the indeterminacy of enslaved sanity and the possibility of rebellion.

Four years after *Smith v. McCall*, Judge Nott did not express a similar anxiety when including the enslaved mind within the general warranty of the soundness, but he performed a similar kind of effacement. In *Stinson ads. Piper, Hogan v. Bowlare*, Nott faced two cases with express warranties where the buyers argued that “want of understanding” made a slave unsound, and the sellers countered that soundness only

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<sup>486</sup> See Andrew Fede, “Legal Protection for Slave Buyers...” 340-50.

<sup>487</sup> Steven Deyle, “An ‘Abominable’ New Trade: The Closing the African Slave Trade and the Changing Patterns of US Political Power, 1808-60” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66(4) Oct. 2009, 840-1

<sup>488</sup> Steven Deyle *Carry Me Back* 295. The figure is extrapolated from estimated court sales in the state.

<sup>489</sup> See Jenny Bourne Wahl, *The Bondsman’s Burden*, 10.

covered physical capacities. Turning to contemporary texts of medical jurisprudence, Nott struggled to understand “whether unsoundness of mind proceeds from moral or physical causes, or may proceed from both.”<sup>490</sup> In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, legal conceptions of insanity were colliding with nascent theories of criminality and what Benjamin Rush called “moral derangement...that state of mind in which the passions act involuntarily through the instrumentally of the will, without any disease of the understanding.”<sup>491</sup> Legal writings on madness were attempting to account for these new forms that did not exist with previous definitions of competence or culpability; Nott thus encountered a theory of insanity arising from “a defect of the organs of the body,” and another that argued “insanity is wholly a disease of the mind,” as well as a description of three classes of maniacs: “the men who became so through pride, the girls through love, and the women through jealousy.”<sup>492</sup> But Nott does not consider himself before an open Pandora’s Box: “the observations can only tend to shew what indeed it was my wish to shew, how unprofitable such enquiry must be.” When it comes to the mind of the slave, the cause of unsoundness fundamentally does matter because “we know the effect. It is to deprive the purchaser of the benefit of his purchase.”<sup>493</sup> As opposed to intricate and disruptive measurements necessary to judge vice and character, insanity and idiocy were easily understood in terms of “a capacity to perform the ordinary duties of a slave.” Although he could not “find a

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<sup>490</sup> *Stinson ads. Piper 3 McCord 251* (1825)

<sup>491</sup> Benjamin Rush, “Medical Jurisprudence” in *Sixteen Introductory Lectures, to Courses of Lectures upon the Institutes and Practice of Medicine* (Philadelphia: Published by Bradford and Innskeep, 1811), 380.

<sup>492</sup> *Stinson ads. Piper 3 McCord 252-3*

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid*, 253.

single case where the question has been made” in regards to “this species of property,” he concluded that this was because “no doubt has been entertained on the subject.”<sup>494</sup> The mental death of the enslaved was as unremarkable as it was uninteresting.

Enslaved insanity was rarely uncontested when mobilized in the courtroom; various parties struggled with its facts and value both in the specific case and in broader trial of the black race, as heard in Judge Garland’s lament that “it is very difficult, if not nearly impossible, to fix a standard of intellect by which slaves are to be judged.”<sup>495</sup> Nott assumed that this would be both immaterial and obvious, that labor would be the measure of value and sanity; yet contests arose over definitions of the basic standard of “ordinary” slave labor and the understanding of what prevented it—insanity, idiocy, viciousness, a master’s cruelty or negligence, a seller’s lies about a slave’s skills, etc. In *Johnson v. Wideman*, a tort case concerning a “habitual runaway” with “habitual drunkenness” sold as “honest” and “sober,” a judge declared “such habits were easy of correction by prudent masters, and it was only with the imprudent that they were allowed to injure the slave. Like master like man.”<sup>496</sup> In a case concerning a buyer who “desired to have a chuckle-headed fool, that had just sense enough to do what he was told” and received “a little more of the valuable quantity of mental weakness than he bargained for,” the court ruled for the seller

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<sup>494</sup> Ibid, 251 and 253.

<sup>495</sup> *Briant v. Marsh* 19 La. 391 (1840)

<sup>496</sup> *Johnson v. Wideman* Rice 343 (SC 1839). The quotation is from the original trial judge’s jury instructions. The appellate case is unique in including the trial report, which summarizes the testimony of each of the more than 50 witnesses. Ariela Gross also reviews this case in *Double Character* 80-4.

because there was “no proof of absolute idiocy.”<sup>497</sup> Yet *Sloan v. Williford* ruled that “if the slave, though not actually an idiot, be so weak in understanding and possess so dim a reason, as to be unable to comprehend the ordinary labors of a slave, and perform them with the expertness that is common with that uneducated class of person,” the warrant for soundness was breached.<sup>498</sup> Another buyer sued for a partial return on account of mental unsoundness, explaining that “at the time of the sale the boy was crying, and the complainant was unable to judge of his mental capacity.” The court stated that while “the evidence makes it certain the slave has less intelligence than persons of his age and condition usually possess” and could not manage horses as the master intended, “for the ordinary services of a field hand, it is probable he will be found equal to other slaves of his age.”<sup>499</sup> Slave affect is a distraction or reproduction of the master, intelligence is both valued and unwanted, labor is an imprecise measurement of a disability with an undetermined time, and the violence of the trade is incalculable.

A Louisiana case, *Icar v. Soares*, exemplifies this struggle over the nature of mental unsoundness, as an enslaved woman is figured as a runaway, insane, stupid, and an idiot before finally being summarized as anti-value. The editors of the *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* present it as “12. Craziness or idiocy is an absolute vice, and where it is not apparent will annul the sale;” in addition to the habit

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<sup>497</sup> *Lookridge v. Baldwin* 20 Tx 303 (1857).

<sup>498</sup> *Sloan v. Williford* 25 NC 309 (1848). It also considered a slave’s insanity a breach even if it was not apparent at the time of the sale, if it occurred during a lucid interval—which could have been used to “prove” Sophia’s insanity.

<sup>499</sup> *Farnsworth v. Earnest* 7 Humphreys 25 (Tenn. 1846)

of running away or addiction to theft, Louisiana redhibition statutes allowed slave buyers to cancel the sale of a slave or demand compensation if an absolute vice of “leprosy, madness and epilepsy” was undeclared at the time of purchase.<sup>500</sup> As Louisiana’s legal system was based in civil law, the judge was not adding idiocy to the list of absolute vices but referring to an article defining vices or defects as something that renders the thing sold “absolutely useless.”<sup>501</sup> The case centered on the purchase of a slave named Kate by Rose Icar, a freewoman of color, on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1834; within three or four days, “it was discovered the slave was crazy, and run away.” Several witnesses testified that the Kate “was very stupid; that being told to do one thing, would do another.” The judge personally inspected Kate, concluded she was “far destitute of mental capacity” and ruled for Icar. The seller, Anthony Soares, appealed, arguing that Kate’s “craziness” was unproven and “the utmost that can be inferred from the testimony is, that she was rather stupid.” The appellate judge decided that “whether the subject of this action is idiotic from nativity, or is laboring under one of the numberless derangements of an intellect originally sound” could not be answered by the available records. It was also immaterial, as “the slave in question was wholly, and perhaps worse than useless.”<sup>502</sup>

The appellate report does not mention Icar’s race or gender; I only know these markers because Ariela Gross discusses this case using the original docket, presenting it as an example of the gendering of slave unsoundness. In her extensive overview of

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<sup>500</sup> D.J. Cain and F. Peyre Porcher, “Lego-Medical Memorandum” 80.

<sup>501</sup> See Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law...* 130.

<sup>502</sup> *Icar v. Soares* 7 La 517 (1835).

the jurisprudence of slave sales, Gross states that enslaved men were commonly figured in terms of morality and character, their elopement or failure at labor attributed to “faithlessness, dishonesty, indolence, and insubordination,” but enslaved women were described as mad, stupid or idiotic.<sup>503</sup> Gross considers “the absence of white fear of ‘Nat’ when the slave at issue was a woman” as a reason why “white Southerners found it easier to imagine black women incompetent than as vicious,” but I find this explanation misleading.<sup>504</sup> As I have been arguing in this chapter, there was not a clear split between managerial conceptions of a slave’s moral character and the medical profession’s concern with the diseases of the black mind. The very figure of Nat Turner that Gross deploys here to emphasize this distinction actually problematizes it, although I will talk more about this specific example in my conclusion. Enslaved men and women practiced different kinds of rebellion and were targeted divergently, but not in a simplistic equation of men with badness and women with madness. Legal representations of slaves are not necessarily determined by this discourse, of course; the race and gender of Kate’s master demonstrates how legal subjects can be abstracted from multiple social positions, even if the visibility of Rose Icar is somewhat unclear.

Gross is correct in highlighting the role of insurgency in this litigation, although I would expand its scope and effect. Using her data from Adams County, Mississippi, there were twice as many warranty cases in the 1830s than in the

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<sup>503</sup> Ariela J. Gross, *Double Character*, 75.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

1820s.<sup>505</sup> I assume this holds for the other slave states, with Louisiana a possible exception due to its prohibition of the interstate slave trade between 1831-4. The majority of appellate rulings on slave sales occur after 1830; the agricultural and medical journals I have been reviewing also emerged around this time. I do not mean to reduce a number of social, economic, ideological, political, and ecological factors to one event, nor do I intend to isolate that event from multiple currents of rebellion. But the Nat Turner uprising of 1831 disrupted hegemonic understandings of control and safety, on the plantation and in the market; this would have been the case even if it had not happened in Virginia, the largest exporter of slaves for sale. Turner was inconsistently conceptualized as a “demented fanatic,” as the failure of the black intellect or white morality, as a lone manipulator of his flock or a small part of a network reaching North, as proof of the savagery inside the black body or the result of external manipulation.<sup>506</sup> The anxiety and ambiguity surrounding the event and the individual were the “cause” of this new emphasis on the mind of the enslaved, which struggled to decide whether madness, morality or some combination was the cause of insurgency.

As opposed to a clear separation of mental illness and moral character along gendered lines, I see two processes at work in these cases: the invention of personality disorder and the tenuous visibility of insurgency. The codification of

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<sup>505</sup> Ibid, 164, Table 7. There were 15 warranty suits in the 1820s and 36 in the 1830s.

<sup>506</sup> Thomas Roderick Dew, “Abolition of Negro Slavery,” in Drew Gilpin Faust (ed.) *The Ideology of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 68. See Herbert Aptheker, *Nat Turner’s Slave Rebellion* (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc, 1966), 57-107.

running away, theft and incapacity to labor as disorder, irreducible to disease or morality, can be understood with the contemporaneous appearances of monomania, moral insanity, and other diagnoses in the constitution of a new delinquent subject.<sup>507</sup> Yet this process was just as strongly connected with production of black subjection in criminal law, where enslaved and free blacks could not testify against whites and the enslaved could only become persons as the perpetrators or victims of crime. As Saidiya Hartman summarizes, “the recognition and/or stipulation of agency as criminality served to identify personhood as punishment. Within the terms of the law, the enslaved was either a will-less object or a chastened agent.”<sup>508</sup> The limited acceptance of slave “testimony” in warranty cases, only admissible as a statements concerning illness made to a physician, adds to Hartman’s genealogy of black criminality, for the mentally ill slave appears as the precondition of antisocial personality disorder.<sup>509</sup>

The gendering of this subject was performed in different practices of insurgency; as running away was not enslaved women’s primary method of resistance, the overabundance of men in cases involving escape is misrecognized by Gross as the confirmation of a stereotype.<sup>510</sup> Whether running away, feigning illness or organizing uprisings, enslaved women’s insurgency was punished in way that was

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<sup>507</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Abnormal and Discipline and Punish*.

<sup>508</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 80.

<sup>509</sup> On testimony, see Ariela Gross, *Double Character*, 68-71. Gross celebrates this and other discursive appearances of the enslaved in these trials as a recognition of agency, rather than its simulation.

<sup>510</sup> See Angela Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” in Joy James (ed.), *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1998) and Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman*, 70-90.



fundamentally invisible to the law: sexual violence. Masters and mistresses sexually assaulted enslaved men as well, but the rape of black women was normalized by the discourse on their wild sexuality as well as the nonstatus of the assault as an “offense not affecting the existence of the slave...as a person,” according to Thomas Cobb.<sup>511</sup> Unlike murder or dismemberment, it was not considered injury “because it did not decrease productivity or diminish value—on the contrary, it might actually increase the captive’s magnitude of value.”<sup>512</sup> With a punishment rendered unremarkable and a violence disavowed as seduction, insurgent enslaved women would not have been represented in court in the same way as men; suffering from an invisible injury, some would have seemed insane.<sup>513</sup>

These cases are filled with calculations of a slave’s value. A defendant introduces evidence to show that “the character of said slave as a runaway” lowers his value \$200-\$400 from the \$800 spent to purchase him.<sup>514</sup> A physician estimates that if a slave “had possessed ordinary capacity of mind, [she] would have been worth in the market eleven or twelve hundred dollars; but, in her actual condition, was not worth more than five or six hundred dollars.”<sup>515</sup> In another case, “five or six witnesses swear that the slave Mary Ann is worth absolutely nothing...two physicians who examined the girl, and were of the opinion she had very little sense,--so little,

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<sup>511</sup> Thomas Cobb, *An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery* (Philadelphia: T. & J. W. Johnson & Co., 1858), 86. See Thomas A. Foster, “The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20(3) September 2011.

<sup>512</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 95.

<sup>513</sup> Enslaved men and women were not present at these trials. Kate’s examination appears to be an exception. See Ariela Gross, *Double Character*, 41.

<sup>514</sup> *Ward v. Reynolds* 32 Ala. 387 (1858)

<sup>515</sup> *Athey v. Olive* 34 Ala. 712 (1859)

they stated, they would not accept her as a gift.”<sup>516</sup> It would have cost Davy (Walker)’s owner \$700-\$800 to have him treated in the asylum for a decade.<sup>517</sup> Holding him in a workhouse or jail for that time could have cost between \$650 and \$1100.<sup>518</sup> In the Richmond market, a “best boy” between 15 and 18 years old was sold for \$850-\$1000 in 1854; in 1860, when Davy (Walker) was 23, he would have been valued at \$1550-\$1650 if he was deemed a “No. 1 man” by the traders.<sup>519</sup> Interest and duty may have aligned for this master; he might have had as much concern for the slave as a person as he had for Davy (Walker) as an investment. Or he was merely trying to dispose of an ungiftable commodity. It is immaterial. Fred Moten displaces Marx’s table, whose value is communicated in a misrecognized speech, with the commodity that screams, “the irreducible materiality—the broken and irreducible maternity” that is before the event of exchange, that is the “capacity for exchange and the capacity for a literary, performative, phonographic disruption of the protocols of exchange.”<sup>520</sup> Misheard in warranty trials as symptoms of insanity, idiocy, or the indolence of caring for lost children, these screams destroyed value, frustrated exchange and were dismissed as unproven. I do not mean to neglect the capacity for resistance that Moten also includes in the scream—I will try to think

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<sup>516</sup> *Briant v. Marsh* 19 La. 391 (1840)

<sup>517</sup> Todd Savitt lists the cost as \$1.50 a week between 1846-56 in *Slavery and Medicine*, 248.

<sup>518</sup> The lower price comes from the \$0.1875 per day charged by the Charleston workhouse in the 1850s, which charged an extra \$0.25 per correction. The higher estimate comes from an atypical jail run by a slave trader in Richmond at the cost of \$0.30 a day in 1860. Maurice D. McInnis, *Slaves Waiting for Sale: Abolitionist Art and the American Slave Trade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 106 and 103.

<sup>519</sup> Prices according to trade circulars and reports compiled in Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 290.

<sup>520</sup> Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 12 and 10.

about the possibilities of Davy (Walker)'s writing and witnessing in the conclusion.

But the violence of exchange can sometimes be deafening.

### **Asylum, Prison, Plantation**

If this institution [the poorhouse] is opened up for the reception of Lunatick Slaves free of charge, our Cells will be filled to overflowing.

--Charleston Commissioners of the Poor (1823)<sup>521</sup>

As the number and ferocity of abolitionist and pro-slavery conflicts grew in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “the asylum appears as a happy twin of slavery. Indeed, insanity and the asylums that housed the afflicted were always shadowed by the national debates over slavery and abolition... Lunatics, like slaves, were deprived of the right to vote, to sign contracts, to make wills, and to hold property.”<sup>522</sup> Slaves, of course, were property and could be lunatics, but Benjamin Reiss’ analogy is an attempt to replicate the popular imagination of that time, as exemplified in George Fitzhugh’s discourse briefly discussed at the beginning of the previous chapter. Where considerations of slavery could lead to uncomfortable revelations about mass slaughter, the mental institution promised a rebirth of the citizen after a short confinement. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, David Rothman describes “a cult of asylum [that] swept the country” in the 1830s, fueled by a faith in the cure of those unable to bear the stress and pace of an increasingly civilized society.<sup>523</sup> Rothman considers this as a national movement, but the institutions were concentrated in the

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<sup>521</sup> Cited in Peter McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias and Madness: Insanity in South Carolina from the Colonial Period to the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 174.

<sup>522</sup> Benjamin Reiss, *Theaters of Madness: Insane Asylums and Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 15.

<sup>523</sup> David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1971), 130.

Northeastern states and the discourse was heavily informed by British and French theories of moral management. In its American adaptation, moral management removed some of the contiguous links with slavery from the asylums—the use of chains as restraints, corporeal punishment as treatment, and figurations of inmates as beasts. It also reinforced others in a new emphasis on surveillance, order, and labor as the primary mechanisms of cure. But the slave and the insane were theoretically incompatible to those now considered superintendents: if civilization produced madness, those outside of it would not be exposed to the pathogens of democracy and commercialism. The 1840 census that recorded the preponderance of insanity in the free black population in the North and its absence in those enslaved in the South “proves the common notion, that in the highest state of civilization and mental activity there is the greatest danger of mental derangement; [in slavery,] where there is the greatest mental torpor, we find the least insanity,” Edward Jarvis observed in 1842.<sup>524</sup>

Other reactions to the census by popular magazines and government officials reveal that, to return to Reiss’ metaphor, there are at least triplets in this family. *The Southern Literary Magazine* was not content with the record of a tenfold increase in insanity and idiocy among free blacks, presenting these figures along with statistics of penitentiary populations to argue that “the free negroes of the northern states are the most vicious persons on this continent, perhaps on the earth.” If slavery was ever to

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<sup>524</sup> Edward Jarvis “Statistics of Insanity in the United States,” *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 27, 1842, 119.

end, confinement would necessarily continue, but “Where should we find Penitentiaries for the thousands of felons? Where, lunatic asylums for the tens of thousands of maniacs?”<sup>525</sup> After his initial publication, Jarvis noticed certain inconsistencies, such as each of the 133 inmates at the all-white asylum where he worked being listed as black in the census, and wrote a series of articles invalidating the statistics of racialized insanity.<sup>526</sup> When antislavery congressmen began to pressure the secretary of state to address these errors, John Calhoun, who had already cited the census in a letter to the British ambassador justifying the incorporation of Texas as a slave state, took his strategy from the *Southern Literary Magazine*. In a letter on the “alleged errors” of the census, Calhoun presented penitentiary statistics, explaining: “It is well known that there is an intimate connection between extreme physical wretchedness and crime. The same causes which produce the one, will the other.”<sup>527</sup> While the letter lacks the rhetoric of viciousness, the cause of crime and madness can only appear as race. Benjamin Rush had previously grouped crime and insanity together, along with many other imperfections, as he sought to stabilize the republic in institutions. But in this mid-19<sup>th</sup> century discourse, the prison and the asylum no longer appear as the means of correcting and producing citizens; they seem

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<sup>525</sup> “Reflections on the Census of 1840,” *The Southern Literary Magazine* 9 1843, 246 and 247.

<sup>526</sup> See Edward Jarvis, “Statistics of Insanity in the United States,” *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 27, 1842, 281-2 and “Insanity Among the Colored Population for the Free States,” *American Journal of Insanity* 8, 1852.

<sup>527</sup> John C. Calhoun, “Letter from the Secretary of State, relative to the alleged errors of the Sixth Census” in Richard K. Carlle (ed) *The Works of John C. Calhoun* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1855), 460.

to revert to their previous forms of the gaol and the madhouse, with a new task of eternally confining an incorrigible population.<sup>528</sup>

Gerald Grob states that the census “was not a subject of interest for most Northern hospital superintendents,” as they systematically excluded or segregated black inmates and “rarely discussed the issue in theoretical terms.”<sup>529</sup> For Virginia’s John M. Galt II, however, the figures represented a means to reinvent the public asylum that was his family’s business. Ever since James Galt, former keeper of the Williamsburg Public Gaol, became the first keeper of the Public Hospital for Persons of Insane and Disordered Minds in 1773, its major positions had been staffed by the family. When John Galt II took over as superintendent at the age of 22 in 1841, the institution now known as the Eastern Lunatic Asylum (ELA) appeared to be struggling in comparison with the Western Lunatic Asylum, established in 1828 at Staunton. Like the ELA, this latter asylum was required to accept insane persons regardless of race or class, but the directors of the Western institution ignored this law from the start, refusing all black applicants (with one exception) and catering to middle and upper class paying patients.<sup>530</sup> The denial of the first class was considered to be a precondition for treating the second; Francis Stribling, superintendent of the institution after 1836, insisted that an integrated institution “would be mutually prejudicial to both whites and blacks,” but especially the former

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<sup>528</sup> I owe a good deal in this paragraph to Jeannine Mare DeLombard, *In the Shadows of the Gallows: Race, Crime and American Civic Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), especially Chapter 5.

<sup>529</sup> Gerald N. Grob, *Mental Institutions*, 243.

<sup>530</sup> Todd L. Savitt, *Slavery and Medicine*, 262. The Western Lunatic Asylum accepted one free black woman named Betsey T. in the month after it opened. She died there 10 years later.

given that the “prejudices existing when in health, have been aggravated, in all probability, by the morbid state of feeling which insanity mostly engenders.”<sup>531</sup> The presence of blackness would be prejudicial to white prejudice, increased after the onset of madness (probably—Stribling does not know for certain). He thus advised the Virginian legislature to build a completely separate institution for the black insane, preferably in Williamsburg.<sup>532</sup>

ELA had accepted free black inmates since 1774, a year after its opening, because of their status as persons; slaves were refused for the same reason. Enslaved men and women were being medically cared for at the asylum in the 1840s, as Galt attempted to procure a “competent slave labor force” by hiring slaves at 15% above market price and offering to attend to their medical needs free of charge.<sup>533</sup> But Galt also sought the legislative approval to admit them as inmates, partially as a response to pressure from slaveholders. For example, one wrote to Galt complaining that “my cook” had become “a *raving maniac*,” which negatively affected his profits as well as his family’s health. “I keep my best negro man constantly with her—a most serious loss to my business.” But even if the bleeding, cold water, and opiates the owner had been using were successful and “she were to get well enough to go about her usual occupations or any other, my wife, who is a delicate person of weak nerves, would be

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<sup>531</sup> Cited in Gerald N. Grob, *Mental Institutions*, 250.

<sup>532</sup> Alice Davis Wood, *Dr. Francis T. Stribling and Moral Medicine, Curing the Insane at Virginia’s Western State Hospital: 1836-1874* (GalileoGianniny Publishing, 2004), Ebook, 77.

<sup>533</sup> Norman Dain, *Disordered Minds*, 84.

in constant dread of a recurrence.”<sup>534</sup> The insane slave thus threatens the master’s management of his plantation and his wife, whose weak sensibility only requires confinement in the big house, not the asylum. It is unclear if this slaveholder understands his treatment only as a fragile, temporary suppression of enslaved madness or whether he believes this is the best possible outcome of all treatment, the asylum included. To put it another way, is he asking Galt to cure his property or to house it indefinitely?

Whatever the slaveholder’s intention, Galt had confidence in slaves’ curability; but his definition of enslaved sanity closely resembled the state feared by the slave owner. As I attempted to show above, the medical discourse of Cartwright, Merrill and others argued that all black illness was mental illness. But the black race also lacked certain forms of madness, the kind observed in the mistress described in the previous paragraph: “the few cases of insanity to be met with among the negroes is owing to the absence of that morbid irritability which so commonly afflicts the nervous system of white persons of both sexes,” as South Carolinian physician described in an early publication on the subject in a Philadelphia medical journal.<sup>535</sup> For some this was a result of anatomical or physiological differences between the races, for others this lack of madness was a consequence of the wise rule of slaveholders, and for Cartwright it was both. Galt drew from this discourse, the

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<sup>534</sup> D.F. Harrison to John M. Galt II, January 23, 1855, cited in Samuel B. Thielman, “Southern Madness: The Shape of Mental Health Care in the Old South,” in Ronald L. Numbers and Todd L. Savitt (eds.) *Science and Medicine in the Old South*, 261.

<sup>535</sup> P. Tidyman “A Sketch of the most remarkable Diseases of the Negroes of the Southern States, with an account of the method of treating them, accompanied by physiological observations” *The Philadelphia Journal of the Medical and Physical Sciences* May and August 1826, 315.



census statistics, and European theories of treatment to argue that “the proportionate number of slaves who become deranged, is less than that of free coloured persons, and less than that of whites” because they are “removed from much of the mental excitement to which the free population of the Union is necessarily exposed in the daily routine of life.” But when insanity did appear in the slave population, their constant surveillance enabled an early, cheap and effective treatment. For insanity in enslaved men and women “may be considered in general as less tenacious of its existence, and more readily yielding to remediate means...Moreover, we believed that these means are usually so applied, as either to result in the cure of the patient or to constitute the mode of management among them most suitable to the chronic insane.” This comes from ELA’s 1848 report to the governor, two years after enslaved inmates were legally allowed into the institution; I cannot tell if the “means” Galt is referring to are those employed on the plantation or in the asylum. Given that Galt is justifying the acceptance of enslaved inmates because “the amount required will be less than for the same number of free persons,” there may not be a significant difference.<sup>536</sup> Regardless of location, the goal is the same: cure being synonymous with chronic care, the inmate could be discharged when she is “well enough to go about her usual occupations,” as the slaveholder wrote to Galt. As in the courts, it essentially did not matter whether the slave was sane or insane; she was sound if she could labor to her owner’s satisfaction.

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<sup>536</sup> Cited in Samuel B. Thielman, “Southern Madness,” 274.

Galt believed enslaved inmates could increase the institution's cure rate, which suffered in comparison with those of the Western Lunatic Asylum. They would also reduce the asylum's costs by providing a source of funding and labor while requiring less resources. Galt knew all of this before they were admitted to the asylum because of his work with the free black inmates: racial segregation was one the first means employed to shift the asylum from a custodial institution to a regime based in moral management. Before 1841, the asylum was integrated in the sense that all inmates were housed in the same building, each in a small cell, and received the same regimes of bleeding and purging that constituted treatment. After Galt became superintendent, he admitted more free black men and women, housing half of the latter in an outbuilding and "thus never in contact necessarily with the white patients."<sup>537</sup> But he segregated white and black inmates primarily by labor: the black men and women were tasked with "assisting the servants of the establishment, who had external duties to perform," the men on the grounds and the women worked the laundry "and other outdoor duties." Galt's interpretation of moral treatment required reproducing the familiar features of the inmates' life outside the asylum; he thus assumed that free black inmates would work as slaves. This labor assignment had the

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<sup>537</sup> It was "in all respects the best arrangement for these persons." Cited in Norman Dain, *Disordered Minds*, 109. Dain does not offer any explanation, nor do the other histories of this asylum. Elsewhere, Dain cites an entry in Galt's medical diary: "I told [a director] to oblige me by not mentioning my name in connection with that of [a slave], first because I never had anything to do with any woman hired by the Hospital, and secondly no Gentleman would have anything to do with a parcel of women who either let the male patients have intercourse with them, or acted as to cause such a report." *Disordered Minds*, 83. In 1857, Galt would move all of the black men to the basement of another building because "the white Patients exhibited the strongest inclination to come into the ward where the colored insane were placed." *Disordered Minds*, 111. Sexual violence was made just as invisible in the asylum as it was in the courtroom.

added benefit of “rendering their isolation from the white patients a very easy matter...[as] they would be scarcely in the wards at all during the day.”<sup>538</sup> When the Virginia legislature approved the admission of slave inmates in 1846, they would be incorporated into this structure, with the addition of \$1.50 a week paid by the inmate’s owner.<sup>539</sup>

The asylum was not an actual plantation; when an enslaved inmate became disruptive, Galt used morphine, not physical restraint or corporeal punishment. Todd Savitt argues that enslaved inmates “recovered at a greater rate and died less frequently,” but he conflates discharge and recovery, as did Galt.<sup>540</sup> The mortality of the three groups were identical during the 1850s, according to Savitt’s figures, but less overall because none of the 14 slaves admitted between 1846-1849 perished in the asylum during that time.<sup>541</sup> Savitt concludes that “a small number of slaves received the best psychological care available in the state” at ELA.<sup>542</sup> Samuel Thielman concurs with Savitt, stating, “Galt may be considered among the most careful and systematic practitioners of asylum medicine of the early nineteenth century.”<sup>543</sup> Yet the essential feature of Galt’s system of moral treatment was the racial segregation of the asylum based on an uncaring homogenization of free and enslaved black inmates. There may be some urge to recuperate Galt because he was

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<sup>538</sup> Cited in Todd L. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery*, 271-2.

<sup>539</sup> This was substantially cheaper than the \$15 dollars per month paid by free patients, or \$17 for special accommodations. See Norman Dain, *Disordered Minds*, 108.

<sup>540</sup> Todd L. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery*, 276.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid*, 269.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid*, 254.

<sup>543</sup> Samuel B. Thielman, “Southern Madness,” 270.

shunned by the association of superintendents and the later psychiatric orthodoxy after he published an article critiquing New England asylums as “mere prison-houses” and envisioned different classes of patients placed in “a series of cottages.”<sup>544</sup> Galt ostensibly took inspiration from the Belgian village of Gheel, where the insane were assigned to different families, but his attempt “to give the insane the proper degree of freedom” by regulating them in dispersed structures where they engage in agricultural labor to become “self-supporting” reproduced a plantation system, its foundation in enslaved labor undiscussed.<sup>545</sup> Thomas Kirkbride of the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane, the most influential superintendent in the nation who centered his treatment in the ordering power of a centralized institution, responded, “the idea of mixing up all colors and all classes...is not what is wanted in our hospitals for the insane, although it may be regarded by that writer as a desirable kind of liberty.”<sup>546</sup> Kirkbride preferred his orderly confinement of race and class to the liberty of the plantation. Galt was shunned by the association of superintendents; when Charles Nicholas designed the government hospital for the insane, he asked for Stribling’s advice on the black inmates.<sup>547</sup>

Galt did not kill Davy (Walker); he died first, in May 1862, from an overdose of laudanum shortly after Union troops took Williamsburg.<sup>548</sup> Some of the asylum’s

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<sup>544</sup> John M. Galt II, “The Farm of St. Anne,” *American Journal of Insanity* 12 April 1855, 353.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid, 354 and 352.

<sup>546</sup> “Proceedings of the Association,” *American Journal of Insanity* 12 July 1855, 43.

<sup>547</sup> Alice Davis Wood, *Dr. Francis T. Stribling and Moral Medicine*, 134.

<sup>548</sup> Shomer S. Zwelling, *Quest for a Cure: The Public Hospital in Williamsburg, Virginia, 1773-1885* (Williamsburg: the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1985), 47. Norman Dain was unable to find support to the story that this occurred after Federal troops denied him access to the asylum. See *Disordered Minds*, 168-9.

staff used this opportunity to seize their freedom; others left after their emancipation was proclaimed on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1863. Those who remained were seized in April 1863, when Confederate forces briefly reoccupied the city and “it was found that several of the servants & nurses were fugitive slaves, belonging to masters who claimed their property.”<sup>549</sup> Davy (Walker) died a month before this reoccupation, neither free nor enslaved. Responsibility for the asylum had been passed between the Union army and civilians for the previous months, both of whom struggled to keep the inmates fed and clothed. He probably starved to death.<sup>550</sup>

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<sup>549</sup> Confederate General Henry A. Wise cited in Norman Dain, *Disordered Minds*, 182

<sup>550</sup> Davy (Walker) should not have been there, which I say not only in condemnation of his murder. The authors I have been citing in this section—Gerald Grob, Norman Dain and Todd Savitt—all agree that slaves were no longer accepted as inmates at ELA after 1856 and those currently in residence were discharged at that time, which directly contradicts the material I am working with. After the legislature expressed concern that the asylum was admitting slaves over the state’s white insane, the ELA board of directors expelled “some of the slave patients” on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1856, according to Dain, or “all the slave and non-state resident patients” on October 10<sup>th</sup> 1856, according to Savitt. See *Disordered Minds*, 111 and *Medicine and Slavery*, 278. Both are working with the large archive on the asylum and Galt’s papers at Williamsburg. As I mentioned above, the ELA did not consistently report an inmate’s race. Observing that slave admissions were not usually entered in the Court of Directors minutes, Savitt calculates the number of enslaved inmates by taking all those mentioned in both these notes and the patient registers found in the ELA annual reports as white. He estimates the free black population by comparing these two texts and the US census returns, the final number being “no doubt understated.” The remaining inmates, “except those not discharged or deceased by October 1856, and all free blacks, were assumed to be slave.” *Medicine and Slavery*, 259, note D. I am using ELA Registers of Patients from 1852-9 possessed by the Library of Virginia in Richmond, which are different from the registers presented in the ELA annual reports. These are handwritten accounts of an inmate’s admission with monthly updates, although the latter were often left blank. I considered an inmate to be enslaved if her last name was in a parenthesis, if she was called a servant, and if there was a reference to her master, mistress or owner. According to the registers, there were 9 enslaved inmates in the asylum from 1857-8, 3 of whom were admitted and discharged that year. Beginning October 1<sup>st</sup> 1858, there were only 5 inmates and no new admissions. One inmate’s disappearance is unaccounted for—I am referring to William (Spencer). The registers do not cover the entire period: the year 1855-6 is missing, with the books jumping from 1854-55 to 1856-7 (the year for state institutions began on October 1<sup>st</sup>, not January 1<sup>st</sup>). There were 23 enslaved inmates treated in 1854-5, with 3 admitted, 6 discharged and 4 deaths. So there may have been a partial expulsion of the enslaved population in October 1856. But it seems that Galt never fully implemented the board’s directions—Savitt notes that he “made a few exceptions after 1856.” *Medicine and Slavery*, 279. Perhaps there were more exceptions than historians have realized. I have not returned to the archive since my original visit. The only ELA annual report I have been able to access actually covers the two years, 1855-7, during

## Case Study

To begin to bring this chapter to a close, I want to consider another approach to an insane slave, one confined in a hospital that is not an asylum. Although this enslaved man is “dead,” he is not a proxy for Davy (Walker); Joe returned to life and the plantation. The following scene is drawn from a medical text that presents the black insane as a kind of monstrous subject, but whose violence is in possession of language. It takes the form of a case history, which Steven Stowe understands as the constitutive genre of mid-century Southern medical representation, the writing usually motivated by an “interesting” mystery or experience.<sup>551</sup> He understands the “autobiographical heart of these narratives—bedside-born, diverse in motive and purpose, and above all, fundamentally personal” as short-circuiting “not only racial generalizations but also other kinds of systematic thought that later in the century were widely adopted as part of a new medical science: establishing criteria for what counts as data, manipulating data under controlled conditions,” etc.. But I do not believe that the personal and the personnel of antebellum medicine can be so easily disarticulated from systemic violence and the abstraction of bodies. In this case in particular, the bed is located in a hospital oriented towards collecting a new kind of data and returning its source to labor. Entitled a “Remarkable Case of Mental Alienation,” the text was published in May 1846 in the *Southern Journal of Medicine and Pharmacy* and the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* and then reprinted later

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which an expulsion could have taken place, but Galt spends almost the entire 23 pages talking about the village of Gheel.

<sup>551</sup> Steven M. Stowe, “Seeing Themselves at Work.” 73 and 58.

that year in the *American Journal of Insanity*, the publication of the association of asylum superintendents that would later substitute “psychiatry” for “insanity” in 1920. It offers a cure as the silence of a commodity.

Dr. W.T. Wragg begins his article by noting his patient’s name and circumstance: “Joe, a young negro of about 20 years of age, possessing an average degree of intelligence, and having enjoyed good health up to the time when he was attacked with the illness which threw him into the remarkable condition in which I found him.” Joe lived on a plantation near Charleston, his occupation “common to persons in his situation; laboring in the cultivation of the soil.” He was “taken ill...probably with fever” and remained on the plantation for two weeks before being taken into town and seen by Dr. Wragg.<sup>552</sup> Although Wragg does not indicate where exactly Joe’s treatment takes place, I believe it to be the Southern School for Practical Medicine, which Wragg cofounded in 1835 in order to “afford Students, during the summer months, the same advantages in the prosecution of Medical Science which are offered in most Northern cities.”<sup>553</sup> The school was one of the four institutions in Charleston that accepted enslaved patients; the Medical College of South Carolina, with its “negro infirmary,” mentioned in a previous section of this chapter was another.<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> W.T. Wragg, M.D., “Remarkable Case of Mental Alienation,” *American Journal of Insanity* 3(1) July 1846, 67.

<sup>553</sup> James P. Jarvery, “Southern School of Practical Medicine,” *Baltimore Medical and Surgical Journal and Review* 2 (1835), 255.

<sup>554</sup> See Stephen C. Kenny, ““A Dictate of Both Interest and Mercy”” 24 note 57.

While Joe did not seem to “suffer from neglect...his case had not been judiciously treated.” Wragg does not indicate any physical signs of punishment but refers to Joe’s master, who lived in Charleston, being unaware of Joe’s illness until a “report of his death” reached him. This report had a transformative effect on Joe:

His imagination, a faculty which with him, had doubtless never, in his hours of health, been called into action, was awakened. He became impressed with the idea that he was dead...He said, that being dead, his flesh would soon begin to rot and drop from his bones; remonstrated at being kept so long unburied...He looked anxiously for the company to assemble which was to follow his body to the grave, and would chaunt [sic] in touching language a final adieu to his mother.<sup>555</sup>

It was Joe’s use of language that unnerved Wragg and made this case extraordinary: Joe suffered a “musical mania,” singing for two days and on the third, in “the most remarkable peculiarity that his delirium had yet assumed...He spoke in rhyme!”<sup>556</sup> Wragg could understand Joe’s singing, for “negroes have some quickness in catching music; hence I was not surprised to hear him sing,” but not this “degree of ingenuity.” Joe “was a slave, perfectly uneducated, and showing no farther knowledge of language than was sufficient for expressing his few and simple wants,” yet his speech—Wragg never calls it poetry—would have seemed “astonishing even in one who had been rendered familiar, by education and habit, with language in all its perfections.”<sup>557</sup>

Joe appears as a freak, not an artist or genius. But unlike the conjoined twins and intersex persons represented as black “monstrosities” in Southern medical

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<sup>555</sup> W.T. Wragg, M.D., “Remarkable Case...” 68-9.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*, 71 and 70.



journals and those displayed in the traveling carnival shows that had begun to flourish in the 1830s, Joe's difference is not produced in the "accumulation and exaggeration of bodily details."<sup>558</sup> Rather, it appears in the contradiction between a laboring black body and a mind capable of possessing language. Yet his words are not art; Joe's rhymes are not the refinement of beauty but the result of an unleashed mind. His "imagination is wild and extravagant...[it] leaves a tract of thought as incoherent and eccentric, as is the course of a meteor through the sky," to cite Thomas Jefferson's description of Ignatius Sancho.<sup>559</sup> He must be mentally and physically bound to be cured:

Fully impressed with the idea that he was dead, and a dweller amongst immortal spirits...he would remain for some time enveloped in this rhapsody. He heard nothing of what passed near him, and saw only the majestic creation of his imagination, and lived only in regions which his mental infirmity had painted, till they seemed to him those of another and brighter world...His countenance wore a pleasant smile, and a vein of humor marked his conversation. But if opposed, he would resist forcibly...Restraint made him violent; but if he succeeded in releasing himself, or the restraint removed, upon the instant a mild and gentle smile threw its bland expression over his face.<sup>560</sup>

Wragg was able to remove that smile with "repeated bleeding, both general and local, blistering, purging, hot pedeluvia with mustard, and other means of depletion and derivation." After sixty-four days of this treatment, on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1837, Joe's "intellect was perfectly clear...and he returned to his occupation in perfectly restored

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<sup>558</sup> Rosemarie Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 59. For a brief discussion of the racialization of bodily difference in medical journals, see Todd L. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery*, 303-5.

<sup>559</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *NSV*, 267.

<sup>560</sup> W.T. Bragg, M.D., "Remarkable Case..." 69-70.

health.”<sup>561</sup> The triteness of some explications of mad speech discussed in Chapter 1 gives me pause here. Joe’s “death” was both an escape from slavery and a reflection of his social and commodified status within it, but it might have been more and less to him, his family and other unnamed members of kinship and affective networks.

Although Wragg was astonished by Joe’s mastery of language, he recorded so few of his words before he bled him to life. They were an impediment to his occupation.

Resurrection is the greatest violence of slavery.

### **Conclusion**

As it had been said of me in my childhood by those by whom I had been taught to pray, both white and black, and in whom I had the greatest confidence, that I had too much sense to be raised, and if I was, I would never be of any use to any one as a slave.

--Nat Turner<sup>562</sup>

“They told Master Joe not to whoop that crazy nigger man,” Adaline Johnson recounts of the warning given to her former master Joe Battle by his family. “He undertook it. He hit him seven licks with the hoe and killed him. Killed him in Mississippi.” Johnson does not speak of any consequence, instead shifting to a description of Master Marmaduke and Tom Williams, two other “bosses of the whole county.” After noting that one died in the Civil War and the other after drinking too much in a hotel, she continues,

They took that crazy nigger man to several places, found there was no law to kill a crazy man. They took him to North Carolina where was all white folks at that place in Edgecombe County. They hung the poor crazy nigger. They

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<sup>561</sup> Ibid, 71-2.

<sup>562</sup> “The Confessions of Nat Turner” in Herbert Aptheker, *Nat Turner’s Slave Rebellion* (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc, 1966), 135.

was afraid of uprisings the reason they took him to place all white folks lived.<sup>563</sup>

Johnson records two deaths on the first page of her interview with the WPA but they almost appear as one, with names belonging only to their executioners. The dead men are instead individuated by place, method and degree of resistance—not from the men themselves but from white and black communities and institutions. One dies in Mississippi, most likely on a plantation considering the weapon, preceded by a warning but not followed by punishment. The other dies in an all-white place in a North Carolinian county with a significant slave population; given the discussion of legality, I take this to be a reference to the court house that contained a slave tribunal composed of three justices of the peace and three slave-owners.<sup>564</sup> While there were laws against manumitting “slaves not being of sound mind or body,” their death was another matter, one which could be approved by white courts or inspire insurrection in those who remained enslaved.<sup>565</sup>

I chose the Turner citation for my conclusion because it too unites insurrection and witnessing in a demonstration that even if there was no “‘Nat’ when the slave at

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<sup>563</sup> Adaline Johnson, Volume II, Arkansas Narratives, Part 4, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938*, The Library of Congress, “Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938,” <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html> (accessed 5/25/14), 52. I am following Terri L. Snyder in refusing the WPA’s translation of the interviewee’s speech into “negro dialect” by the utilization of minstrel show spelling conventions. I have not altered the syntax. See Terri L. Snyder, “Suicide Slavery and Memory in North America” *The Journal of American History* 97(1), June 2010, 39.

<sup>564</sup> Joseph Kelly Turner and John Luther Bridgers, Jr., *History of Edgecombe County, North Carolina* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Co., 1920), 53. This text reports no lynchings in the county’s history before or during Reconstruction and then proceeds to celebrate the graphic violence of Klu Klux Klan for returning law and order.

<sup>565</sup> The phrase comes from the Statues at Large of Virginia, Chapter 41, 1792. See June Purcell Guild, LL.M., *Black Laws of Virginia*, 65.

issue was a woman,” as Gross claims, there were Turner women.<sup>566</sup> At this point in the confessions, Turner had just described being spoken to by the “spirit” and is responding to lawyer Thomas Gray’s question, “what do you mean by Spirit?”<sup>567</sup> Turner mentions his mother as the first person to recognize his extraordinary intelligence, presenting his astonishing knowledge to others who considered him “a prophet, as the Lord had shewn me things that had happened before my birth.” His mother and father, the latter of whom would later escape, “strengthened me in this my first impression, saying in my presence, I was intended for some great purpose.” Next his grandmother, “who was very religious,” recognized “my uncommon intelligence for a child” and “remarked I had too much sense to be raised, and if I was, I would never be of any service to any one as a slave.”<sup>568</sup> But this observation takes place in the context of “other religious persons” belonging to his master’s church, who are presumed to share this opinion.<sup>569</sup> Thus, Turner appears to be responding to Gray’s dismissal of his religious experience—embodied in the text in the non-capitalization of spirit—by centering it in a community primarily directed by enslaved women but which also includes white Christians, all of whom recognize Turner’s supernatural intelligence as well as the impossibility of its subjection. To spirit, Turner offers sense, which could encompass physical sensation, spiritual

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<sup>566</sup> Ariela J. Gross, *Double Character*, 75. This reading was inspired by Mary Kemp Davis, “‘What Happened in this Place?’ In Search of the Female Slave in the Nat Turner Slave Insurrection,” in Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

<sup>567</sup> Nat Turner and Thomas Gray, “The Confessions of Nat Turner” in Herbert Aptheker, *Nat Turner*, 135.

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-4.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

experience, reason, wisdom, intelligence, etc., located in the absence of service.

Sense is insurrectionary.

Gray attempts to discipline Turner's confession as an artifact of gallows literature, but Turner disrupts the conventions of penance and guilt here and elsewhere ("Ques. Do you not find yourself mistaken now? Ans. Was not Christ crucified?").<sup>570</sup> Gray presents Turner's revolt as the work of "a gloomy fanatic...revolving in the recesses of his own, dark, bewildered, and overwrought mind."<sup>571</sup> Gray does not fully individualize this mind, but attempts to isolate Turner's sense by anchoring it in the ability to "read and write... taught to him by his parents... [Nat Turner] possesses an uncommon share of intelligence, with a mind capable of attaining any thing; but warped and perverted by the influence of early impressions."<sup>572</sup> Slaves, not slavery, developed Turner's sense as a perversion of true religion and knowledge. Turner's insurrection was not produced by a community well before the actual event, nor was it related to other recent uprisings; it was a consequence of abusing an enslaved child through education. Gray thus presents the entire text as "an awful, and it is hoped, a useful lesson, as to the operations of a mind like his, endeavoring to grapple with things beyond its reach" without a hint of irony.<sup>573</sup>

But Southerners had trouble learning unambiguously from the insurrection; the *Norfolk Herald* latched onto Turner's religion as "proof of his insanity" and

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<sup>570</sup> See Jeannine Mare DeLombard, *In the Shadows of the Gallows*, 13-6 and Chapter 4.

<sup>571</sup> Nat Turner and Thomas Gray, "The Confessions of Nat Turner" in Herbert Aptheker, *Nat Turner*, 130.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid*, 147.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

portrayed the entire rebellion as “instigated by the wildest superstition and fanaticism.”<sup>574</sup> Thomas Dew, professor of history, metaphysics and political economy at the University of Virginia, believed the “confessions prove, beyond a doubt, mental aberration” and then bemoaned the contagiousness of madness in the following “period of excitement, when reason was almost banished from the mind” as the Virginia legislature debated abolition.<sup>575</sup> An anonymous author in the *Farmers’ Register* considered “our Virginia negroes as forming a most valuable class. They have some of the best traits of character of any person on the globe...and in fact, are the happiest people in the world, unless tampered with by fanatics.”<sup>576</sup> In 1900, historian William S. Drewry observed that Nat Turner’s grandson “now in the lunatic asylum [Central State Hospital] at Petersburg, Virginia, well illustrates the trend of his early ancestors. Intelligent and well informed...[he] is at times wild and raving, bearing a special grudge against the officers of the institution” and “also seems to be a religious fanatic.”<sup>577</sup> Here it did matter whether or not Nat Turner was insane. But the cause was illusive: the slave family, religion, superstition, the ability to read, physical morbidity, black savagery, or the influence of abolitionist propaganda.

The Virginia legislature could not agree on the conditions for abolishing slavery and settled on outlawing preaching, learning to read or write, firearms,

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<sup>574</sup> Cited in Douglas R. Egerton, “Nat Turner in a Hemispheric Context,” in Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Nat Turner*, 135

<sup>575</sup> Thomas Dew, William Harper, James Hammond and William Simms, *The Pro-Slavery Argument* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, & Co., 1853), 289-90.

<sup>576</sup> “On the Management of Negroes, Addressed to the Farmers and Overseers of Virginia,” *Farmers’ Register* 1 1834, 564.

<sup>577</sup> William S. Drewry, *The Southampton Insurrection* (Washington: the Neale Company, 1900), 28.

alcohol, and “seditious meeting or saying or writing anything of such a nature” for all blacks, free and enslaved.<sup>578</sup> Other states followed suit, but Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina and Mississippi had already passed similar laws immediately before Turner’s revolt in response to a pamphlet written by another David Walker, a freeman born in North Carolina and living in Boston at the time of its publication in 1828. Walker’s *Appeal* was “a synthesis of African Americans’ experiences, thought and resistance—slave and free, North and South,” analyzing slavery and anti-black racism in religious, economic, political and affective registers.<sup>579</sup> Subjectivity was at the center of this struggle, as one of the primary strategies of slaveholders and their ideologues—Walker singles out Thomas Jefferson as exemplary early in the text—was to confine slaves “the more secure in ignorance and wretchedness, to support [the masters] and their children, and consequently they would have the more obedient slaves.”<sup>580</sup> Education of persons of color by other persons of color was one form of resistance, but Walker also called for armed struggle: “They want us for their slaves, and think nothing of murdering us in order to subject us to that wretched condition—therefore, if there is an *attempt* made by us, kill or be killed.” Walker argued that “it is no more harm for you to kill a man, who is trying to kill you, than it is for you to take a drink of water when thirsty; in fact, the man who will stand still and let another murder him, is worse than an infidel, and, if he has common sense, ought not to be

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<sup>578</sup> Herbert Aptheker, *Nat Turner*, 82.

<sup>579</sup> Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind*, 140.

<sup>580</sup> David Walker, *Walker’s Appeal, in Four Articles, Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in particular and very expressly, to those of the United States of America: Third and Last Edition* (Boston: Revised and Published by David Walker, 1830), 52.

pitied.”<sup>581</sup> Walker thus associates common sense, religious faith, and self-defense, all as necessary as water for life.

In a revision to the text in 1830, Walker addresses the laws that sprang up after he circulated it throughout the nation, saying, “I heard a wretch in the state of North Carolina said, that if any man would teach a black person whom he held in slavery, to spell, read or write, he would prosecute him to the very extent of the law.-- Said the ignorant wretch, ‘a Nigar, ought not to have any more sense than enough to work for his master.’”<sup>582</sup> Walker’s ability to hear this is inseparable from his ability to spread the text—the work of a collectivity of free and enslaved abolitionists dispersed throughout the Free and Slave States. There was a ten thousand dollar reward for Walker’s capture at that time, so he did not venture into the South. Walker had a slave contact in North Carolina, Jacob Cowan, who was caught circulating the pamphlet in 1831, but he primarily utilized a network of black and white seaman to distribute his work, which was sometimes sewn into the lining of jackets.<sup>583</sup> There is some debate as to whether it reached Southampton County, but Turner need not have read this passage to formulate a similar theory of sense and slavery before his execution. Herbert Apthekar critiques the theory that Turner had read Walker, arguing “it is also possible that some study of Napoleon influenced Turner” and that the understanding of the revolt as an effect of abolitionist literature disavows its

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid, 29-30.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>583</sup> See Marshal Rachleff, “David Walker’s Southern Agent” *The Journal of Negro History* 62(1) Jan. 1977 and Vincent Harding, “Symptoms of Liberty and Blackhead Signposts: David Walker and Nat Turner,” in Kenneth S. Greenberg (ed) *Nat Turner*, 95.



natural and spontaneous critique of enslavement.<sup>584</sup> I agree with Apthekar although I do not view these as mutually exclusive. I also do not think it was necessary for Turner to have read Walker to have known of this passage; Turner's mother, wife or another member of his insurgent community could have seen this text or communicated with someone who had read and transported it.

As could have Davy (Walker) and his family. He was 16 when he entered ELA in 1853—he could have been named for David Walker. I do not believe I am wildly speculating when considering this. Pokeweed berries contain a purplish-crimson juice that was sometimes used as an ink.<sup>585</sup> Davy (Walker) could have been writing.

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<sup>584</sup> Herbert Apthekar, *Nat Turner*, 42.

<sup>585</sup> Pokeweed was also known as inkberry. See Larry W. Mitich, "Common Pokeweed," 887.

## Conclusion

I want to end my dissertation by considering the epistemological and ethical demands of two deaths. The first is Pomp's, a slave executed in Ipswich, Massachusetts, on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1795, but whose status as property was disavowed in the broadside that contains his confession. There were no slaves in the state at that time: Chief Justice William Cushing of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court had abolished the institution in 1783 and "not one citizen claimed to own a slave" in the census of 1790.<sup>586</sup> Neither was Pomp termed distracted or mad, despite his convulsive fits and the strange whispers telling him to kill his master. But both his social and mental status inform his legal designation as a criminal, a combination which has persisted after Pomp's death at the hands of the state. I am thinking specifically of how racialized violence is an essential element of the criminalization of madness, a process that Jonathan Metzl has recently profiled in the psychiatric response to the black liberation struggles of the 1960s and 70s.<sup>587</sup> The second death, belonging to Esmin Green, was also enacted by the state and made to circulate in the public sphere, albeit in the form of video taken from the surveillance system of Kings County Hospital Center in Brooklyn, New York. The most widely viewed section of the footage begins at 5:32am on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008, after Green had been waiting a full

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<sup>586</sup> Emily Blanck, "Seventeen Eighty-Three: The Turning Point in the Law of Slavery and Freedom in Massachusetts," *The New England Quarterly* 75(1), Mar., 2002, 30.

<sup>587</sup> Jonathan M. Metzl, *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009).

23 hours in the psychiatric emergency room for a bed in the ward to open up. At this time, Green falls from her chair in the Main Waiting Room and lies face down on the floor, her body moves sporadically until going completely still at 6:08am. By the time CPR is performed on her at 6:40am, the footage has shown Green being observed by a doctor, two different security guards, a nurse who nudged her with a small kick, and “various other individuals who appear not to be associated with the hospital.”<sup>588</sup> Unaware of her death, at 6:51am the doctor wrote an order for a chest X-ray and bloods test on Green, as well as “sedation/restraints if needed.”<sup>589</sup> While the mass circulation of this surveillance video was accompanied by a vocal outrage, I look to the efforts by Green’s communities and psychiatric consumers/survivors/ex-inmates (c/s/x) activists to make her death grievable in the hopes of a politics that addresses the multiple other deaths I have considered in this dissertation. To analyze these deaths together despite their vast differences in time and medium, I draw from the recent discussions in black studies around Afro-pessimism and black optimism. My understanding of mental death has an affinity with the former’s theory of the political ontology of antiblackness, but the “fugitive movement” of black optimism interrupts such totalizing readings while enabling an ethical attention to those lost.<sup>590</sup>

My original project was an attempt to connect these deaths through a specific set of institutions; as I mentioned in my introduction, I had planned to use racially

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<sup>588</sup> New York City Department of Investigation, “DOI’s Investigation into the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of Esmin Green,” June 2009, 7.

<sup>589</sup> Cited in Jim Dwyer, “After a Death Seen on Tape, Change is Promised,” *The New York Times*, B1, July 12, 2008.

<sup>590</sup> Fred Moten, “The Case of Blackness,” *Criticism* 50(2), Spring 2008, 179.

segregated mental asylums as a contiguous link between chattel slavery and the contemporary state of mass incarceration in the US. I was inspired in this task by Vanessa Jackson as well as the excellent histories of the convict lease system written by Alex Lichtenstein and Matthew Mancini, the critical legal studies of Colin Dayan and Guyora Binder that carefully trace contemporary legal definitions of criminality and race to slave law, and recent theorizations of the prison industrial complex by Dylan Rodriguez and Lisa Marie Cacho.<sup>591</sup> But, as I explained in my introduction and chapter one, “Haunting Asylums,” I shifted my project to an analysis of the asylums’ conditions of existence in the political, economic, medical and literary discourses and technologies of slavery. Confronted by the vast blankness of the asylums’ archives, I turned in chapter two, “Compounds of Race and Madness,” to Revolutionary era texts on mind, slavery and nation to explicate how American citizenship was founded on the exclusion of blackness. I do not mean to imply that I found these latter representations more transparent than the asylum records; I was not interested in Jefferson’s authentic feelings about blackness, nor was I attempting to determine whether Rose was truly insane. Rather, these texts helped me to discern some the epistemic foundations of race (nascent articulations of whiteness, blackness

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<sup>591</sup> Vanessa Jackson, *Separate and Unequal: The Legacy of Racially Segregated Psychiatric Hospitals, A Cultural Competence Training Tool* (2005); Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (New York: Verso, 1996); Matthew Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866-1928* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1996); Colin Dayan, “Legal Slaves and Civil Bodies” *Nepantla: Views from South* 2(1) 2001; Guyora Binder, “The Slavery of Emancipation,” *Cardozo Law Review* May 1996; Dylan Rodriguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); and Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

and redness in terms of species, health and nation) and madness (as lack and disorder in body, reason, affect and sexuality conditioned by environment, society and race) that guided my close reading of Davy (Walker)'s case. In chapter three, "Worse than Useless, Too Much Sense," I profiled specific managerial, medical and legal discourses and institutions that enabled Davy (Walker)'s confinement and death in the asylum. In order not to present this immense infrastructure of violence against enslaved bodies and minds as a closed system that fully determined slave existence, I considered the possibilities of hidden practices of care as well as the actualities of insurrection that united free and captive black communities.

To summarize the conjunction of blackness and madness I offered the concept-metaphor "mental death," but I now feel hesitant at its deployment. I had hoped to avoid using the term diagnostically, claiming this or that person was experientially suffering it, and sought to utilize it as a theoretical tool and hermeneutical strategy to investigate how the racialization of madness was and continues to be foundational to political, medical, economic and juridical systems in the United States. Even though I did not intend it as a clinical or empirical entity, I chose the term because of its allusions to the legal and anthropological concepts of civil and social death that have guided discussions of slavery and its afterlife. Searching for the materialization of mental difference in plantation hospitals, asylum records, court cases, autobiographies, and elsewhere created a productive tension in my work between a desire to guard mental death as a metaphor without a literal referent and to demonstrate its conceptual and material utility with cases and

examples. But I am unsure as to what kind of work it can do beyond this context, especially as a unifying name for the different processes of racialization and subjectification that I have examined in this text.

I am prompted in these reflections by the recent articulation of Afro-pessimism, most vocally by Jared Sexton and Frank Wilderson III, which I find both incredibly persuasive and disturbingly exclusionary.<sup>592</sup> One of the reasons I find myself agreeing with Afro-pessimist work maybe due to a shared origin in the writing of Saidiya Hartman, who first suggested the term to Wilderson.<sup>593</sup> Indeed, a dialogue between these two authors published under the title “The Position of the Unthought” emphasizes some elements of Hartman’s work on slavery, namely a critique the notion of hegemony in relation to slave subjection and a refusal of celebratory or integrationist narratives in the hope of radical transformation, which would later become foundational to Wilderman’s political ontology of blackness.<sup>594</sup> As Wilderson states elsewhere, “as an ontological position...the Slave is not a laborer but an anti-Human, a position against which Humanity establishes, maintains, and renews its coherence, its corporeal integrity...the Slave is, to borrow from Patterson,

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<sup>592</sup> Jared Sexton, “People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery” *Social Text* 28(2) Summer 2010 and “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism” *InTensions Journal* 5 Fall/Winter 2011; Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). For an excellent overview of afro-pessimism in relation to the United States legal system, see Stephen H. Marshall, “The Political Life of Fungibility” *Theory and Event* 15(3) 2012. My primary entrance into this discourse comes from Fred Moten’s writings with and against it, approximated as “black optimism.” See Fred Moten “Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 112(4) Fall 2013 and “Black Op” *PMLA* 123(5) Oct. 2008.

<sup>593</sup> See Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black*, 346, note 9.

<sup>594</sup> Saidiya Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson III, “The Position of the Unthought” *Qui Parle* 13(2) Spring/Summer 2003, 184-6.

generally dishonored, perpetually open to violence, and void of kinship structure.”<sup>595</sup> The slave is an object of violence without claim to kin or civilization, but “political ontology, as imagined through Humanism, can only produce discourse that has as its foundation alienation and exploitation as a grammar of suffering;” therefore, “what is needed (for the Black, who is always already a Slave) is an ensemble of ontological questions that has as its foundation accumulation and fungibility.”<sup>596</sup> In Jared Sexton’s words, “for Wilderson, the principle implication of slavery’s afterlife is to warrant an intellectual disposition of ‘afro-pessimism,’ a qualification and a complication of the assumptive logic of black cultural studies in general and black performance studies in particular, a disposition that posits a political ontology dividing the Slave from the world of the Human in a constitutive way.”<sup>597</sup>

Along these lines, Sexton offers a description of black existence that begins as a productive critique of the effacement of chattel slavery and antiblackness but ends by founding a political project on a circumscribed definition of slavery and contemporary racial formation as primarily black. In his provocative “People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery,” Sexton opens with an astute critique of Achille Mbembe’s necropolitics, the contemporary instrumentalization of human existence founded upon histories of race and colonialism, for “a subsumption of slavery under the rubric of colonialism, making of slavery one more instance of a

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<sup>595</sup> Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black*, 11.

<sup>596</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>597</sup> Jared Sexton, “The Social Life of Social Death,” 23.

general phenomenon--‘modern terror.’”<sup>598</sup> By slighting the singular commodification of slavery, which applies not only to slaves’ labor power but their entire existence, Mbembe’s theory of global violence and death becomes “a regrettably imprecise hypothesis” that does not account for the political ontology of blackness.<sup>599</sup> As a firmer foundation than broad definitions of colonial sovereignty, Sexton refers to US slave codes and their cultural and legal afterlife, arguing that “the application of the law of racial slavery is pervasive, regardless of variance or permutation in its operation across the better part of a millennium.”<sup>600</sup> Yet Sexton misleadingly defines the racial element of slavery as always and only a matter of blackness or nonblackness: after citing Hartman’s analysis of slave law as predicated on a slave’s submission to all whites, not just his or her master, Sexton suggests that the “latter group is better termed *all nonblacks*, because it is racial blackness as a necessary condition for enslavement that matters most, rather than whiteness as a sufficient condition for freedom.” Although he grants that races and nationalities have “at one point or another labored in conditions similar to or contiguous with enslaved African-derived groups,” their exploitation and alienation are incommensurate with the property relations of chattel slavery. Fundamentally, “blackness serves as the basis of enslavement in the logic of a transnational political and legal culture.”<sup>601</sup>

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<sup>598</sup> Jared Sexton, “People-of-Color-Blindness,” 37. Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15(1) Winter 2003.

<sup>599</sup> Jared Sexton, “People-of-Color-Blindness,” 38.

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>601</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.



Sexton's complete disavowal of the connections between settler colonialism and slavery in the Americas, where enslaved indigenous peoples and Africans were made legally and economically commensurate in a number of places, renders his hypothesis not just imprecise, but demonstrably false.<sup>602</sup> Yet this origin of anti-blackness appears to be necessary to its end, where the "vantage point" of black existence is required for a truly radical transformation of society. Sexton begins with a critique aimed less at a specific author or theory than at the term "people of color" for insisting "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." I am sympathetic to this statement despite its vague context, yet the following passage increases the nebulous and disconcerting reach of Sexton's articulation:

Black existence does not represent the total reality of the racial formation—it is not the beginning and the end of the story—but it does relate to the totality; it indicates the (repressed) truth of the political and economic system. That is to say, the whole range of positions within the racial formation is most fully understood from this vantage point, not unlike the way in which the range of gender and sexual variance under patriarchal and heteronormative regimes is most fully understood through lenses that are feminist and queer.<sup>603</sup>

I have read this passage a number of times but I still struggle to partially (much less "more fully") understand the analogies and denegations at play: ontological blackness does not exhaust but is the truth of "the" racial formation, and is also an epistemology that is distinct from, but not incommensurate with, feminist and queer critiques (but

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<sup>602</sup> See Alan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: the Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

<sup>603</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

not existences?). I am surprised at how Sexton can make such divisions after works like Siobhan Somerville's *Queering the Color Line*, which places slavery at the origin of the sexual sciences, or Roderick Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black*, which demonstrates the necessity of black existence to an analysis of heteronormativity in the US.<sup>604</sup> After this pronouncement, Sexton proceeds to join black ontology/epistemology continuously with an ethicopolitical project, arguing that "every attempt to defend the rights and liberties of the latest victims of state repression will fail to make substantial gains insofar as it forfeits or sidelines the fate of blacks."<sup>605</sup> In another text, he refers to this as "a rule of inverse proportion...how radical a reconstruction you seek relates to how fully you regard the absoluteness of power." Therefore, "slavery must be theorized maximally if its abolition is to reach the proper level...Otherwise, we succumb to the forces of mitigation that would transform the world through a coalition of a thousand tiny causes."<sup>606</sup> Afro-pessimism is in danger of becoming the new vulgar Marxism.

My dissertation began as a reading of slavery as the repressed truth of the US mental health system; I took inspiration in this task from those working to abolish the prison industrial complex as well as c/s/x and mad pride movements that struggle against state violence, usually presented as "treatment." I believe these two positions

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<sup>604</sup> Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) and Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

<sup>605</sup> Jared Sexton, "People-of-Color-Blindness," 48. My analysis of Sexton's conflation of ontology/epistemology and the ethicopolitical comes from Gayatri Spivak, "Feminism and Deconstruction, Again: Negotiations," in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), specifically from her critique of Jacqueline Rose.

<sup>606</sup> Jared Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death," 32-3.

could benefit from more sustained dialogue given their substantial commonalities, and a shared genealogy of slavery may help in this regard. I also hope my work can speak to queer, feminist, black, disability and American studies by offering an account of the racialization of madness at the foundation of US government, medicine and law. I do not think that either Rush's sane citizens nor Davy (Walker)'s enslaved insanity are essential for the "most full" understanding of race, psychiatry or sexuality, but I hope their presence can facilitate new theorizations of mental difference, criminalized personhood, and continuing event of slavery. Rather than glossing over the differences between these projects with a singular theory of power, I want to end with a consideration of two people killed by similar, but not identical, forces. I will try to highlight how my work can help to trace their connections and indicate where I fail to understand. Following Jacques Derrida's invocation of "*tout autre est tout autre*" (every other is the wholly-other, among other possibilities), I hope "tiny causes" and senseless deaths can point to an experience of justice outside of the law.<sup>607</sup>

The woodcut illustration accompanying the broadside of Pomp's "dying confession" renders his status and body monstrous (Images 10 and 11). The title identifies him as "A NEGRO MAN, who was executed at IPSWICH, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August, 1795, for Murdering Capt. CHARLES FURBUSH, of Andover," but his racial difference is not immediately apparent in the illustration.<sup>608</sup> In itself, this is not

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<sup>607</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>608</sup> Jonathon Plummer, *Dying Confession of Pomp, A Negro Man, Who Was Executed at Ipswich, on the 6th August, 1795, for Murdering Capt. Charles Furbush, of Andover, Taken from the Mouth of the*





Image 11

### Enlargement

exceptional; as Jeannine DeLombard describes in her outstanding review of black gallows literature, “the racial identity of the black condemned features far more prominently in the titles than the content of the confessions,” including both textual and visual elements.<sup>609</sup> Yet, along with the figure’s size, the two objects springing from the crown of the hanging man indicate a fundamental divergence from the spectators carrying farming tools and the executioner standing on the stage.<sup>610</sup> The

<sup>609</sup> Jeannine Mare DeLombard, *In the Shadows of the Gallows: Race, Crime and American Civic Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 19.

<sup>610</sup> The man on the stage, who I presume to be the executioner, appears to have a similar object on his head, but I believe this to be a lever in the foreground.

nature of these objects and that difference, however, is hard for me to grasp. Those might be animal ears sprouting from Pomp's head, perhaps mule ears given the ubiquitous analogy between that beast of burden and African slaves.<sup>611</sup> Or the corpse may be adorned in a feathered headband; woodcuts were occasionally recycled between different broadsides and the Native condemned, like the African, were over-represented in this particular format as well as the larger genre of crime literature.<sup>612</sup> The author of Pomp's confession, Jonathan Plummer, may have thought the two races exchangeable. Or, considering that Pomp ends his narrative with a description of his conversion and its effects on his body ("now I have scarcely a drop of negro blood left in me, my blood having so far [turned] into the blood of a Minster, I am [already] nearly as a white as a Mulatto") those might be horns, a sign of his failure and damnation.

As with his human, racial or spiritual status, Pomp's enslavement is held in question by the text. As with the Constitution of the United States, the word slave does not appear in the broadside despite the institution's determining significance. Born in Guinea, Pomp was brought to Boston where "my Mother soon after our arrival in this Country gave me away to Mr. Abbot of Andover."<sup>613</sup> When his "old master" moved away, Pomp remained in Andover with one of Abbot's sons, with

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<sup>611</sup> See George B. Ellenberg, "African Americans, Mules and the Southern Mindscape, 1850-1950," *Agricultural History* 72(2), Spring 1998.

<sup>612</sup> See Katherine Grandjean, "'Our *Fellow-Creatures* & our *Fellow-Christians*': Race and Religion in Eighteenth Century Narratives of Indian Crime," *American Quarterly* 62(4) December 2010.

<sup>613</sup> The country of Pomp's birth is illegible to me in the image, but the transcription by Libby Chenautlt, Andrea Rosenberg and Elizabeth S. Wright lists it as "[illegible]nea." Given Guinea's place in the Atlantic slave trade, I assume this to be the location Pomp is referencing.



whom Pomp quickly grew “uneasy.” He thus declared his intention: “I told him that I meant to leave him soon, but he informed me that I was not free. About this time I was seized with convulsion fits which continued to oppress me at times ever after, to the fatal night that I murdered Capt. Furbush.” While not an explicitly causal relation, Pomp’s “lunacy” emerges when his freedom is denied, and will later disappear after the death of his master. After the son refuses to release him, Pomp consults the selectmen of Andover who “advise” him to stay with his master. Sometime later, after “Capt. Furbush took a notion to have a black man,” these same town officials consent to Pomp becoming “his servant.” As with his mother’s gift, there is no mention of sale.

Yet Pomp “soon found that I did not like him any better than man with whom I last lived.” Pomp originally presents this discontent as a result of Furbush’s managerial ineptitude, for his master was unable to properly care for his farm, blamed Pomp for his mistakes, and required his servant to work on the Sabbath. After Furbush brought home a number of horses, left them unattended in a corn field, and then “charged me with the guilt” of the destroyed crop, Pomp attempted to escape, but was captured and “severely flogged by him for my pains. I afterwards ran off again but again met with the same fate. In this manner I went on ten or a dozen years, not liking my place, and not able to get away from it.” At this point, Pomp discusses his illness again: “I was frequently troubled with convulsion fits and sometimes crazy in such a degree, that I was generally bolted in to a chamber every night, in order to hinder me from getting into the chamber where my masters daughters slept.” It is

unclear whether this perceived threat comes from Capt. Furbush, his family or Pomp himself. It may also emanate from Plummer, the broadside's author, for reasons I will discuss shortly.

After describing another escape attempt and beating, Pomp articulates a desire for the master's position, not his daughters, in what may be the scene of his manumission: "My master used to tell me I might stay as long as I please at his house, adding that he should not stay in the world forever. From this I entertained an idea that Mrs. Furbush and the farm would be mine, after the death of my master. The hopes of being master, husband and owner, on one hand, and the cruel treatment I had received from Furbush on the other, prompted me to wish for his death." The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 declared that "all men are born free and equal," even though this document did not explicitly reference slavery, three years later Justice Cushing used it in *Commonwealth v. Jennison* to argue that "slavery in my judgment is effectively abolished."<sup>614</sup> But this and other cases on the institution "went unnoticed in the newspapers of the day" and historians have struggled to precisely date the abolition of slavery in the state, viewing it less as a singular event than an unevenly dispersed process.<sup>615</sup> The census of 1790 is often cited as evidence of the institution's disappearance; in addition to the Furbush family, this document lists one "other free person" in the household.<sup>616</sup> If Furbush is deceptively offering

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<sup>614</sup> Cited in Elaine MacEacheren, "Emancipation of Slavery in in [sic] Massachusetts: A Reexamination, 1770-1790," *The Journal of Negro History* 55(4) Oct. 1970, 303.

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>616</sup> Cited in Zachary Hutchins, "Summary of this title," University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, "Documenting the American South," <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/pomp/summary.html> (accessed 5/25/14)



Pomp his freedom by dissimulating it as the master's benevolence, allowing Pomp to stay as long as he lives, the census records may not be falsified. Or perhaps Pomp is not mislead or mistaken and is presenting his manumission not as a simple event or gift from Furbush but as the promise of the appropriation of the master's property and status.

On "the fatal day," Pomp awakens "considerably disordered," hearing a disembodied voice "singing" and "whispering," but "went about my work as usual." Later he "was seized with a fit, bit my tongue almost through, and after coming out of the fit, was delirious." In this state, Pomp is "impressed with the idea that I must get up and kill Capt. Furbush"—despite being "struck with horror at my reflections," he heard a voice "whispering in my ear, that now is your time! kill him now! now or never!" Finding the "door of my chamber not being bolted as usual," Pomp takes an axe into his master's bedroom, distinguishes his body in the moonlight, and "raised the ax before he awakened and at two blows, I so effectually did the job for him, that he never after even stretched himself." The latter part of that sentence could just as easily apply to Pomp's labor on the farm. Afterwards, "I did not try to escape not knowing that there was any necessity of it," but he was soon brought to jail "and here enjoy [myself] considerably well." Along with the change to his blood enacted through his conversion, the "fits and lunacy have left me entirely [and I] hope to behave cleverly and graciously in this world."

At this point Plummer offers his "reflections," stating that he "endeavored to preserve the ideas of poor Pomp" but has "taken the liberty to arrange the matter in

my own way [and] to word his thoughts more elegantly and [illegible] than he was able to express them.” Plummer singles out the voice Pomp hears as a “falsehood...contrived by him to excuse his conduct” and states, without supplying any specific examples, that “in several particulars he was pretty much mistaken.” For Pomp’s “understanding was undoubtedly considerably injured by common fits, though his parts were vastly superior to those of an idiot. But for a rational being his mental improvements were extremely small, though when we consider the situation he lived in, this is not so very strange as we may think.” Plummer is referring to Pomp’s isolation “in the field, in bed” and that he “probably was never learned to read...He knew not the names of the Seven Sciences, nor ever that were such things—knew nothing of ancient or modern history...of philosophy, [illegible], geography, good breeding, honor, politics...” Ignorant of the “Laws of the United States or of this Commonwealth,” Pomp believed “he should immediately rise to a good estate and great felicity whenever he should be fortunate enough to kill his master.” But rather than education, Plummer, a former school teacher, believes this situation could have been prevented with the experience of propertied male liberty in heterosexuality. Furbush “could very well have afforded him 50 dollars per year,” with which Pomp could have purchased and improved some land. “In that situation, some unfortunate white woman” or a “girl that fell within the line of his [acquaintance?] would have sprung like a nimble doe [into] his marriage bed—The animating sweets of freedom, and of domestic life, had then be his own—He would neither have sullied his hands with innocent blood, nor have been forced with

unutterable woe, to breath his last in a [hood?].” In the footer of the broadside, Plummer advertises his other services: “A certain secret disorder cured privately and expeditiously—Love-letters in prose and verse furnished on the shortest notice—The art of gaining the object beloved reasonably taught.”

Given the “liberty” Plummer takes to rearrange and restate Pomp’s words, the question of which sexual fantasies or definitions of freedom properly belong to the condemned and/or to the entrepreneur is unproductive. As I tried to articulate in chapter one, I would feel the same even if the transcription was less explicitly mediated. Rather than speculating on Pomp’s or Plummer’s authentic feelings, I am interested in the place of madness in this text, how it functions along with racial difference to explain Pomp’s actions while displacing his enslaved status. Pomp’s fits first appear when he is refused his freedom and disappear after its momentary realization in the death of his master. This seems a critique of the institution of slavery as pathogenic, but it may also suggest that his insanity is at least in part staged. Indeed, Pomp’s madness is interpreted as an alibi in the death of his master, which Plummer appears to trace to Pomp’s ignorance and lust. These latter two qualities are offered as implicit signs of his blackness, connected to the fits that damage his unlearned understanding or reveal his desire of and/or threat to the master’s daughters. In order to prevent this mixture of insanity, depravity and stupidity from congealing in violence, Plummer offers a hetero-patriarchal landowning ideal that avoids acknowledging slavery even as it allows for an “unfortunate” race/class mixture. Plummer does not recommend Pomp’s

emancipation, nor does he list the recent rulings on slavery among the subjects of ignorance. Like his anticipation of assuming the master's position, Pomp's captivity appears delusional. His violence is therefore monstrous.

In *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease*, Jonathan Metzl traces contemporary “associations between schizophrenia, criminality, and violence” to the political and epistemic upheaval in the US during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>617</sup> Beginning by noting the contemporary consensus among psychiatric and medical researchers on the over-diagnosis of schizophrenia in black men—who are “five to seven times” more likely to be judged with the condition than white men—Metzl turns to an examination of case records from Michigan's Ionia State Hospital for the Criminal Insane.<sup>618</sup> In these texts, and various newspaper reports, Metzl initially finds schizophrenia presented as a broad, nebulous illness linked to emotional disturbance and associated with white femininity in the 1950s. But as civil rights and black liberation struggles drew the attention of psychiatry and other systems of incarceration, doctors and researchers began “to uncover *hostile* aspects of black schizophrenia, such as paranoia, delusions, or rage, or to associate schizophrenia with civil rights remonstrations.”<sup>619</sup> No longer a vague, emotional condition, schizophrenia became defined as major disorder of the intellect with manifestations of antisocial violence. The disease's “transformation from an illness of white feminine docility to one of black male hostility” rendered schizophrenia and

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<sup>617</sup> Jonathan M. Metzl, *The Protest Psychosis*, xix.

<sup>618</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

other major psychiatric disorders as threatening while promoting the mass incarceration of black men in hospitals and prisons.<sup>620</sup> I find Metzl's meticulous work convincing and hope my own can supplement his thesis by expanding the scope of his timeframe and subject matter. The process that Metzl analyses is also a repetition and rearticulation of the different moments in the racialization of madness that I have attempted to profile, such as Pomp's violent and delusional emancipation, Jefferson's questions of species and labor, McPherson's impossible citizenship, Rose's threatening embrace, the value of Sophia's sanity, the proof of inferiority in the 1840 census and the death of Davy (Walker). My main concern lies in the overly symmetrical nature of the Metzl's argument, where black masculinity is substituted for white femininity, which may enable an understanding of certain formations of madness, crime and violence—such as the current isolation of and panic around the mass shooter—but can obscure others, like the death and remembrance of Esmin Green.<sup>621</sup>

The 2008 video of Green's death remains widely available, albeit in a much abbreviated form. Most of the videos available through a Google search contain about a minute of footage, usually a montage of specific moments: her fall from the chair, the spasmodic movements of her left leg, the security guard wheeling his swivel chair to stare at her body before moving back off camera without ever having

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<sup>620</sup> Ibid, xv.

<sup>621</sup> For an excellent analysis of the construction and impact of the mass shooter, see Benjamin Reiss, "Madness after Virginia Tech: From Psychiatric Risk to Institutional Vulnerability" *Social Text* 28(4) Winter 2010.

left his seat, the nurse nudging the corpse with her foot (Image 11). But most of Green's previous 23 hours in the Kings County Hospital Center were also recorded by one of the four cameras in the ER, footage that conflicted with entries in hospital records made by four different physicians and two nurses. One nurse, for instance, recorded Green in normal physical condition and "sitting quietly in the waiting area" every half hour from 5-6:30am, while another observed Green asleep between 5-7am.<sup>622</sup> A physician claiming to have examined Green during the 8am-5pm shift reported her *deep vein thrombosis/pulmonary emboli* risk assessment as "low."<sup>623</sup> Medical examiners would later attribute her death to "deep venous thrombosis of lower extremities due to physical inactivity."<sup>624</sup> Risperdal, an antipsychotic prescribed to Green during her admission to the hospital in the previous year, is also associated with an increased risk of blood clots.<sup>625</sup>

The video was obtained by the New York Civil Liberties Union in the course of a suit filed in 2007 against the hospital, charging the psychiatric center with holding patients for days in the ER, often without toiletries or a place to sleep besides a chair.<sup>626</sup> As Victoria Pitts-Taylor describes, following the footage's release to the public, the "local and national media circulated the security tapes of Esmine Green's

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<sup>622</sup> Anemona Hartocollis, "Video of Dying Mental Patient Being Ignored Spurs Changes at Brooklyn Hospital," *The New York Times*, B3, July 2, 2008.

<sup>623</sup> Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn, New York City Department of Investigation, "DOI's Investigation..." 5.

<sup>624</sup> Cited in Sara M Bergstresser, "The Death of Esmine Green: Considering Ongoing Injustice in Psychiatric Institutions," *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics* 4(1) Spring 2011, 222.

<sup>625</sup> Chris Parker, Carol Coupland, and Julia Hippisley-Cox, "Antipsychotic drugs and risk of venous thromboembolism: nested case-control study," *British Medical Journal* 341 September 2010.

<sup>626</sup> Jim Dwyer, "After a Death Seen on Tape..."



Image 12

Source: AP Photo/New York Civil Liberties Union

death and replayed them for weeks, instigating public outcry. The images of Esmin Green collapsed on the floor, and of the nurse poking Green's body with her foot, went viral on the Internet. Journalists and bloggers highlighted the case as evidence of discrimination against poor, black, immigrant, and mentally ill persons."<sup>627</sup> The amount of details given about her life before its frequently-viewed end varied; some

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<sup>627</sup> Victoria Pitts-Taylor, "Waiting-to-Death, or Security and Asylum-Seeking in a Hospital ER," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 39(1/2), Spring/Summer 2011, 342-3.

reports just mention her age and “psychosis.”<sup>628</sup> Others attempt to humanize the figure on the floor, offering a “portrait of a deeply religious, if sometimes troubled, woman, who left Jamaica for New York in the late 1990s to earn money for her six children back home.”<sup>629</sup> But the status of Green’s body as transparent object of identification or evidence reinforces, rather than upsets, the spectacularization of black suffering. In chapter one, I discussed this fixed, pained black embodiment through Saidiya Hartman’s critique of abolitionist representation. Recently David Marriott has referenced the images of murdered black British children circulated by TV news programs to describe a related process: “as long as documentary TV continues to show images of dead African children as the epitome of lawless violence, it remains haunted by its likeness to the hegemonic surveillance of CCTV; that is to say, showing everything but revealing nothing, simply announcing—through its scopic regimes—the racialized exclusion of people as commodities to be disciplined.” The broadcast of Green’s silent death on screen, presenting her as an object of pity, disavows its conditions of possibility—her prior silence as an incarcerated and captive body. To take another point from Marriott’s reading, there is in the video “the trauma of seeing an African past that keeps on happening.”<sup>630</sup>

Facing a death witnessed blankly by multiple members of hospital staff, in the flesh and on video, and then by an outraged public, the state responded to this

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<sup>628</sup> Associated Press, “Esmine Green, who died on Brooklyn hospital floor [sic], perished from sitting,” *New York Daily News*, July 11, 2008.

<sup>629</sup> Cara Buckley, “A Life Celebrated, and a City Criticized,” *New York Times*, July 7, 2008.

<sup>630</sup> David Marriott, *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), xx.



“inadequate supervision and monitoring of patients” by calling for more.<sup>631</sup> The Department of Justice had already begun an investigation of the hospital in the spring of 2008; the day immediately before Green’s passing, investigators had written the first of three “immediacy letters” addressing “serious fire safety and sanitation issues in the mental health units.” The following letter focused on the “inadequate mental health assessments, inappropriate drug combinations, and inappropriate use of drugs for their secondary sedative effect.” The third detailed a series of violent and sexual assaults “generated in large part by inadequate, ineffective, and counterproductive treatment and the resulting failure to identify and control patient aggression.”<sup>632</sup> In the final report, the investigators blamed “a system that has neither clear, specific standards of care nor an adequately trained supervisory, professional, and direct care staff,” but believe they are only referring to this hospital in particular.<sup>633</sup> In their call for a constant and individualized supervision of each psychiatric inmate to ensure accurate diagnosis, effective chemical and behavioral management, prevention of aggressive or suicidal behavior, and proper discharge placement, the investigators fantasize a total institution dispersed through a network of control, a dream that failed to materialize in the deinstitutionalization of psychiatric facilities in the 1960s and 1970s. Constantly referencing a set of “generally accepted professional standards” of impossible panopticism, they forget about the cameras.<sup>634</sup>

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<sup>631</sup> Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division. *Kings County Hospital Center Findings Letter*. Jan 30, 2009, 3.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>633</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

In a place where “no one person had the full picture of what constituted Ms. Green’s medical file,” a stronger system of notation and accountability is no doubt in order.<sup>635</sup> But even though the waiting room was the scene of Green’s death, a bed the psychiatric ward or a place in an outpatient program would not necessarily have saved her life. New York State has performed an influential merger of its criminal justice and the mental health systems, beginning in 1999 with an act enabling the involuntary outpatient treatment of people with psychiatric diagnoses. Known as Kendra’s law—named in reference to the victim in a much publicized act of violence on the New York City subway tracks attributed to unmedicated schizophrenia—a judge could now compel a person over the age of 18 to follow a treatment plan prepared by a physician working for the County Director of Community Services or be hospitalized for 72 hours. A case manager is assigned to ensure compliance with the kind of treatment mandated, which 88% of the time refers to “medication management.”<sup>636</sup> Despite the name invoked in its passage, the law is primarily deployed against people without a history of violence; more than one psychiatric hospitalization appears to be one determining factor in its utilization. The other is race: black people are five times as likely to be subject to this law as white people and latin@s are two and half times as likely as whites.<sup>637</sup> But some feel compelled to elect into this racially profiled and profiling system because the court orders grant a

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<sup>635</sup> New York City Department of Investigation, “DOI’s Investigation...” 10.

<sup>636</sup> New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, *Implementation of ‘Kendra’s Law’ Is Severely Biased*, April 7, 2005, 6.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

priority access to mental health treatment over the voluntary applicants. Thus, a “perverse result of this tie is that orders are sometimes sought simply to get people services.”<sup>638</sup> Esmin Green, a black women with more than one hospitalization, was a primary candidate for this kind of involuntary treatment. But as an undocumented worker, she could have been ensnared by the immigration courts, where her mental difference would have likely resulted in a “deportation by default.”<sup>639</sup> Instead, she perished in the interstice of these systems of violence and incarceration, under their surveillance but not their protection.

In her outstanding overview of early American gallows literature, DeLombard cautions against a solely pessimistic or continuous reading of the texts of black criminality. While the many broadsides, pamphlets, confessions, and sermons concerning the African condemned may have presented black subjectivity as criminal, in concert with the prohibitions against enslaved and free black testimony in court, there are other itineraries than a straight path to the prison industrial complex. For in claiming a public “black persona...in early American print culture...crime literature, regardless of who composed specific texts and under what conditions, helped to create the terms of possibility for the civic presence assumed by a later

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<sup>638</sup> Ibid. The law was recently extended by Governor Cuomo as part of the New York Secure Ammunition and Firearms Enforcement Act of 2013. It now requires all mental health professions (defined as physicians, social workers, psychologists and nurses) to report a potentially violent patient to the Director of Community Services. Again, despite the fact that mass shooters like Jared Lee Loughner and Seung-Hui Cho were subject psychiatric and legal supervisions prior to their acts, the state responds not by reevaluating its failed institutions, but by expanding them.

<sup>639</sup> Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union, *Deportation by Default: Mental Disability, Unfair Hearings, and Indefinite Detention in the US Immigration System* July 26, 2010.

generation of black autobiographers,” especially ex-slaves.<sup>640</sup> Pomp’s monstrosity may be used to efface his captivity, but his desires for freedom are not completely exhausted in the text’s expressions of violence, illness and sexuality. While the text could be understood as restricting him to a criminal subject, where he feigns his madness but not sexual desire, and a racialized object whose slave status is both natural and invisible, Pomp’s literal and metaphorical escape attempts gesture at a “fugitive movement in and out of the frame, bar or whatever externally imposed social logic—a movement of escape, the stealth of the stolen that can be said, since it inheres in every closed circle, to break every enclosure.”<sup>641</sup> Fred Moten is here articulating a “black optimism” that confronts the political ontology bequeathed in slavery not simply with a full or correct knowledge of its operations, but with a necessary failure at the very possibility of its foundation. As he states elsewhere, “what is often overlooked in blackness is bound up with what has often been overseen. Certain experiences of being tracked, managed, cornered in seemingly open space are inextricably bound to an aesthetically and politically dangerous supplementarity, as an internal exteriority waiting to get out, as if the prodigal’s return were to leaving itself.”<sup>642</sup>

I have a hard time reading Esmin Green or Davy (Walker) in terms of escape, but those who refuse to allow these losses to be ungrievable or passed over also point to a space outside of the logic of social and mental death. Green’s church, the Jesus

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<sup>640</sup> Jeannine Mare DeLombard, *In the Shadows of the Gallows*, 38.

<sup>641</sup> Fred Moten, “The Case of Blackness,” 179.

<sup>642</sup> Fred Moten, “Black Op,” 1745.

is Lord Sanctuary in Canarsie, organized a memorial service that drew members of the Jamaican government and the international news media as well as Green's friends and family. Rejecting her objectification without representing an untroubled subject, mourners spoke of the Green's struggles not in terms of an inherent psychosis but as a "depression" caused by a recent job loss, which meant she "was on the verge of losing her apartment and could no longer send money home."<sup>643</sup> Mad Pride and c/s/x activists have continued to memorialize Green by rejecting the narrative of her murder as a mistake of oversight since amended. In one instance activists lay on the sidewalk outside the hospital, reproducing the pose of Green's body in the waiting room, in order to see if the staff would offer medical assistance. "They did not" (Image 13). A number of candlelight vigils have also been held outside the hospital—the fliers for which contrast images of Green in death and life with a discussion of the hospital's abuses after its supposed correction (Image 14). These activists, some of whom spent time interned in the institution, identify with Green's position not to possess her suffering or pain, but to argue that its event has not ended. In the call to "close this psychiatric institution down," they ask not for the reform or expansion of this system of violence and incarceration, but its abolition.

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<sup>643</sup> Cara Buckley, "A Life Celebrated, and a City Criticized," *New York Times*



Image 13

*“Activists re-enact Esmin's murder and wait to see if KCHC staff respond (they did not).”*

Source: Lauren Tenney, “Psychiatric Survivors and Allies Hold Demonstration and Vigil in Remembrance of Esmin Green,” readMedia

<http://readme.readmedia.com/Psychiatric-Survivors-and-Allies-Hold-Demonstration-and-Vigil-in-Remembrance-of-Esmin-Green/1456478#!prettyPhoto> (accessed 5/25/14)

**WE THE PEOPLE**

In remembrance of Esmin Green who was murdered-by-neglect  
at the Kings County Hospital Center Psychiatric Emergency Room, June 19, 2008.

**2 YEARS AFTER  
ESMIN GREEN'S  
MURDER,  
WHAT HAS  
CHANGED?**

**NEWS REPORTS:  
ABUSE  
CONTINUES.**






**STILL OUTRAGED? JOIN US!**

**JUNE 18, 2010**

5 PM OPENING DEMONSTRATION and SPEAK OUT \*\*  
6 PM PRESS CONFERENCE: 6-9 PM DEMONSTRATION & SPEAK OUT\*\*  
9 PM CANDLE LIGHT VIGIL

**JUNE 19, 2010**

5 AM CANDLE LIGHT VIGIL \*\* SPEAK OUTS AND DEMONSTRATION 6 AM - 5 PM

On June 19 it will be two years since Esmin Green was murdered-by-neglect at the Kings County Hospital Center Psychiatric Emergency Room. In February 2010, it was reported by the media that a male "patient" was raped by an employee of Kings County who was charged for the crime. As recently as April 27, 2010 more citations of abuses were published in the news.

Not only does this abuse and torture happen - but it happens in the multi-million dollar new psychiatric building. This was supposed to end murder, abuse, rape, and torture of people confined within its walls - after the City agreed to court monitoring because of the abuses and torture that people were subjected to while detained in the facility.

**YOU CAN HELP US STOP ABUSE AND TORTURE!**

**SIGN ON AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL CO-SPONSOR OR  
INDIVIDUAL ENDORSER TODAY:**  
[www.TheOpalProject.org/Vigil.html](http://www.TheOpalProject.org/Vigil.html)

- This abuse and torture has been going on for centuries with no end in sight - we must make our voices heard!
- Kings County is not safe.
- Kings County should be closed down.
- Rape and Death are not good outcomes.
- **COME CALL TO CLOSE THIS PSYCHIATRIC INSTITUTION DOWN.**
- **Building "R"**  
**410 Winthrop Street**  
**Brooklyn, NY 11203**
- [www.TheOpalProject.org/Vigil.html](http://www.TheOpalProject.org/Vigil.html)
- **(516) 319-4295**

WE THE PEOPLE OFFICES LOCATED AT 158 Jefferson Street Floors 1 & 2. Albany, NY 12210 (516) 319-4295

Image 14

Source: Lauren J. Tenney, "WE THE PEOPLE In remembrance of Esmin Green," The Opal Project, <http://theopalproject.org/vigil.html> (accessed 5/25/14)

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