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# Spectacular Violence: The Affective Registers of Black Bodies' Matter

Stephanie M. Lemmer

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**Spectacular Violence:  
The Affective Registers of Black Bodies' Matter**

by

Stephanie Lemmer

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## Abstract

This thesis functions parenthetically within and between several essays of James Baldwin's: most notably, "Everybody's Protest Novel" and "The Price of the Ticket." Its aim is to rigorously interrogate what I limn *affective registers*. My polemic aggressively pursues Baldwin's scathing critique of sentimentalist discourses that extend, I argue, from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and are extended, therefrom, into a revivifying barrage of white savior complexes, ostentatious yard signs and progressive liberal tropes that attempt to mask the cruelty and spectacular violence endemic to and instantiated by sentimentality.

Given the aforementioned, this thesis holds a further, and much heavier contention: it follows that sentimentality is not only indexed by a kind of "spectacular violence" enacted upon Black bodies, but also that sentimentality is the discursive container constructing a form of emotionality simultaneously articulated through and by a certain metaphoricity located in the terminological markers and epistemic ruptures effecting the distancing of white subjects/gazes from the metaphoricity of objects that are both constructed by and within the discourse of spectacular violence.

Therefore, the intentionally aggressive polemic this thesis pursues demands an evisceration of the psychic dimensions found within this peculiar brand of white (American) sentimentality—that which, as Teju Coles reminds us, "supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening."

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The grad student on exhibition—she who should not be named—must be handed a coffer of my immense gratitude. Without her magic sentence of absolute honesty and humility, I would be lacking my own counter to Maya Angelou’s “When we know better, we do better.” Dear friend, the time is now...and time and time again, we have failed to act.

To my dearest Monroe. That Angelou quote is as much to acknowledge the bridge we continually meet each other upon. From the first instance of my own outrage in this project, you met me into the early morning hours, chasing down and handing me back the scattered and shattered pages fallen from my twelve open file folders. They were always, no doubt, better for your fingers gracing them.

To Dr. Catherine Fox. Those sighs yet still are audible when my sentences become too convoluted. Forgive that they remain all too often.

To Dr. Luke Trip. Eighty-five pages came and went and are a bit behind us now. I do not know if you recall, but just over two years ago, after class, you graced me with being “a real intellectual.” Those words are things I’ve carried with me, all the days since and forward. Thank you.

To Sharon and Carol (Doctors who I consider my comrades). From before my embarking upon this master’s situation, you both were staunch advocates for my too

often too ardent voice. Apologizes for my slow progress on plain speak and clarity. When I say, "I couldn't have done without you both," understand that to be a raw and awesome sentiment (though, let me leave sentimentality out of this blessing).

My gremlins. Your mama's love is thick as honey. I'm sorry in these months there've been times you've needed to wait for it to drip down past all these words in this thesis.

Thank you all for being present for this journey.

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*But what can any individual do...*

*There is only one thing that every individual can do,--they can see to it that they feel right.*

*An atmosphere of sympathetic influence encircles every human being; and the man or woman who feels strongly, healthily and justly, on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor to the human race. See, then, to your sympathies in this matter!*

*--Harriet Beecher Stowe*

*(italics original)*

## ❧ PREFACE ❧

### PLACING THE PERVERSE AND PRIVILEGED PARADOXES

*At least we know now that this is happening...*

–Fellow graduate peer during a reel-time viewing of a murder of a black man by police

Sitting in seminar, the above-cited peer’s indignant outrage strikes me...a certain kind of way. It’s a physiological response that is not dissimilar to the one I had passing yard signs and bumper stickers a few years back. These mottos, propping words to “gay marriage” with the ubiquitous yellow equal signs backed by blue, served the smacking lip spill of progressive propaganda. My spontaneous response—a recoiling, backward momentum, resounded a familiar alert. Now, to a queer woman who would rather not be enveloped in the U.S. imperial machine as a homonationalist<sup>1</sup> (the right kind of [white] marrying gay), these mottos denote a certain-kind of uptaking that signify less the puritanical claim of ontological equality and more a cashable stake within the nation’s parameters of citizenship. *Equality*. The word so chewed on, chewed up and spit out that it finds itself needing to be scrapped off the walkway of the busiest

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<sup>1</sup> Homonationalist is a term coined by Jasbir Puar in her seminal text, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, to signify a LGBTQ person who is enveloped by the state in order that they may propagate nationalism to the further exclusion of those “not quite right” gays and other Others.

street. Its tattered, strung-out and favor-less, to say the least. An exhausted motto quite afflicted with political affect, it has imploded to impotency. Words, imbued with affect, do things, no doubt. But, the trace I'm interested in is how these mottos, slogans and eye-rolling political catch phrases are simply vehicles for the work done by emotions. It's all a very Freudian exam: What is behind the words? What may the (perverse) motivation be? Without furthering the problematic relation of the status of queerness and blackness as exclusive marginal identifiers—which is to say, to forego a parallel—a mutual (even if exclusive) space exists in which to examine the uptake by hetero-whiteness toward a political patronage of both identifications. Incantations of outrage falling forth from shocked mouths alert, through these resounding tugs of my physiological response, that something is, well, *off*. That slippery term, equality, needs to be interrogated, off top. And within these questions, we locate the divergence between the enveloping of the *right* gays and the movement of outing Others as always already too queer (which, after all, has nothing to do with sexuality and everything to do with being eligible for envelopment into the citizen body).

What I'm getting at here is that while the student sitting beside me could manufacture ethics for herself in extending her vote for the private right of

marriage into my gay sphere in order to allow that my private collapse into the public arena of the nuclear, homonormative family (the gay mirroring the straight in all ways but gender), she could not become an “us” with the murdered black man on the (significantly distanced from her) screen. “*Bad*” cops are murdering “them.” Now “we” can stop it. Now “we” know. The critical disclosure in this conversation is this “we.” The illustrious question: *Who is we?*

To my fellow graduate student, this “we” is constituted at a mid-western university’s roundtable. We, as it is, are watching—a spectacular viewing of a reality that is decidedly outside what has been constituted as “us.” I look to the sole black young man at the table, disappeared by the white woman’s proclamation that “we” now know. He, she has ascertained, must have been previously unfamiliar with the imminent threat of *existing while black*. In the same instant she realizes him into existence, she has paradoxically disappeared him. He has become a being for her, to recognize her own humanity. This perverse paradox is what troubles the white progressive platform of *equality*, on humanitarianism’s grounds.

The marriage equality banners in my predominantly white, staunchly progressive, neighborhood have been replaced with lawn signs that advertise, “Black Lives Matter.” This is a neighborhood where, in fact, black lives are rarely

allowed to inhabit. And yet again, onto the *rhetoric* of equality, mottos are grasped, straw men construct the matter of all lives and the matter of black lives becomes yet another platform for white outrage in the form of affective tautologies. The repetition of this political platform of equality through emotional alliterations is what fuels my project. The bumper sticker that demands, “If you are not outraged, you are not paying attention,” compels me to ask the very question on which this thesis resides: *How does emotion work as an alibi for excusing whiteness while paradoxically maintaining it?* The hashtags of the movements, imprinted onto everything that can be writ upon (see equal sign tattoos): “Straight but not narrow” and “ally” of all the things that can be hashtagged with progressive props, have themselves become a market economy — the selling of (political) affect. What does this insistence of affective, political sloganeering implicate; or, rather prevent the implication thereof?

This barrage of interrogative assertions is imbued with a certain polemical disposition proximal to the outrage I’ve accused yet and still with a vast distance between the two forms of outrage in terms of *modus operandi*. The scope of settling (down) this inquiry on the whole is beyond what can be accomplished in this thesis or perhaps many lifetimes — to which history has attested.

Additionally, the white subjects of my inquiry here are not apart from me; rather, admittedly, this inquiry is simultaneously an investigation of myself as an academic who habitually immerses herself into rigorous questions of race. No doubt, my whiteness situates me and therefore implicates me into the very paradoxes I am interrogating. To be transparent, I'm acutely aware of the slipperiness of this inquiry; it is a dangerous trip to put under a microscope the handful of folks who dare to speak in outrageous tones, against the primary constitution of this country (being race, being whiteness...being white supremacy, to be real).

This is a deeply personal project of which the goal is a Spartan mapping of terrain that illustrates how white folk uptake emotion as political manifestos. The impetus of this thesis, in no uncertain words from Nikki Giovanni, is to "study white people," which is to place the pathology of this discussion directly into the red-handedness of whiteness (56). Rather than another examination of black folks in order to answer why it is that we are still collectively proclaiming shocked outrage at the historically relentless murdering of black people, I attempt to trace the use of this affectation as an alibi of maintaining an epistemology of (white) ignorance.

As a retort to the graduate peer at the beginning of this Preface: *How can we feign not knowing, my dear?*

## ❧ INTRODUCTION ❧

### “FEEL RIGHT:” AFFECTIVE NOTIONS AND POTIONS OF WHITENESS

*[Technologies of the self] permit individuals to effect, by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity wisdom, perfection, or immortality.*

—Michel Foucault

*[G]iven that affect is never simply individual or internal, whiteness can be understood as a form of affective technology, an affective mode of self-practice situated in a circuit of social and political meaning...the performance of the white subject...is played out affectively in comparison to those excluded through emotion norms and appeals to the feeling of whiteness.*

—Zeus Leonardo and Michalinos Zembylas

Working with Foucault’s theses on the technologies of power, along with Sara Ahmed’s work on the affective turn in political economies, Leonardo and Zembylas allege, “One of the technologies of whiteness is its ability to project itself as its own alibi” (151). Continuing, they assert that this “bifurcat[ion]” while illustrated through the dichotomy of good whites/bad whites, occurs also within the (white) self, who “forge[s] personas that favor non-racism, a form of image management, rather than aligning themselves with anti-racism, a political project” (151). In other words, to *feel right*, to be affected with outrage at a racist act conjures the image of a nonracist. This very split enacts a nonracist alibi through a “spatial metaphor”: Proclaiming to locate oneself *in* a space of anti-racism, simultaneously places oneself *outside* the location of racism. One, after

all, “cannot be two places at once, both literally and discursively” (Leonardo and Zembylas 155).

The work done through this affective labor is what Ahmed coins as “the cultural politics of emotion.” Explains Ahmed, “[A] feeling bad...’shows’ we are doing something” (“The Non-Performativity”). In no uncertain disagreement, Ahmed complicates J. L. Austin’s performative of a speech utterance, in that, expressing outrage—I feel bad, sad, mad—in fact, “does not do what it says” (“The Non-Performativity”). Rather, these utterances are non-performative, and instead “texts [that] are not ‘finished’ as forms of action” (“The Non-Performativity”). Affective “admissions are not anti-racist actions, and nor do they commit a...person to a form of action that we could describe as anti-racist” (“The Non-Performativity”). Said another way, *saying is not doing*. Further, in *feeling bad*, one is affected rightly. Subsequently, this places oneself apart from what was causing the *bad* affect. Consequently, the alibi is conjured as one is no longer in line with what is bad. This calculative function of the affective economy of white emotion has transcribed the outraged subject as *good*.

William M. Reddy, historian and anthropologist, arguably constructs an elucidation to the emotional speech he problematizes through Austin’s emotive utterances. Reddy argues that “emotion statements” neither simply report nor

perform and prescribes what he deems as a “solution” — “emotives.” Emotive statements, declares Reddy,

[a]re influenced directly by and alter what they ‘refer’ to. Thus, emotives are similar to performatives [and differ from constatives] in that emotives do things to the world. Emotives are themselves instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying, emotions. There is an ‘inner’ dimension to emotion, but it is never merely ‘represented’ by statements or actions. (331)

Reddy allows that not only do emotions do things “to the world,” but also, those things do things back. This mutually constitutive feed that is fueled by the work of emotions has serious implications for the propositions put forth in this thesis. Said another way: *The matters addressed are affective matters.*

Feeling a certain kind of way and projecting it (as an utterance that does a deed [that deed being an alibi against racism]), is precisely what Ahmed is troubling. What Leonardo and Zembylas are getting at by insisting “whiteness is a technology of affect,” is, in fact, the tangible effect of this Foucauldian technology of the self. Affect does, indeed, do things. What this method allows is precisely the rhetorical maneuvers that Ahmed is critiquing: *saying one thing and (not) doing another.* Uttered words threaten to become stagnant, floating-

away abstractions creating distractions for things are still being done. Put another way, the *not* doing here is actually enacting an allowance toward the continuance of doing what was previously being done, before the utterance was put up against the deed. The inaction, which occurs *after* the utterance—the unfinished business, as Ahmed has it—perpetuates the very thing just spoken against. This paradoxical action manifests not only an impotent utterance, but also creates an invisibility cloak for the critiqued racism to move ahead less impeded. Succinctly, Ahmed summarizes her thesis, “The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism,”

My concern with the non-performativity of anti-racism has hence been to examine how sayings are not always doings, or to put it more strongly, to show how the investment in saying as if saying was doing can actually extend rather than challenge racism. The claims I describe do not operate as simple claims. They have a very specific form: they define racism in a particular way, and then they imply ‘I am not’ or ‘we are not’ that. So it is not that such speech acts say ‘we are anti-racist’ (and saying so makes us so); rather they say ‘we are this’, whilst racism is ‘that’, so in being ‘this’ we are not ‘that’, where ‘that’ would be racist. So in saying we are racist, then

we are not racists, as racists don't know they are racist; or in expressing shame about racism, then we are not racist, as racists are shameless, and so on. These statements function as *claims to performativity* rather than as performatives. Or we could even say that anti-racist speech in a racist world is an 'unhappy performance': the conditions are not in place that would allow such 'saying' to 'do' what it 'says.'

Such a transparently pointed position (which Ahmed extrapolates as the progressive notions of white liberalism) is not to elicit shame. Ahmed leaves no error in analysis: Shame doesn't work to do the work it was motivated to do. In fact, shame can promote pride in embracing the transformation of what once one shameful to the transfiguration of what one now is—no longer shamed.

Returning to a spatial metaphor, or rather pulling space into a horizontal temporality, the racist exploits spoke against are located in the past—historicized. Speaking against moves us into the future, beyond what we now have been moved by—what we no longer are, which is to occlude the presence of racism in this present moment. This is the rhetoric of getting over and moving on; what Ahmed calls "the politics of admission" wherein this bait-and switch

turns the apologetics of the admission of racism into a diversity discourse of post-racial, pride of radical progressivism—a white alibi, to be sure.

Under the terms of apologetics, “The assumption that saying is doing—that being sorry means that we have overcome the very things we are sorry about—hence works to support racism in the present” (Ahmed, “The Non-Performativity”). What is done in this speech act, if anything is done at all, is that the “white subject is re-posed as the social ideal” (Ahmed, “The Non-Performativity”). Further, the nonwhite body uptaken in such projects has, contrary to the mission(ary) declaration of humanitarian discourse, been utilized toward a re-fashioning of whiteness, one in which white people can proclaim their way out of being racist simply through impotent utterances that are non-performative. These “unhappy performances” or fine speeches may *feel* contrary in a racist world, but the affective language fails to move the world outside of the affective realm. Actions, as it is, speak louder than words. And as Ahmed begs us, words should not be mistaken as actions.

\* \* \*

*But Now We Know...*

*When we know better, we do better.*  
—Maya Angelou

Returning to the grad student from the preface and her declaration of

“Now *we* know,” we can now understand her more accurately through Ahmed’s affective economies and Leonardo and Zembylas’s application of Foucault’s technologies of the self—managing whiteness through affect. Precisely, the politics of admission become obvious here: At the undeniable, visible testament of a racist action, the white psyche is moved through articulated affect, to speak out against blatant racism. The admission that something is *off*, to admit racist “forms of bad practice, where such ‘admissions’ are valued as a form of good practice” conducts the ‘admission’ itself [to be] read as a form of anti-racism” (Ahmed, “The Non-Performativity”). The articulation, *now we know*, supposedly moves us into the future, marking the present as past at the very instance that the white gaze happened upon the witnessing of state-sanctioned black death. The articulation, *now we know*, implies that we didn’t previously *know*, which is to evade culpability. *We* didn’t *know* (better). Now that we know, *knowing* itself and the articulation of this knowledge stands as a (failed) performative utterance. Articulated awareness, for that graduate peer, seems to imply a break with the present that would disallow such police brutality in the next instance...Because *now we know*.

“A certain white narcissism may be at work here,” where change is manifest simply by white voyeurism and slippery empathy (Leonardo and

Zembylas 155). This empathy at visible black death is slippery precisely because “[i]t serves an emotional function for white subjects who experience catharsis that doesn’t necessarily lead to a racial disinvestment” (Leonardo and Zembylas 155). Circling back to Ahmed’s contention that utterances are unfinished to-do’s is deftly spoken in this instance of my peer’s outraged declaration. “Now we know,” begs the elliptical to something yet to come though not yet arrived. What remains to be actualized is the fleshed-out second half of the epigraph from Maya Angelou: “When we know better, *we do better.*” The yet-to-arrive is the “do better.” The cited student remains a bystander, a voyeur, not a perpetrator by her own admittance, cleansed of ignorance through her articulation of knowing (better).

\* \* \*

**The Rhetorical Movements of Feeling Our Way: From Sentiment to Emotion  
(through Hysteria) to the Affective Turn(out)**

*‘Not talking about affect’ need not mean that no affect exists.*  
--Barbara Rosenwein

*This discovery makes me feel dizzy, which itself reinforces the notion that I may be asleep! Suppose then that I am dreaming – it isn’t true that I, with my eyes open, am moving my head and stretching out my hands. Suppose, indeed that I don’t even have hands or any body at all.*  
--Descartes, *Meditations on the First Philosophy*

All this talk about affective economies warrants a discussion and a historicizing of (emotive) terminology; specifically, an inventory of how emotions have been uptaken and thus been employed rhetorically and politically. The work of publicized emotion has a history, though the historicity of emotions is a new project. The Cartesian split—so defined through Descartes' *Meditations* on the questioning if he has “even hands or any body at all”—is where we will enter into this crude cruising, historically contextualizing the (cultural) politics of emotion. Outside his thoughtful contrivance, Descartes' cognition, his thinking, which “split” the real of the mind from the possible illusion of the body, transpires at this pivotal interrogation: Is his hand “real” or a materialization of his mind? Descartes concludes by constructing a duality between the mind and the body which has manufactured a “terministic screen”<sup>2</sup> that always already places the onus of the Cartesian duality upon Western disciplines to accept that the mind is distinct from the body, and therefore employing his duality, as such.

Pivoting from the genesis of Descartes's solidified distinction of sensory perception as distinct from the logic of cognition understands Descartes'

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<sup>2</sup> Terministic screen is Kenneth Burke's term, which insists that we all view reality through colored glasses. How we “see” is predetermined and simultaneously dependent upon our situatedness in society.

thinking self as subsuming emotions. Further, Descartes would categorize these emotions as affective—that is, from the material body, bypassing the logic of his thinking self—precognitive. The point I’m attempting to clarify at this juncture draws a distinction between the ways ‘feeling’ has been uptaken and how they have been read to work. More to the point, whether we (or history) names feelings as sentiment, emotion or affect, the Cartesian split has always already framed our Western cognition to read feeling as residing at and within the material body. Consequently, then, feeling resides previous to and outside of thinking—an extension of Descartes *Meditations*.

This divergence of body and mind has foregrounded a logic that prerequisites an absence of affect, of emotion. At this moment, we come upon our common knowledge that emotion is the substrate of the binary of the cognitive and the sensory. Starting from this theoretical, historic moment, we must clarify the fundamental take-away: Sensory projects are regulated to the material body, which are stratified through an oppositional definition that determines them as definitively *non-cognitive*. This is all to say, cognition—defined through Descartes as the location of beingness—is given precedence over what is *felt*, at the sensory level as well as, materially, at the corporeal level. If

the mind is to be trusted, the body and its affectations aren't. Affect, in other words, as an effect of the body, is primal and instinctual—thoughtless.

Thrusting ahead a few centuries, certain that Descartes yet pulls the reigns, I drive this discussion to what Shirley Samuels entitles her edited anthology, *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America*. Given the preceding hand(le) by Descartes, we must understand the Cartesian split as potentially applicable to race and gender. This dualism has ascertained a weighted binary that places whiteness into the category of reasoning and blackness into the materiality of the body; likewise, the gender binary disallows women the benefit reason, allocating reason to the realm of patriarchal cognition, insisting that women are directed by reason's opposite: emotion. (For example, within engendered conversations, excessive emotion often equivocates hysteria). And as we recall, emotion (aka— affect, but we'll get to that distinction momentarily) has been located in the body, pre-cognitively, or perhaps, even as sexism attests to, a stunted cognition that handicaps logic. Foremost, however is the notion that the mind is reliable. The obvious and familiar follow-through is that women and black folks are not, due their illogical embodiment. More, moving laterally to the historicizing of

sentimentality — the excessive intensity of emotion — implicates, as a preface, excessive, intense emotion as an affliction.

Now, if we confront Samuel's insistence, "Sentimentality is literally at the heart of nineteenth-century American culture," we encounter a succession of paradoxical muddles to the history of emotional work. The paradox laboring in American sentimental culture is the covert power of the coy feminine. Let me explain, staying with Samuels,

The paradox of sentimentality, like the paradox of the 'separate spheres' ideology with which it is often associated, is this combination of the national symbolic and particular embodiment, an obligation at once to national respectability and to a private virtue removed from national power. This double logic of power and powerlessness meant, in the case of separate spheres, that a separation from the world of 'work' (and economic power) was compensated for by the affective power of the 'home'; in the case of sentimentality, separation from political action nonetheless meant presenting an affective alternative that not only gave political actions their emotional significance, but beyond that, intimately linked individual bodies to the national body. The imagination

of national embodiment nonetheless repeatedly excluded the racial and gendered body. (4)

Naming the national body (white and male) as a body of logic (and power) from beyond the sympathetic curtains of the private sphere, depends upon the work women do (through the labor of black bodies).<sup>3</sup> This is the covert power exercised in the shadow(ing) of the political sphere. Feminine work, in this case, “trafficking in sentiment,” is a coy uptake to insert the work of emotions in the public sphere (Samuels 7).

Paramount in the realm of “trafficking in sentiment” is the distinction that women’s emotional labor was uptaken by the national body to do its work, just as black (women’s) labor was usurped by white women to employ their sentimental affection: “one hidden behind the other” (Samuels 4). This is to foreground that much of the affective work that Samuel confronts when theorizing sentimentality, race and gender concerns the “associative exclusion of women and slaves,” fueling the abolitionist writs authored by white women. These abolitionist writs, also, invariably work to the distinct benefit of the feminist-abolitionist’s voice penetrating the public sphere, while also overshadowing muted black voices and the presumed issue at hand: forced

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<sup>3</sup> See Register Two and the discussion of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s sentimental project.

enslavement. Perhaps, these penned utterances work in other ways. We can thus further complicate Ahmed's complication of Austin's utterances. Put another way, Ahmed's assertion that an utterance is an incomplete action—it doesn't *do* what it *says*—is to re-cognize yet again how it is that affect *works*. Returning to Samuel's theorizing, this very distinction is developed according to sentimentality, which "appears not so much as a genre as an operation or set of *actions* within discursive models of affect" (6). To flesh out this sleight of hand, we will visit Harriet Beecher Stowe's seminal sentimental text, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in "Register One."

Here I'd like to state, with a strategic pause, one of the core propositions of this thesis: Affect (named any other way: sentiment, emotion, hysteria) *does* things. Affect *acts*. The distinction I'm breaking for here is that what affect claims to do and what it actually does, is very often (or inside the treatment handled in this thesis) divergent. To be clear, I contend that Descartes' duality hitherto directs our common sense (what we tell ourselves and each other we believe—our guiding apparatus). The *underbelly* of what manifests our materializing direction is all together quite the opposite of Descartes' proclaimed rigid split.

Descartes, author of one of the most infamous hashtags of philosophy, “I think, therefore I am,” made certain that his tombstone revealed quite a contrary adage (one rarely set next to the preceding), “He who hid well, lived well” (qtd. in Damasio 249). What was it that Descartes was hiding well? While that may be unanswerable, Descartes, centuries later, still informs our (purportedly) logical conventions. A neuroscientist writing at the front of this century, from a discipline of science that would agree with Descartes and that Descartes himself would agree with, Antonio Damasio arguably concludes that Descartes’ excessive cleavage has it wrong (perhaps projecting what Descartes himself admits, though elusively and posthumously, to hiding). This “error” of Descartes, as Damasio argues, is

the abyssal separation between body and mind, between the sizable, dimensioned, mechanically operated, infinitely divisible body stuff, on the one hand, and the unsizable, undimensioned, unpushpullable, nondivisible mind stuff; the suggestion that reasoning, and moral judgment, and the suffering that comes from physical pain or emotional upheaval might exist separately from the body. Specifically: the separation of the most refined operations

of mind from the structure and operation of a biological organism.

(249-250)

Damasio's suturing of the Cartesian split of mind/body must reorganize how we thus interpret the affective ecology of what I take to task in this thesis:

specifically, the *outrage* of white women's affective assaults upon the matter of black bodies.

From this pivot, acknowledging that the underbelly of what passes as logic is filled with pathos, Damasio ascertains that "Descartes' error remains influential. For many, Descartes' views are regarded as self-evident and in no need of reexamination" (250). This is to say, when examining the affective economies of white outrage in regards to black bodies' violation, we must yet consider the relevance of Descartes' thesis, simultaneously holding Damasio's corrective as underscoring how easily this outrage is dismissed as illogical—it is quite a paradox, indeed.

Picking back up after this aside and reiterating Samuels, sentimentality (as a mode of affect) is *operative, a set of actions*. To tie this all up into (more than) a few words: To see behind the scenes of political operation, we must be keen to Descartes' logical continuity in how we make sense of things while simultaneously heeding Damasio's corrective. How we *feel* and how we *act*, in

relation to how we *act about what we feel* are divergent cognitive patterns. The Cartesian split has constructed a bifurcation that insists how we feel and what we think are vacuous and sealed spaces. Said another way, the sentimental paradox in play here is (as Samuel illustrates) the political saturated with pathos, and while excessive affect is dismissed at the surface (as a feminine illogic), affect is steadfastly prominent in moving the political (read: public), national body.

Moving with Descartes (and Damasio) and the culture of sentimentality, I intend to peruse (for a slight moment) the interrogation of “emotionology” – “an unlovely word” yet “extremely useful” – neologized to describe the labor of interpellating emotional beingness (Rosenwein 824). The work of affective ideological indoctrination through the evaluation and subsequent altering of emotive expression—*feeling right*—is precisely what is addressed in the historical study of emotionology. The prescription: Our emotional behavior must be subsumed into the realm of the rational in order to become appropriate, reason(able) and cogent.

At this occasion, we can see reverberations of Descartes’ *Passions of the Soul* in which he locates six passions (Descartes’ terming of emotion) as having bodily causes. These primitive passions, according to Descartes, require virtuous disciplining. Passions (emotions) as bodily excesses require the rational to

intervene and cleave what is thus deemed unvirtuous, through the very necessitating of the corrective. Emotions, then, are impure at the very definition of hysterics. Pathologizing emotions, by way of inciting hysteria as a medical condition (of the body) or the condition of a possessed (thus unvirtuous) soul, *fixes* excessive or improper emotions as irrational, unreasonable and foolish.

Here we must note that the notion of histrionics (a contemporary invocation of hysterics) is functioning securely in the present. Modernity, as a marked characteristic, has insisted upon a civilizing narrative—one that has strung along Cartesian duality through centuries. Rationality has been insisted upon, alongside logic and empiricism. Western ideology, at its very core, has mandated a narrow characterizing and policing of *feeling right/acting as though one feels right*. No doubt, “The modern period ...brought with it self-discipline, control, and suppression” (Rosenwein 827). Further, “The philosophers’ counterpart to the grand narrative of historians is the erroneous view that early modern philosophers separated the mind from the body and reason from emotion, so that modern philosophy represents the triumphant healing of these dichotomies” (Rosenwein 827). Except, it doesn’t.

Contemporary culture coasts along this unforgotten, internalized Cartesianism—a “systemic self-control” tethered to a Calvinist notion of a total

depravity of humanness that requires civilizing and a “renunciation of instinctual gratifications” (Freud qtd. in Rosenwein 828). If there was a “healing” of the Cartesian split, it was rather a subsuming of the instinctual (body) into the “rational” through the Foucauldian technologies of the self—a internalized feeling to act right, a Cartesian slip, as it may be. Conclusively, this is to acknowledge what is under the belly of our upfront actions: the preference for the rational, which always already, due to our Cartesian heritage, splits our ontology into a dualism of mind and body in which cognition, outside the affective bodily excesses (emotion), is the objective goal for behavior.

The specialized historians of emotionology and the school of affective neuroscience take up Damasio’s problematizing of Descartes (along with cognitive neurologists). The being and function of emotions has and is being traced and excavated through science and history. For the sake of what can be accomplished within the lengthy constraints of this thesis, I’ll cite here that I address “emotion” as a historically affective term without expounding on what is unique and significant to the employment of the rhetoric of *emotion* (versus the distinctions of sentiment or affect). Which, to echo and alter the epigraph of this section, means that to not talk about emotion does mean that emotion doesn’t exist. This is all to say, emotions (as an umbrella term) are having their day

under the microscope of legitimization (even if not on these pages); but we've a lot of catching up to do—this is all unfinished and unincorporated business as of present. Additionally, *it is not my hypothesis that emotions are or are not logical.* Rather, it is my hypothesis *that emotions are rather sneaky, allowing the veil of sentiment to cover the covert manifests behind the scenes, the actions which transpire that may be disharmonious with the acting(out) affectively.*

\* \* \*

### **The Affective turn(about)**

*Affect is not a personal feeling. Feelings are personal and biographical, emotions are social...and affects are pre-personal...An affect is a non-conscious experience of an intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential...Affect cannot be fully realized in language...because affect is always prior to and/or outside consciousness.*  
—Eric Shouse, “Feeling, Emotion, Affect”

We now consider affect; or, the “affective turn;” or, the “turn to affect,” as it is often designated—in a grossly reductive manner. Late in the last century we witnessed a striking contention between the terms “emotion” and “affect.” And here it is that Damasio needs his own corrective on his corrective to the Cartesian duality. Damasio does not so much validate *feelings* as he assigns certain feelings to the body, pre-cognitively. Neither does Damasio so much diverge from Descartes' passions, but for the mechanisms of *interplay* between body and mind.

Damasio's corrective allows for an *interdependence* of body and mind, rather than an ordained split. Relying on empiricism, Damasio pursues, through neurobiology, a "nonintentionalist, corporeal account of the emotions" (Leys 439). Which, all in all, is really just a doubling-back to Descartes. Apparently, Damasio could not find himself outside the Cartesian ideology, no matter his taxonomical indexing of Descartes' error. Locating a certain precognitive reason *in* the body and creating an interlock of the thinking self and the physical self, it is as though Damasio doesn't leave the hierarchical dualism in the dust (nor even allow it to acquire any dust). Admittedly, this is a simplification of errors, but for this thesis, such must be noted (even if not notarized).

The concern over affect as distinct from emotion then is seemingly motivated by a corrective that would locate affect as pre-cognitive and "asignifying" – nonintentional. Could this be a de-feminization of emotion? A move away from an essentialism that locates emotion in the feminine body? Or rather, a further bifurcation of Cartesian duality?

Addressing the former, anthropologist and historian, William M. Reddy, in his essay, "Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotions," confounds,

But anti-essentialism easily becomes a species of extreme relativism, in which there is a marked reluctance to assert anything at all about the individual. The argument that it is constraining to characterize women *as nurturing* or *as emotional* easily becomes an argument against characterizing women and men in any way. The political goal of liberating men and women from constraining expectations or assumptions can easily get lost in this refusal to characterize them, since, if individuals are entirely empty and wholly plastic, then there is nothing in virtue of which liberation is good. (328)

Perhaps what Reddy fails to feel his way through is that anti-essentialism has been employed as a critical tactic to counter the biologically based pathologizing of gender and race as genetically inferior. This brings us to a tell in addressing the latter inquiry, which is: How can affect, situated in the body, specifically as *nonintentional* and precognitive, make good sense as a return to inhabiting bodies of racialized and sexualized peoples? In a deft article of interrogation, "The Turn to Affect: A Critique," Ruth Leys, takes this very question to task, specifically Brian Massumi's (who is often cited as the darling of queer theory's affective

turn) uptake of affect as “assignifying,” and thus pre-ideological. Leys concludes her critique by stating,

A related question is why anti-intentionalism exerts such a fascination over the cultural critics and theorists whose work I have been criticizing in this essay—especially since one price their views exact is to imply such a radical separation between affect and reason as to make disagreement about meaning, or ideological dispute, irrelevant to cultural analysis. (472)

Which is to ask: Is this embracing (or embodying as it is) of affect counterintuitive or counter-indicative to the work of cultural studies?

To distinguish emotion from affect and locate affect in the physical, re-assigning it to the realm of pre-cognition (rather than a pathological condition of excess), would seem to be a quite covert move by the scientific patriarchy to a deft gender reassignment of what was previously understood as emotion. (After all, these terms, slippery as they have become, are synonymous in most discourses in which affect is not the main object of interrogation. Or, as this thesis examines, this slippage occurs even in discussions in which emotions are affectively engaged). My example here illuminates the slipperiness of invoking and playing with/attempting to contort Descartes’ split without the

hyperawareness in which we always already operate, or in which we are interpellated under this very Western ideology. We cannot, do not, exist outside (or before) ideology.

Lacan's *real* understands that pre-cognition cannot be examined through language because it is at the very juncture of language (which is signifying ideology at the front) that we lose the nonintentional. Here, I align with Leys, in that Massumi confuses himself at his insistence in expounding upon corporeal interpretations of affect (measuring involuntary bodily responses in order to remark and conclude upon "empirical" measurements) (450). To be clear, my engagement with anti-essentialism is not to bear upon one side of this binary, but

to realize precisely the problem incurred therein—"to be or not to be" cannot be ontologized outside of Descartes', "I think, therefore I am." In other words, in the words of Lord Berkeley, "To be is to be perceived."

To clarify that affect theory is a divergent, multi-faceted gathering, another of queer (affect) theories' prominent voices, Jose Esteban Munoz, too, offers Massumi a corrective at the asignifying level, asserting that affect is not, in fact, pre-cognitive, but rather "invoking affect as always already within signification" (qtd. in Puar 208). Acknowledging the perception of the subjectivity of self, of others and self through a double-consciousness, Munoz

attempts the turn toward affect as a corrective to the close-circuit, over-determined interpellation of identity. Further, Jasbir Puar, working alongside both aforementioned affect theorists, sums up this affective conundrum,

[d]esires to move beyond representational critiques of post-structuralism and an interest in a 'post-Foucauldian' critique beyond the disciplinary subject . . . . Perhaps what these slippages between emotion, feeling, and affect are performing in queer critique are continuing efforts to elaborate different and alternative modalities of belonging, connectivity, and intimacy, a response, in fact, to paradigms that have privileged the deterritorialization of control societies to such an extent that identitarian frames appear no longer relevant in the face of the decentralization of interpellated subjects. (208)

Returning to the start, and putting Puar into a conversation with Leonardo and Zembylas' employment of Foucault, we can begin to see how technologies of the self (along with other technologies of power) are governed through affective means and measures, and likewise struggle with and wiggle from these very emotive apparatuses. This is to say, significant yet varying registers of work are

accomplished through (what will be interchangeably termed through this thesis as) sentiment, emotion, feeling and affect.

What I'm concerned with in this space is how these species of emotionology each act as an apparatus to "*feel right*" without acting right (or even acting at all beyond the utterance). And, precisely, how expressing outrage acts as an alibi for whiteness, pre-emptively, against charges of racism. Through the conceptualization of Leonardo and Zembylas, whiteness itself is produced through affective technologies.

\* \* \*

## **An Accounting of the Registers**

### **REGISTER I:**

#### **Historical Continuities, Locations of the Self**

In "Everybody's Protest Novel," James Baldwin defines sentimentality as "the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel" ("Everybody's Protest Novel" 11). Baldwin's definition of sentimentality (as a white alibi) will be the framework and working theory with which I examine the "catalogues of violence," both in his incisive critique of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and, more explicitly, Harriet Beecher Stowe's

declarations of outrage and the affective economies of her sentimentality. Specifically, I'll utilize Ahmed's concept of the non-performativity of anti-racism to illustrate the unfinished business of Stowe's utterances. Additionally, Reddy's concept of emotives will demonstrate that, in fact, Stowe's romantic articulations *do things*, just not what they say they do. Stowe's labor of sentimentality, as I will elaborate upon, is the work of virtue. The virtue investigated is to be Stowe's characterization of herself as a messianic abolitionist. In a missionary move (to be understood as a colonialist operation) *saving brown people*<sup>4</sup> is projected as an act of charity, but instead services to save "the souls of white folks" (W.E.B. DuBois). This register places Stowe at the beginning of the exploration of the historical continuities of the affliction of white affective, nonracist alibis and locates the (white) self as always already in a symbiotic relationship with white supremacy. Said otherwise, Ann Douglas in *The Feminization of American Culture*, dares, "Sentimentalism provides a way to protest a power to which one has in part already capitulated" (12). The double-entendre of sentimentalism (specific to white abolitionist writs) marks the start of this work.

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<sup>4</sup> A spin here on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's often utilized phrase, "White men saving brown women from brown men." See "Can the Subaltern Speak."

## REGISTER II:

### **Foul Play: On the Staging of Innocence as an Affective Economy of Whiteness—The Location of Enjoyment and Dislocation of Affect**

In this chapter, Baldwin's sentimentality will be positioned in conversation with Saidiya Hartman's discussion of John Rankin's likewise account of being a witness to slavery's brutality (one that he also nonetheless gives detailed accounting of) blurring the "thin line between witness and spectator," illustrating the "precariousness of empathy" and invoking a "masochistic fantasy" in which "making the other's suffering one's own," requires "this suffering [to be] occluded by the other's obliteration" (Hartman 19). Conclusively, empathy in these instances reinscribes rather than redacts violence against black bodies.

Picking up where register one closes, I give attention to the continuities and discontinuities of images of black death. Specifically examining lynching postcards using Dora Apel's text on the images of lynching, I draw parallels between the affective narrative accounts of brutality against black bodies and the photographic stills capturing the affections of whiteness. Rankin's letters, along with lynching pictures and postcards, reveal what Hartman defines as a "perverse enjoyment." I inquire: Is there titillation in white spectatorship of

black death? How are Rankin's aroused expositions and the smiling faces of white witness to lynching to be understood? Building from the foundation set in the first register, the examining of the affective economy of Stowe's narrative is constructed here in the second register where I draw a historical continuance of affect as paramount in the workings of white supremacy's reification.

Concentrating narrowly on the affective white gaze, I again draw Baldwin back into the conversation in this register with Ahmed on sentimentality as a dislocation of affect—reverberating on Miss Ophelia's, "Oh! The outrage." Building further, I draw on Hartman's theory of this inability to feel and relocating enjoyment into the perverse amusements at the spectacle of suffering, where "the crimes of slavery are not only witnessed, but staged" (Hartman 17). Closing this register reiterates the continuation of white-on-black violence and the vectors of lynching—both literal and symbolic as well as the symbolic as literal.

### **REGISTER III:**

#### **"In Death the Negro Became a Human Being," or The Invisible Ink on White Protest of Black Lives' (Matter)**

In his novel, *The Underground Railroad*, Colson Whitehead astutes, "In death the negro became a human being. Only then was he the white man's

equal” (52). Questioning black death as intrinsic to white affective outrage and subsequent protest for ontological equality is a perverse paradox of white alibi I will explore in this last register. Bringing us into the present, I’ll draw upon the affect of white spectatorship into the recent murders of black men by police (as an act of state-sanctioned violence). White spectatorship is an essential part of the spectacle of black death—it doesn’t (do the) work without the whiteness of the audience. The question I’ll close with is: What is the work that the spectacle of black death does *for* whiteness?

## ❧ REGISTER I ❧

### HISTORICAL CONTINUITIES, LOCATIONS OF THE SELF

*We are never as steeped in history as we pretend not to be, but  
if we stop pretending we may gain in understanding what we lose in false innocence.*

*Naiveté is often an excuse for those who exercise power.*

*For those upon whom that power is exercised, naiveté is always a mistake.*

—Michel-Rolph Trouillot,

*Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*

#### **Historical Continuities**

Earlier this year, I asserted, for the benefit of my professoriate reader here at St. Cloud State, that I do not set out nor intend to write about race at every inquiry. However, each inquiry reveals that race is always already present.

Precisely, discourses of race (in dialogue with economic forces) are the foremost organizer of American society. In short, what we are speaking toward is, in on the one hand, an overdetermined political economy of race as it structures American social formations; on the other hand, then, this is also to forcibly conclude that any discussion about any aspect of our American social formation in which race is absent is decidedly through omission, *not* irrelevance.<sup>5</sup>

However, the onus remains to properly situate and position the claims I make

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<sup>5</sup> See Stephanie Lemmer's *The Privileged Paradox: The Haunted Hipster Homology*, for ENGL 531: Rhetoric of Style, Prof. Catherine Fox, Spring Semester, April 25, 2016.

above. Surely, some may retort: "This cannot be the case simply because Stephanie Lemmer arrived at such intrusive conclusion." Maybe not; but, perhaps we need to consult some established authorities on the matter—both outside and inside the field of English Studies, in general, and Rhetoric & Composition, specifically.

As such, Stuart Hall, in his densely mapped chapter, "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance," begins by taking us through the literature concerned with "racially-structured social formations," offering his apologies for the "crude" and necessary "simplistic" categorization of this literature (as vast, formidable and immense as it is varied) into two clear and defined rubrics: "economic" and "sociological." He asserts: "[t]he attempts to deal with the question of 'race' directly or to analyse those social formations where race is a salient feature constitute, by now, a formidable, immense and varied literature, which it is impossible to summarize at all adequately" (305). However, the intense intellectual labor Hall employs in unpacking and demystifying this literature, provides with something more than snap-shots of it; rather, Hall properly situates and distills the literature in a way so as to offer correctives as well as offers a clear and unmistakable vantage point from which I pivot.

On the matter of “articulation,” Hall is insistent that articulation has a literature of its own—“articulation literature” (324). In the literature of “articulation,” Hall finds particularly useful the work of John Rey, which is primarily (though not solely) concerned with “lineage societies” that have come into considerable and detrimental contact with external forces—capitalism, colonialism, imperialism and, in some cases, plantation slavery. For Hall, what distinguishes Rey’s work is his concern with the way in which “lineage societies are interrupted and disarticulated by the exterior force of capital—often through violence and . . . the ‘fact of conquest’” (324). The importance of foregrounding this particular dialogue from the outset begins to come into focus as Hall moves from Rey to a discussion, building upon it, in order to bring into proximity the idea of articulation—which, we are reminded, is “a complex one, variously employed and defined . . . [with] no clear consensus of conceptual definition” (324). Yet, Hall is masterful at linking discussions of articulation, arriving at Althusser and Gramsci’s work, which squares us accurately and completely in line with my earlier contention that any dialogue involving any facet of American social formation in which race is not present is due to omission, *not* irrelevance.

Before dealing with Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci, Hall highlights the work of Foster-Carter, who “correctly suggests [in the work of Althusser] that [articulation] is a metaphor used ‘to indicate relations of linkage and effectivity between different levels of all sorts of things’ — thought he might have added,” Hall rectifies, “ that these things require to be linked because, though connected, they are not the same” (325). Speaking to the “linkage and effectivity” of the “all sorts of things” found in the work of Foster-Carter, on Althusser, Stuart Hall refers to these “things” as a “unity.” This “unity,” Hall continues,

which they form is thus not that of identity, where one structure perfectly recapitulates or reproduces or even expresses another; or where each is reducible to the other; or where each is defined by the same determinations or have exactly the same conditions of existence; or even where each develops according to the effectivity of the same contradictions. (325)

Important here is that the idea of “unity” among “all sorts of things” foregrounds the fact that societies (social formations) contain within them a “combination or articulation” of necessarily “complex structures . . . in which things are related, as much through their differences as through their similarities”

(325). Further, Hall distills the processes, or “mechanisms which connect dissimilar features,” and contends that they “must be shown.” The heavier contention, however, is that “since the combination [or unity] is a structure (an articulated combination) and not a random association—there will be structured relations between its parts, i.e., relations of dominance and subordination. Hence,” as Hall concludes, “a complex unity, structured in dominance” (325). Thus, when considering the ideas that will be set forth in this project—a reading and rereading of “affect,” “sentimentality,” “black death,” “modes of consumption,” “culpability,” “protest,” “ignorance,” “race,” “narrative,” “enjoyment,” “arrogation,” Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom Cabin*, and James Baldwin’s critique of Stowe—we might assume, without being too careful, that this array of seemingly random concepts, ideas, and texts are as unrelated as they are dissimilar. Accordingly, my brief (and perhaps crude) sketch of Hall’s chapter does establish one of many things: that our society is a “complex articulation, structured in dominance;” in fact, structured within the ambient of the intimate relations of dominance and subordination. What, then, of race within this elaborated and complex “articulation”?

Stuart Hall responds accordingly, asserting that these relations “requires us, in turn, to show [race’s] articulation with the different structures of the social formation” (339). For example, Hall argues,

the position of the slave in pre-emancipation plantation society was not secured exclusively through race. It was predominantly secured by the quite specific and distinctive productive relations of slave-based agriculture, and through the distinctive property status of the slave (as a commodity) and of slave labour-power (as united with its exerciser, who was not however its owner), coupled with legal, political and ideological systems which anchored this relation by racial ascription. (339)

The relation (of dominance and subordination) was “anchored by racial ascription” that is accomplished through, among other things, “ideological systems” that do the work of naturalizing the everydayness of our existences. Moreover, and keeping in line with the title of this section, “Historical Continuities,” my interrogation “must start, then, from the historical ‘work’ which [race] and racism accomplishes under specific historical conditions — as a set of economic, political and ideological practices in a social formation” (338). Is it not the task of rhetoric to tease out and demystify historical tropes that still

haunt our thinking? In a recent anthology co-edited by Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan, titled *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change*, Victor Villanueva would agree with my claim, arguing “that the first distinctions [along racial lines] were rhetorical, even prior to the theological, and that today’s racism, though very clearly having material, economic effects, is more steeped in the rhetorical” (Villanueva 17).

Hall’s chapter, in conversation with Villanueva’s “The Rhetorics of Racism: A Historical Sketch,” not only supports my initial claim but also lay the groundwork for a more complex undertaking of what I attempt in this thesis. Before proceeding, it is imperative to thoroughly clear the conceptual grounds for the task of interrogating the historical continuities between, say, nineteenth century sentimental narratives (or novels) and our current discourses of sentimentality and the affective registers that are “articulated” from within the complex arrangement of “all sorts of things.” For example, to understand why race is always already present in the world of literature and literary criticism (the same world that often denies its existence), Sylvia Wynter, in her article, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” contends that the “plantation-societies . . . came into being as adjuncts to the market system” (95). If plantation-societies emerged as corollaries of the market system, a market system that Stuart Hall

would describe as “anchored by racial ascription,” then plantation social formations that Wynter discusses must be understood as not only anchored by racial ascription, but also as constituting a complex unity that simultaneously articulates the racial ascriptions that anchor the market system as well as articulated by the market system it anchors.

Now, as Wynter continues, if “the novel form itself . . . came into being with the extension and dominance of the market economy,” then, “it appears to us to be in effect, the transposition on the literary plane, of the daily life within an individualistic [plantation] society” (95). Wynter concludes that “the novel form” and plantation societies “are twin children of the same parents” (95). “History is” writes Wynter, “in the plantation context, itself, a fiction; a fiction written, dominated, controlled by forces external to itself” (95).

Sylvia Wynter’s discussion of the novel, in the context of Stuart Hall’s social formations structured in dominance, allows for the gradual emergence of an understanding of my initial claim. This claim, might now be understood and expressed in the following manner: “the geopolitical formation of the United States demonstrates a clear racial, not simply ethnic, pattern of constituting national identity and the commonality it invokes” (E. San Juan, Jr. 4). The novel form, the literary canon, the literary criticism that sustains and buttresses the

literary canon, as constituent parts of a unifying whole (a complex unity) are all “articulated” from within and by the very structuring patterns that constitute national identity and its concomitant communal experience. Consequently, legal scholar Lani Guinier, argues that race continues to be an organizing principle of the democratic nation state. Guinier contends that “majority rule is not a reliable instrument of democracy in a racially divided society . . . In a racially divided society, majority rule may be perceived as majority tyranny” (qtd. in San Juan, Jr. 91). Majority rule or majority tyranny notwithstanding, we can conclude that *any dialogue about American society that does not include race is an omission by intention, not by irrelevance.*

The heavier contention I hold, however, is not simply that “race” must be included in our dialogues about American society or about some other mundane or less mundane facets of American society—No. My heavier contention is one that has been with me for years. It is perhaps a contention with not only the way in which dialogues around race occur but also with the way in which these dialogues are staged, witnessed, and reconciled. In other words, my contention, particularly with our society, intentionally structured (or articulated) in dominance, takes its theoretical impetus from, among a few others, Herbert Ross Brown’s *The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789 – 1860*, where he asserts that the

sentimental novel captured the “stirring scenes in a great national drama,” which included the “conquest of a continent” as well as the “the rise of the common man on the wings of the new democracy” (358 – 9). After providing a brief contextual landscape, Brown moves to critique the writers of this period, Harriet Beecher Stowe surely among them, suggesting that these sentimental writers inadequately confronted the national drama and this new democracy in that these writers should have been more concerned with “the realities of this raucous period” yet were not because, in actuality, they were not “fitted to enlighten the readers as to the real nature of their civilization” (qtd. in Samuels 3). Further, Brown bears down in his critical assault of these sentimental writers, finding that the most “conspicuous failure of the sentimentalist was their inability to solve the irrepressible problem of slavery” (367 – 8). Shirley Samuels (ed.), in *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*, concurs in that Brown’s critique is crucial: “[Brown] both indicts them for their powerlessness and accuses them of not exercising power”(3). As such, Samuels follows Brown with an incisively crucial observation of her own: “If the ‘irrepressible problem of slavery’ was there to be ‘solved’ by sentimentalists, this indicates at once the intimate association of their project with the upheavals over slavery and abolition—an association,” Samuels continues, “in which the idea of

nation excludes both women and slaves, one hidden behind the other, in the most political issue of the nineteenth-century” (Samuels 3 – 4). Because “[s]entimentality is literally at the heart of nineteenth-century American culture[,]” and because it involves “women as objects or agents of these policies[,]” sentimentality, then, must be understood as embodying a unity, consisting of “a set of cultural practices designed to evoke a certain form of emotional [or affective] response, usually empathy, in the reader or viewer,” that “produces or reproduces spectacles that cross race, class, and gender boundaries” (4 – 5).

Consequently, Stuart Hall might suggest the same, albeit differently: Sentimentality galvanizes a unity of cultural practices that are articulated within racialized social formations for the reification of specific ideological ends which articulates specified relations of dominance and subordination (simultaneously on both sides of the hermeneutic operation bound up with literary texts); Wynter, adding to this conglomeration, might suggest, more specifically, that the “novel form” and its corollary “market system” (the twin children of the plantation social formation) emerges in nineteenth-century America at a strategic phase: At an epochal shift wherein the national identity was being negotiated on an affective register, hinging upon the sentimental discourses developed and

disseminated by the sentimentalists in order to solidify ideological and racial ascriptions regarding women and slaves, as well as to offer a transcendental evasion of culpability (on the part of the sentimental novelists) and a transcendental triumph over the “irrepressible problem of slavery” (on the part of both author and audience) that would, still, result in *texts*, *bodies*, *bodies-as-text*, and *bodies-in-texts* to be severely and inadequately mishandled.

Because Harriet Beecher Stowe and her textual productions were exemplary of this problematic aesthetic operation, Shirley Samuels justifiably concludes:

Stowe’s ‘solution’ of Heaven and the Afterworld, for instance, can appear alternately [as] a utopian projection and an inadequate remedy, at once honoring and disowning the embodied subjects of the nation in the making. Such a transcendence of the body both foregrounds the natural body and understands the body as an abstract embodiment of the [moral] values that it transcends. The charge against sentimentality, in this view, is its undercutting of political potential; the idealized body removes the political from critique. (5)

And the way in which the political is supplanted from the realm of critique— which is also to say, the material is supplanted from the rhetorical—is through the concomitant production and reproduction of sentimental readers/viewers. In another way, “such an analysis finds that the production of a sentimental consumer means the alteration of political as well as emotional values” (Samuels 4). The alteration of values is achieved through symbolic processes (symbolic differentiation) which function not only to situate and extend meaning within a culture, but also to attempt to repress the *irrepressible* (“problem of slavery,” perhaps) through the creation and maintenance of symbolic forms that aid in the application of *symbolic vision to the alteration of reality itself*—An entirely different matter when discussing the affective registers that must be traversed in order to achieve this alteration at the expense of intimacy and privacy; at the level of self and other; hinged upon bodies and texts, effecting the “imagination of national embodiment” that nonetheless repeatedly excludes “the racial and gendered body” (Samuels 4). Stowe, then, is certainly guilty of pimping the principle of sentimentality for the cause of abolitionism as well as for the cause of *locating her* gendered and (unbeknownst) racialized *self*.

In other words, Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author, cannot be possible without Harriet Beecher Stowe, the modern subject. Dipesh Chakrabarty, in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, sums it up:

The sufferer here is an embodied self, which is always a particular self, grounded in this or that body. . . The person who is not an immediate sufferer but who has the capacity to become a secondary sufferer through sympathy for a generalized picture of suffering, and who documents this suffering in the interest of eventual social intervention—such a person occupies the position of the modern subject. In other words, the moment of the modern observation of suffering is a certain moment of self-recognition on the part of an abstract, general human being. It is as though a person who is able to see in himself or herself the general human also recognizes the same figure in the particular sufferer, so that the moment of recognition is a moment when the general human splits into two mutually recognizing and mutually constitutive figures of the sufferer and the observation of suffering. (119 – 20)

\* \* \*

## Locations of the Self

Uncle Tom's Cabin—like its multitudinous, hard-boiled descendants—is a catalogue of violence. This is explained by the nature of Mrs. Stowe's subject matter, her laudable determination of flinch from nothing in presenting the complete picture; and explanation which falters only if we pause to ask whether or not her picture is indeed complete; and what constriction or failure of perception forced her to so depend on the description of brutality—unmotivated, senseless—and to leave unanswered and unnoticed the only important question: *what was it that moved her people to such deeds.*

—James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel"

*This is perfectly horrible... You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!*

—Miss Ophelia, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

In 1949, James Baldwin probed (the 1852 text of) Miss Ophelia's "ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion," citing a disturbing sentimentality that he extrapolates as suspect. What if, after all, these sentiments, as Baldwin asserts, reveal more about the exoneration of white guilt and absolution? Which is to ask if *Uncle Tom's Cabin*<sup>6</sup> is less about abolition and more about the saving graces of those white abolitionists paraded in Stowe's own prefacing writ, the "Christian brotherhood"—those gatekeepers to soul's final salvation whose "hand of benevolence is everywhere stretched out, searching into abuses, righting wrongs, alleviating distresses, and bringing to the knowledge and sympathies of the world the lowly, the oppressed, and the

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<sup>6</sup> From here, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

forgotten" (Stowe 1). *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the archetypal novel of white abolitionists, is saturated with the biblical saving graces of *the good whites'* outrage. Baldwin seemingly begs of Ms. Stowe to put use to all of her indignation; and, rather, interrogate: "What was it that moved her people to such deeds[.]" These "deeds," their effects and affective economies, hold for us serious implications in the realm of production and consumption, and the resultant (surely problematic) discourses that surround, too, these "spurious" and excessively "ostentatious" acts enmeshing both Stowe's novel, its context and contents, and, consequently, its audience—again, *the archetypal novel of white abolitionists*. This novel remains emblematic of 19<sup>th</sup> century sentimentalism, which, according to Ann Douglas in *The Feminization of American Culture*,

[i]s a complex phenomenon. It asserts that the values of a society's activity denies precisely the ones it cherishes. It attempt to deal with the phenomenon of cultural bifurcation by the manipulation of nostalgia. Sentimentalism provides a way to protest a power to which one has already in part capitulated. It is a form of dragging one's heels. It always borders on dishonesty but it is a dishonesty for which there is no known substitute in a capitalist society...The minister and the lady were appointed by their society as the

champions of sensibility. They were in the position of contestants in a fixed fight: they had agreed to put on a convincing show, and to lose. The fakery involved was finally crippling for all concerned.

(12)

We must insist here upon thinking about the slippery space between sentimentality and hysteria. Sentimentality, as Douglas determines, appoints the lady as a champion of sensibility who agrees at a fixed show, to lose—the lady’s emotionology is in the service of power (definitively outside herself).

Conversely, the excess emotion of hysteria is unchecked, claiming a rebellious noncompliance with power—a lady onto one’s own. (Though, to be sure, if the hysterical lady has a room of one’s own—it is under lock and key [of which she is on the captive side of the door]). Hysteria is an outrage whose rage is outside power, while sentimentality is depleted of rage—out(side) of rage. The “ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion” is precisely what Ahmed’s critique of Austin’s utterances addresses—non-performativity (of sentimental parades).

Sentimentality’s allowance of affective excess is budgeted by a reassurance of a lack of action, of staying within the bounds of feminine passivity. Sentimentality’s emotives are transferred and pacified through an

attentive attending to (a reward for *feeling in the right way*). Feeling from a domestic sphere is knowing one's place versus having to be put in one's place. The "dragging of the heels" could very well be said to be a resolve to not be dragged by the heels. Stowe, it could be said, plays the coy lady of the hearth rather than the "madwoman in the attic." Rifting on Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's influential work on the (Cartesian) duality of feminine affect in literature, *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteen Century Literary Imagination*, two scripts become available: the puritanical, virtuous woman, as a vessel for God, and the corporeal, soul-less woman, maddeningly ripe for possession. Dangerous women are mad women, acting autonomously, and must be locked-away (in the attic) as not to disrupt the "going along" of the sphere of the hearth, to prevent the spilling of (out)rage into the public sphere. Mad women contrarily "go against" the flow of things. Consequently, hysteria's self-service is pathologized.

Here, I must inject, that Stowe's own ploy (to stand steadfastly upon her heels) does not leave her innocent of her own racism. Her deployment of emotives teased from her own anti-racist utterances are precisely what this thesis intends to expound upon. The question to put upon Stowe and her affective white descendants is whether "to protest a power to which one has already in

part capitulated” is, in fact, a non-performative utterance and a clearance for racist power to “go along” and “go on.” (To reiterate, Stowe capitulates her outrage to white supremacy even as she protests it). Asked another way, might the fine speeches of sentimental outrage be futile exemplars from the “beneficiaries” of racism, even as they propound, due to an absence of power, *not* to be racism’s “signatories”(Mills 11).<sup>7</sup> Thus, at this pass, it is imperative cite Stowe’s whiteness as the cultural capital that grants her voice to protest (in this paradoxical act of capitulation and protest), while those she speaks for, the enslaved, have no voice precisely because they are not white (it should be unnecessary to state here that race, of course, is the distinction between the slaving and enslaved).

The slippage between the two terms—sentimental and hysterical—and their descriptors elide characteristics, diverging in only application. Stowe fittingly displays hysterical notions and exaltations. What I intend to accomplish by way of Baldwin’s prompt is to gain further insight into these calculated moments of what I limn (in the coldest vivisection of examination)

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Mills’s *The Racial Contract* redefines the social contract of the U.S. to be situated and constructed through and fortified by race. By using calculations of social contract theory’s own underpinnings, Mills definitively assigns the U.S. social contract as a racial contract—as a state of white supremacy.

*outrageous narcissism*; put differently, insight into a closely linked variant of what, in other fields, is understood to be *histrionics*, officializing of the pathology of hysterics, through medical taxonomies and diagnosis. The fundamental characteristics which define “histrionic personality disorder” are important to outline when autopsying the systemic (and surely problematic) functions of Stowe’s novel. Accordingly, these characteristics include the following: (1) a peculiar myopia; and, (2) an inability to authentically empathize while “performing” melodramatically in order to stage emotions for witness and validation (Mayo Clinic).

Without getting ahead of ourselves, it must be acknowledged that, in dealing with histrionics this way, a dangerous terrain threatens my critical intent and, in fact, comes with a considerable burden that is attached to eliding Stowe with a personality disorder known in psychology as “histrionic personality disorder.” Due to the historical misogynistic regimes of dismissing women as excessively emotive, which is to say, hysterical, “histrionic personality disorder” comes burdened with the onus of patriarchy which, as Lauren Berlant reminds us, “is manifestly figured in both the generic and the actual body and mind of woman...[which] might be said, in the narrative logic of the word, to be ‘forced’ in to ‘subjectivity’...[that] is based not on ‘official history’ but on a history of

figuration" (106). Further, Berlant continues, "We can see that the conflation of 'subjectivity,' 'woman,' and 'citizen' ...is also paradoxically figured as a gender crisis *created* by women and 'woman.'" And "if 'woman' becomes the manifest, public problem of order and law, both by too much and too little [sentimentalism], then her containment [of her excessively emotional state] solves the problem of [its] contagion" that threatens the illusion of a stabilized, emotionally rational patriarchy that governs all under its auspices: woman and enslaved, alike (106-7). Madness, as being affected *wrongly*, then, is located in the corporeal bodies of those bodies that are mandated to containment.

Giving heed to Berlant's critical incisiveness, nevertheless, "histrionic personality disorder" also conditions the potential for interrogating Stowe's outrageous exclamations and melodramatic narrative that underscores and structures *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The "staging" for "validation" of histrionic's definition demarcates Stowe's text, as certainly does the "peculiar myopia" through which she usurps the voices and liberation of the enslaved. Stowe's abolitionist writ paradoxically colonizes the bodies of those she (utterly) proclaims to liberate. This arena is where the slippage of sentiment and hysterics can be witnessed. Under the "dishonest" project of sentimentality, the lady's "convincing show" channels her (histrionic) emotions *rightly*, distinguishing

between the bodies of herself and the enslaved, creating “a shadow” of the enslaved through her performance. What are at the front histrionic displays then maneuver away from performative speech acts into the arena of the non-performativity of sentimentality—which is to say, all the action takes place on or behind the stage: constrained in the abstraction of the stage or in the concrete action that is unseen and not uttered. Off-stage (or beyond Stowe’s text, as it is in this instance), these emotives of abolitionist anti-racism give way for racism to continue along, unimpeded by unfinished doings, as a white alibi has been created by Stowe’s sentimental, vacuous testimony.

To return then to the start of this section (with the discussion of sentimentalism’s labor now began), I contend that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* must be examined as a testament to *good* white exceptionalism (the white alibi) performing against the inequities of the institution of slavery—a testament of absolution benefitting virtuous whites. What is performed in this novel utterance is a question that must not fall behind the scenes. Shifting the performativity of the utterance from Stowe’s Protestant messianic claim of sacrificing her pen toward the liberation of the enslaved, the emotive performance of her own salvation must be put up on stage for a clear viewing. What comes into view when we widen our myopic range is that the bodies of

sacrament are, in fact, the black bodies of the enslaved, propped thus to sanction white guilt. Recalling Mill's racial contract, Stowe's emotive stage denies her as a beneficiary of whiteness as she simultaneously protests those who are signatories of the racial contract. What is liberated in this performance is Stowe and her Christian brotherhood's culpability. Stowe must not be sainted as a literary martyr (lest us not forget that it is Uncle Tom who is materially sacrificed in Stowe's text). In fact, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* itself must be accounted for as an act of violence not divisible from slavery itself.

Stowe rescinds Miss Ophelia's culpability through what is characteristically histrionic outrage, "This is perfectly horrible... You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" Stowe extracts the character of Miss Ophelia from the liability of slavery; further, Miss Ophelia is consequently pardoned by Stowe, through the narrative extradition of slavery *vis-à-vis* a graphic writ, "a catalogue of violence," which simultaneously becomes the exemplary figure *within* Baldwin's critique of sentimentality as well as an exemplary figure *of* this very "catalogue of violence." Violence, I insist, must be understood as material *and* rhetorical. Categorically, and in exponential ways, rhetorical violence is acutely material. Considering Stowe's (seemingly unbeknownst) violent enactments of histrionics, Baldwin occasions a moment of criticality which foregrounds Stowe's

narrative act of oblivescence; an oblivescence which, to say the least, fosters a coexistence with author and audience around the narrative and affective economies that construct a sociality for a largely white middle-class readership. Primarily, as this sociality galvanizes narrative and affective energies in order to effect a portraiture of the unspeakable horrors of enslavement, it not only structures the overall context of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but it also structures the aesthetic receptivity of Stowe's middle-class white readership. *As we will later understand, aesthetic receptivity in this very specific context can only be achieved when working at aesthetic distance.*

\* \* \*

### **Of Narrative Sickness**

When thinking through the aforementioned contexts that structure *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and given Stowe's novel receives more than substantial attention within the literary and instructional canon embedded within academe, it is useful to consider Paulo Freire's idea of "narrative sickness." "Narrative sickness," slightly outside of its normalizing educational uptake, might serve us here in shedding considerable light upon the fact that Stowe's context is structured not only by the unspeakable horrors of enslavement, but also by a noticeable void of black voices within *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe's outrage is

located *without* a treaty amid the people she has accorded herself to “save.”

Freire demands that,

[a]ny situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects...Attempting *to be more* human, individualistically, leads to *having more*, egotistically, [which is also] a form of dehumanization. (85-86)

Freire provides an understanding of the procedural modes of dehumanization, strictly within the context of narrative. This means that black bodies are in service and paradoxically subsumed into Stowe’s rhetoric of moral indignation and paternalistic narration. Read through Freire, it might be suggested that 19<sup>th</sup> century discourses of moral indignation fall squarely within the procedure of attempting to be more human. Further, Stowe’s attempt, her moral indignity, accomplishes the task of alienating black bodies (beyond the scope of narrative integrity) precisely by pardoning herself and her characters from any culpability regarding the moral tone, theme and timbre of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Because she assumes a coeval with her audience, we might also understand that these black bodies that are pressed into the service of narrative are, at the same time, pressed

into the service of dislocating affect. (We will come back to this in the following chapter). Still, however, Freire is pertinent here in that his notion of narrative sickness, in conversation with Baldwin's critique of sentimentality, provides us with a critical framework wherein we carefully interrogate Stowe's ostentatious acts—categorically sentimental; materially and rhetorically, violent. Materially violent because, as Freire points out, to prevent one from engaging in the process of inquiry, particularly about one's own material conditions, is an act of violence. Stowe's "narrative sickness," is not so much a matter of her own narrative ailment, her sickness, so to speak, as it is a matter of the rhetorical acts (her narrative behavior, if you will) committed under the auspices of said ailments. This is to say, that when Stowe arrogates herself as the voice of moral indignation of the South and of white abolitionists, she commits an act of violence that renders and transforms enslaved humans into empty vessels and objects—to be filled with narrative content and concomitantly structured by and circulated within a racist narrative economy.

Through this pathogenic accounting, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* mutes black voices. Stowe speaks *for*, in place of, the voice of the slaves she bespeaks in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. No doubt, Stowe's rhetorical savvy feeds the benevolent ploy of speaking for those who are not sanctioned to speak. What is transparently

disingenuous is the usurping of agency from the very disenfranchised she claims to speak for. In her acerbic essay on the white fetishizing of black bodies, "Eating the Other," bell hooks, in no uncertain terms, coins this operation "consumer cannibalism," continuing, the mechanism works to "expand the parameter of cultural production to enable the voice of the non-white Other to be heard by a larger audience even as it denies the specificity of that voice, or as it recoups it for its own use" (31). Stowe's novel, by definition, is *fiction*. Yet as Wynter's mutually constitutive theory of the novel and its author reminds us, the cloth from which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is cut is the same its author Stowe is clothed in—product(ions) of the plantation economy for markets of consumption. Or, to remind us of Mill's thesis, Stowe is always already a beneficiary in this market economy, unable to be untangled from the racial contract. To this end, Stowe feigns (white) ignorance.

A corollary function of Baldwin's critique of Stowe's narrative oblivescence might concern the discursive enactments of *whiteness* and *ignorance*, insofar as the logic of racism unconsciously and persistently manufactures, for example, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the production and reproduction of what I might limn "white ignorance." To be clear, Stowe, to grapple with the underpinnings of slavery, decidedly dejects (and hence denies) herself from this making of

whiteness, leaving one to interrogate: How is it, to be exact, that Stowe dismisses herself from this very construction in which she is implicated, and from which she is a beneficiary? (In fact, her very posturing as an abolitionist, given the right of the writ, is insisted by her assumed racelessness [understanding that racelessness is achieved solely through whiteness]). The “narrative economies” of abolitionist novels such as Stowe’s, then, cloaked in the cause of humanitarian salvation, could be “proved serviceable for a purpose relating to whites; that purpose being, to go further, absolution” and/or “vindication” (Gooding-Williams 65-66).

As theorist George Kent expounds, “white characters who express revolutionary will” with a “mouth full of puritanical rhetoric” form “lasting literature derives from our deepest consciousness, and the evidence from literature is that even alienated white writers cannot push aside these cultural drives sufficiently to come into the court of racial imagination with ‘clean’ minds” (178/179/166). What Kent impressing upon is the already capitulated author and the intended audience of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and putting into question the effecting affectation of the novel—a rhetorical question, to be sure. No doubt, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was written by a white woman for a white audience. What Kent may have us ask here, is how an “unclean” mind could baptize the like-

minded. And here, perhaps is the very reveal of Ahmed's utterance of non-performativity: *it doesn't*. "A mouthful of puritanical rhetoric" is just that—an unfinished utterance, words that do *not* act in accordance with their edicts.

The exculpating appeal of abolitionist texts such as Stowe's is undoubtedly to white readers, as "no American text of the sort I am discussing was ever written *for* black people—no more than *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written for Uncle Tom to read or be persuaded by" (Morrison 16-17). Indeed, the text's reception is bifurcated: cussed is the blameworthy and dismissed is the persuaded—either hand congratulates the white hand that is empowered to write in the colonialist's voice, appropriated from the enslaved who yet failed to be acknowledged (or speak) outside their object status employed by Stowe. To reiterate: I'm interested in the paradoxical implications of works such as Stowe's (and her progressive descendants onto the present) which attempt to subdue racist actions, but simultaneously work to alleviate white guilt as they codify a type of white alibi of *nonracism*. What is to be put under interrogation here by us is how the construction of "the hero and the audience are permitted to feel that they have dealt with a major issue of American life and reaffirmed the humanistic content of Anglo Saxon culture" (Kent 176).

What convergence of impetuses undergirds these declarations of slavery's malfeasance? In this, very specific context, we must revisit and expound of the notion of histrionics. The very engagement of Stowe's laborious (and literary) detailing of the inhumane horrors of enslavement, notwithstanding, Stowe implicates herself as a witness—perhaps, participant—rather than a voyeuristic standby. Continuing with Morrison on the narcissistic pen of whiteness, further applicable to Stowe, is to reckon that

the subject of the dream is the dreamer. The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity. It requires hard work *not* to see this. (17)

Expounding on the craft(iness) of the dreamer—in this instance, Stowe—is to implicate her (through the very frame of Miss Ophelia's abolitionist narrative) in a simultaneously guilty (and shamefully) exculpation of her own whiteness. Stowe implicitly arrogates, through *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, her histrionic accounting of the brutalities of slavery, thus cleaving her from culpability. Miss Ophelia insists, with moral impunity: *you ought to be ashamed of yourselves*. Read

inversely, Miss Ophelia is not to be shamed. The imaginary of Stowe's pen indeed exists in a fantastic state, since Mrs. Shelby and her likewise Southern plantation wives whose "gesture renouncing...plantation heritage is morally ambiguous, since [s]he continues to receive from it a subsistence income" (Kent p. x). Stowe's narrative act materialized is, after all, surely a narrative act that is rhetorical: the trope of the progressive liberal. Stowe's narrative act (to her own cumulative accounting of over thirty published texts) materializes as a consumer spectacle sold, "If you see my name coming out everywhere –you may be sure of one thing, that I do it for the pay" (Stowe qtd. in Parfait 9). To reiterate, I am still maintaining that material violence, specifically with Stowe's narrative arrogation, is acutely rhetorical.

Stanley Cavell's *A Pitch of Philosophy*; specifically, calling attention to his chapter entitled "Philosophy and the Arrogation of Voice," occasions us to think through and about the "voice, by which" Cavell "mean[s] to talk at once about the tone of philosophy and about [his] right to take that tone; and to conduct [his] talking, to some unspecified extent, anecdotally, which is more or less to say, autobiographically" (3-4). Stowe's literary text, itself, might stand in the place of philosophy's "tone," in Cavell's sense; and if it does, we might then slightly restructure Cavell's formulation around voice; consequently, suggesting

that Stowe, too, intended to write about voice in a way; by which she meant her own moral voice, that would not only speak, in a more or less unspecified way, about the moral tone of slavery in the South, but also, in some ways, speak about and encapsulate, arrogate, the moral tone of white abolitionists.

In other words, whereas Cavell seeks autobiography, the right to take an autobiographical posture to speak about the tone of philosophy, while also problematizing the very act of arrogation, we might then suggest that Stowe, too, seeks something of an autobiographical posture to speak about the moral tone concerning the evils of enslavement in the South. That Stowe assumes a certain right to arrogation, without the onus of problematizing the act of arrogation, calls attention to the occasioning of a certain kind of slippage. To this end, it must be understood that this slippage, the assumption of the right *not* to problematize her own narrative arrogation, is the very act of rhetorical violence that is constitutive of Stowe's narrative in the first instance.

And it is here that I am concerned with the act of arrogation, as occasioned by Stowe's text, which absolves Stowe from the culpability of the brutalities of enslavement. So much so, in fact, that reading Baldwin's intentionally aggressive polemic with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* correctly understands that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* not only cleaves Stowe from the culpability of the brutalities of

enslavement which are arrogated in the text of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but *Uncle Tom's Cabin* also cleaves Stowe from any actual culpability of rhetorical violence committed by her text's narrative arrogation as well as from the "scenes of subjection" that perpetrate material violence on the black bodies arrogated by and within Stowe's text.

Stowe's slippage here is not exceptional to either the protest novel or today's progressive liberal. Stowe's moral arrogation at this juncture should make us stop for a moment and consider the implications of her literary and laborious detailing of the inhumane horrors of enslavement—which is to consider that a detailing and act of translation might evolve into a kind of "perverse enjoyment." Enjoyment, according to Black's Law Dictionary, means, among other things, property ownership, or the capacity to "enjoy" the uses (and abuses) of one's property. Additionally, "translation," here, must be understood through Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*, wherein he insists that every act of subjugating, for example, a so-called third-world population to the wiles and logic of capitalism is, at the same time, an act of translation—their worldviews, their thought-categories into the worldviews and thought-categories of the dominant epistemology.

Further, the aim of this chapter might be said to be an attempt at extrapolating the subversive affective economies that structure, all too well, an economy of (moral) sentiment that is enshrouded with and by a “perverse enjoyment” that is not so easily discerned by white radical progressives who parade tropes in a stickiness of mottos. Their oblivescence is a historical trajectory that I intend to, *need* to, locate at the site of Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Only then, will I be able to trace its continuing significance within the contemporary discourses of what I am calling *white narrative arrogation*. Stowe’s narrative arrogation occurs in her accounting of the steadfast (surely histrionic) brutality cast onto black bodies that, in turn, also enacts a kind of rhetorical and material violence through the very ownership encumbered through “perverse enjoyment.” In addition to Baldwin’s inquisitorial corrective—*the only important question: what was it that moved her people to such deeds*, I intend to follow Morrison’s trajectory in “Black Matters” wherein she directs the inquiry into “the racist inflection on the subject...a serious intellectual effort to see what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of masters” rather than isolating my own outrage in “cataloging the violence” of the “horrific results on its objects [‘with financial value’]” (11-12). More, as Saidiya Hartman avers, spectacular violence reiterated and circulated can be understood as the very acts

of violence that are catalogued and indexed, for example, through the kind of narrative accounting/arrogation/ownership and reproduction found in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—put another way, rhetorical violence manifested materially. In refusing to duplicate Fredrick Douglas's narrative of his passage through the blood stained gate of slavery—Aunt Hester's beating, Hartman “call[s] attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave's ravaged body”(3). That Hartman utilizes one of the most widely-read, and therefore *already* hauntingly re-countable, must also, however, trouble her own refusal to reproduce the narrative.

What Hartman is asking us to reckon with here is the instantiation of further material violence, by way of a rhetorical “blood-stained gate” of narrative violence, which also perpetuates material violence by desensitizing us to black suffering and the brutalities of enslavement. Moreover, this certain translatability of black lives into black literary matter does the work of dissolving *blackness* (itself a conceptual category heretofore of American modernity) into modalities of rhetorical and material violence. It also does the work of translating black lives into literary figures and narrative tropes that manufacture not only the ruse of property ownership under the auspices of literary work but also accomplishes

this work by utilizing its narrative property in occasioning a slippage that evades culpability: engendering a cognitive dysfunction. What Baldwin, Morrison and Hartman mutually mandate is a critically interrogatory movement beyond “a what” and “a how” toward a relentless vivisection of the “cognitive dysfunction” of Stowe’s entire of ensemble: the actors, the impotent witnesses, and the voyeurs; consequently, posing this inquiry to slaveholders, Harriet Beecher Stowe, herself, and “their white descendants.”

Baldwin’s impatience with this of cognitive dysfunction as evidenced through Stowe’s white narrative arrogance, (a ticket garnished from black bodies) is clear,

I know that this is considered to be heresy. Spare me, for Christ’s *and* His Father’s sake, any further examples of American white progress. When one examines the use of this word in this most particular context, it translates as meaning that those people who have opted for being white congratulate themselves on their generous ability to return to the slave that freedom which they never had any right to endanger, much less take away. For this dubious effort, and still more dubious achievement, they congratulate themselves and expect to be congratulated--: in the

coin, furthermore, of, black gratitude, gratitude not only that my burden is—(slowly, but it takes time) being made lighter but my joy that white people are improving. (“The Price” 839)

From the white progressives before Stowe, after, and presently, Baldwin clarifies to these whites the very misnomer of progress, “My black burden has not, however, be made lighter...and my joy, therefore, as concerns the immense strides made by white people, is, to say the least, restrained” (“The Price” 839).

In Stowe’s “most particular context” of a “white improving” romance, we must ask: Is the very infraction that she is appalled by the immorality of those “bad” whites who taint the purity of whiteness? *Who’s burden precisely is Stowe attempting to alleviate?* Is Miss Ophelia’s exposition on the antagonism of slavery an outrage responding to excessive violence onto the black body, and/or the very condition of un/freedom? Baldwin demands “we pause to ask whether or not her [Stowe’s] picture is indeed complete,” and, further, “How is it that we are so loathe to make a further journey than that made by Mrs. Stowe to discover and reveal something a little closer to the truth?” (“Everybody’s Protest” 12).

Stowe’s philosophical discourse on 19<sup>th</sup> century Southern agrarian political formations—all under the guise of (white) abolitionist prose, moves upon the racist hoodwink that while no doubt slavery was dreadful, the *viciousness* of

slavery was an autonomous infraction. To say, in the rote rhetoric, the *racism* of slavery—isolated by Stowe as containment and violence—was assigned to the abstract state (through law) and to the individual, respectively. Imperative in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is these juxtapositions of good and bad, pure and evil, individual and systemic, concrete and abstract. Stowe is insistent, through varied master/slave locations and ambience, that there exists such a dichotomy. The “good master,” ironically, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is yet a covert abolitionist, made impotent by the agrarian economic system—which is to say, the potential abolitionist is stunted to action by his very economic livelihood. In other words, the good master, is forced by hands of not his own, to enslave blacks in order to feed his family. Stowe extrapolates this very unfortunate *inculpability* through the sentimental forging of fugitive slave Eliza's testimony to the senator, Mr. Bird, whom, after “wiping his spectacle-glasses, occasionally blowing his nose” inquired,

‘How came you to tell me you had a kind master?’ he suddenly exclaimed, gulping down very resolutely some kind of rising in this throat, and turning suddenly round upon the woman. ‘Because he *was* kind; I'll say that of him, any way;--and my mistress was kind; but they couldn't help themselves. They were owing money; and

there was some way, I can't tell how, that a man had gotten a hold on them, and they were obligated to give him his will. I listened, and heard him telling mistress that, and she begging and pleading for me,--and he told her he couldn't help himself. (73)

Here, Stowe pithily illuminates the good white gone bad (who is not violent) must indeed be under the abuse of the economic hostility of legal slavery himself—the agrarian economy that depends upon the free labor of black bodies and is, conclusively, unsustainable without this invisible class of slaves. What we see that Stowe miss herself, through her own exposition, is how American architecture and social fabric are an industrious weaving of white racial narcissism legislated into the insidiousness of everyday acts and affectations. Which is to say, Stowe, embodying this heritage, does not, through the mechanism of a pen, find herself outside this ideology of white supremacy. To restate, Stowe, the author, cannot be possible without Stowe, the modern (white) subject.

How do we translate this imperious discrepancy of “white strides” juxtaposed against “the black burden” of being materially “the goods” of whiteness? Put another way entirely, is Stowe (by way of Miss Ophelia) begging the good white folks to remove their petticoats and dirty their hands? Or

instead, is this an insistence for “better working conditions” for the (enslaved) domestics—which is to ask, just how far is Stowe(‘s characters) willing to go with their relinquishment of the servitude of black labor? I wish to pose to Stowe (and descents), how (if the distinction between the subject and object of her outrage is merely one of degree) interrogating the very antagonism of slavery and demanding its abatement doesn’t enact the sentimental feminist abolitionist paradox: the “reckless, unabated power of a white woman gathering identity unto herself from the wholly available and serviceable lives of Africanist others” (Morrison 25).

Stowe deftly illustrates the fatal detriment of slavery—violence—the violent treatment of slaves, not their domestic indenture, which Stowe takes it upon herself to rather write into a type of shrine (in what could be called her Victorian domesticity and moral authority of “the home”) to the mammy figure: the Aunt Jemima and Uncle Tom that continue to “feed” white kitchens. Stowe, through her characters, is not suggesting that white woman be without the servitude of black women—No. Rather than the abandonment of black domestic labor, Stowe’s argues for what may be called a voluntary indenture—the continuation of usurping black labor for white benefit, but without physical containment or violence.

What we see in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is an embroidered patterning of these "warmed" domestic quarters. The mammy figures who, rather than lacking, are touted as resourceful domestics, putting up what Stowe offers as (saccharine) lemonade. While slavery, in Stowe's accounting, is outrageously sour, the mammy (yet under hierarchical servitude of their domestic [female] masters) plums the sweet fruit of the hearth. Stowe illustrates (repeatedly) such scenes. The following, such an installment, blathers on for a few, drawling pages, but we shall only peek into "The cabin of Uncle Tom" where Aunt Chloe is envisioned,

A round, black, shining face is here, so glossy as to suggest the idea that she might have been washed over with white of eggs, like one of her own tea rusks. Her whole plump countenance beam with satisfaction and contentment from under her well-starched checked turban...A cook she certainly was, in the very bone and centre of her soul...Her corn-cake, in all its varieties...and other species too numerous to mention, was a sublime mystery to all less practised compounders; and she would shake her fat sides with honest pride and merriment. (19)

Mrs. Shelby, we are to understand, is the purveyor and consumer of Aunt Chloe's domestic "mysteries." Under the auspices of Mrs. Shelby, it is

nonetheless Aunt Chloe's (black) magic that illuminates Mrs. Shelby's impotence in the domestic quarter, making impervious the absolute requirement for the labor of Aunt Chloe's "soulful" egg-glazed constitution; which, under the beckon of Stowe's pen, constitutes Aunt Chloe's disposition as satisfied, content and merry. We must then make here the distinction between Stowe's abolitionist rhetoric and what she is decidedly *not* calling for: the release of her black domestics into a private sphere that is of their own.

"Reveal[ing] something a little closer to the truth" is that while Stowe may indeed formally call for the abolition of slavery, she yet fetishizes the domesticity of slaves in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Whiteness yet retains the heroism in Stowe's novel while the black characters fail to be recognized as autonomous humans with voices of their own. Stowe's project, then, we discover, is a moral divisiveness of "good" and "bad" whiteness, the black characters providing the *matter* for this division.

That *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is second only to the bible in translated texts and best-sellers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century communicates without doubt the weighty uptaking of Stowe's histrionic prose "very closely resembling the zeal of those alabaster missionaries to Africa to cover the nakedness of the natives, to hurry them into the pallid arms of Jesus" (Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest" 16). Which

is to say, white folks eagerly have purchased the ticket (to salvation) in imagining themselves through Stowe's illustration of the exceptional (read "good") white. The manufacture produced with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Baldwin asserts, assures "the necessity to find a lie more palatable than the truth has been handed down and memorized and persists yet with a terrible power" ("Everybody's Protest" 13). The melodrama's alternate title—*Life Among the Lowly*, has since been disappeared. Stowe, I contend, haunts the very ontology of race(lessness). In the epistemology of whiteness, Stowe informs the notion of individual invisible whiteness, which is to say, "racism without racists" (Eduardo Bonilla-Silva).

And yet, Stowe is among but one in a haunting choir of white collective (un)consciousness that has been formulated and perpetuated through American white literary imagination and its readers. Miss Ophelia's "Oh, the outrage," isn't so remarkable gathered among historical adages and today's bumper stickers and yard signs. If "Black Lives Matter" remains static in (white) textual propaganda (without praxis), then,

This practice is incompatible with a truly liberating course of action, which, by presenting the oppressors' slogans as a problem, helps the oppressed to 'eject' those slogans from within themselves.

After all, the task of the humanist is surely not that of pitting their slogans against the slogans of the oppressors, with the oppressed as the testing ground, 'housing' the slogans of first one group and then the other. (Freire 95)

Stowe, read through Freire, at the site of Miss Ophelia and St. Clare "are terribly earnest" in their "medieval morality," the "exclamation...moral, neatly framed, and incontestable like those improving mottoes sometimes found hanging on the walls of furnished rooms" (Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest" 11). Which is to say, the black body historically has been violently usurped as a vacuous site which white possession utilizes for social dissent just as effectively as it has enslaved for free labor and perverse enjoyment. The slipperiness of sentimentality, through Stowe's melodramatic narration, manufactures an arena for white abolitionists to inhabit, creating a moral distinction of salvation between the evils of slavery and the "good white" abolitionist who is absolved through the mere textual utterance of outrage. Returning to Wynter, the market economy is harkened by the same DNA as federations of white supremacy. Said another way, "The imperialist forces and the imperialist forces are one" (Wynter 96). If the U.S. economy is founded on slave labor, the black body, at the front, has been an object of the

market economy and continues to be such through the paradoxical anti-slavery rhetoric of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

This sacrificial black body in the novel's case is the failed protagonist, Uncle Tom, instead awarded to Miss Ophelia (or Stowe herself, I'd assert) in which the void of objectified blackness is validated by Stowe's own moral superiority. Muted, Uncle Tom's experience may only be spoken of through a second-hand accounting—through the voice and valor of whiteness. Stowe, at the very murder of Uncle Tom, takes his place as the novel's hero; critically, "his victory," claimed only through Stowe's abolitionist rhetoric and not materially for Uncle Tom, "is pyrrhic" (Wynter 97). Stowe's moral victory then is dependent upon the very evacuation of Uncle Tom's life, the abolishing of the very bareness of agency. Uncle Tom is, effectively and through a hoodwink of sentimental affect, erased as Stowe, as his white savior, comes and comes *too late*, enacting not his salvation, but rather her own. Tom is liberated from slavery only through his death.

Baldwin has no saccharine testaments to Stowe's "virtuous rage," and rather steadfastly avows that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "is activated by what might be called a theological terror, the terror of damnation; and the spirit that breathes in this book, hot, self-righteous, fearful, is not different from that...which sought to

exorcize evil by burning witches...[and] that terror which activates a lynch mob” (“Everybody’s Protest” 14-15). Baldwin puts Stowe’s supposed empathy under scrutiny—the hood(wink) not so cleaved from the other white cloth as her rage proclaims. Despite what I’ll refer to as “ignorant consent”—the myopia of white-sightedness and the consent to the blinders that conceal self-examination, the hood adorned by Stowe nonetheless hides the genuine face of her narrative, as Baldwin reveals,

Sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel; the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty. (“Everybody’s Protest” 12)

What Baldwin alludes to is Stowe’s paradoxical collusion with the slaveholder at the uptake of the black body for the utilization of whiteness. For Stowe, this uptake is a writ upon the flesh of blackness that she believes will grant her moral ascension and, ultimately, spiritual salvation through a Christian morass of paternalistic benevolence, through a “secret and violent inhumanity.”

To be certain, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is projected as a protest novel with slavery making the protestant. Stowe’s romantic melodrama, under Baldwin’s

interrogation, demands to be unmasked to reveal the racist tautness discordant in the commodification of blackness for not only the market but also as a vehicle for white abolitionists' morality play(s). What is revealed as/at the bearing/unbearable of Stowe's sentiment? I'm interested here less in the demonstrative affect of Stowe's outrage as effective action, but more so in inquiring into the affective reservoir that such white protest create—a reservoir into which white progressives to dip: the holy water of absolution.

To this end, Stowe's own oblivescence as a beneficiary (or, in fact, as I have argued thus far, a coy signatory) is articulated sharply in her "Concluding Remarks," in which she repeatedly preaches to her reader, "I beseech you," imploring us to come along with her to salvation, through the denouncing (through prayer) the evils of slavery; Stowe commands, "A day of grace is yet hold out to us" in which to avoid (in her last five words of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) "the wrath of Almighty God" (379). This writ of Stowe's protestation of slavery, the question of *who* the beneficiary of Stowe's benevolence, is must be handled. Further, the residual legacy of white abolitionist voices foregrounding the humanist discourse of black people must not be overlooked. The Dover edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, first published in 2005 (the most current copy pressed in 2015) bears a solitary critical quote on the back cover; asserts Alfred Kazin, "The

most powerful and most enduring work of art ever written about American slavery.” This continuity of abjection/objectification of black voices, sentience and agency is crucial in understanding the heritage of current white progressives’ projects. This is to ask: Can we occasion a nuanced critique that assumes a polemic with progressive white liberal political discourse functioning as a co-conspirator of black oppression and dehumanization? Rather than a “good white” attempt at civil rights? Finally, is it possible that liberal guilt testifies to a double jeopardy of culpability at the first instance, and again at its attempt to assuage that guilt?

\* \* \*

❧ REGISTER II ❧

FOUL PLAY: ON THE STAGING OF INNOCENCE AS AN AFFECTIVE  
ECONOMY OF WHITENESS—THE LOCATION OF ENJOYMENT AND  
DISLOCATION OF AFFECT

*I know what the world has done to my brother and how narrowly he has survived it. And I know, which is much worse, and this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it...But it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent.*

*It is the innocence which constitutes the crime.*

—James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

Foremost, Baldwin demands, “But it is not permissible that the authors of such devastation should also be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime” (292). Stowe’s “not knowing” is not of the inhumanity of slavery, but rather her own failed attempt at humanistic missionary work. Baldwin holds Stowe culpable for her unbeknownst innocent ignorance. The very crux of this humanistic mission is claiming to be a savior to those who are not beings for themselves, but “beings for others” (Freire 74). Returning to histrionic pathology, Stowe (and her descendants) may be said to inherit this cognitive disordering wherein the salvation of self is through the sacrament of those

bodies supposedly “saved.” Again, for Stowe and her Christian guild, this racist anti-racism espoused through *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* bespeaks moral indignation not at the outrage of crimes against material black bodies, but rather at the crime against the moral sensibilities of the Godly.

Joel Kovel, who’s relentless work on the psychology (perhaps more aptly, pathology) and history of racism in *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, theorizes: “At a general rule, racism today is carried out along with and at times cloaked by, antiracism” (xxi). Writing in 1984, in the “Preface to the Morningside Edition,” Kovel traces the decade and a half since the text’s first edition was published in 1970. What is striking in this statement is that we see this very manifestation of racism’s invisibility cloak with Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. (No doubt, we are presently steeped in this phenomenon in this age of purported post-racism and diversity rhetoric). Kovel himself, exemplars Stowe’s paradox of racist anti-racism to illustrate how this maneuver functioned in the “controversy over slavery,”

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* took this dynamic situation and furthered the distortions which white culture had already made. It thereby place itself squarely in the mainstream of idealistic American reform, and appealed to the destructive falsification inherent in that reform:

attack the crime, appease and feed the conscience, and abstract the victim into a new level of degradation. Thus arose the subhuman stereotype of Uncle Tom, the helpless, devoted Negro who would be consumed by the badness in whites if he were not saved by their goodness. And badness reposed exclusively in the rapacious Southerners, goodness exclusively in the rapacious Northerners, who were soothed by the black this and other related works which allowed them to avoid the black man and to further their own abstracted gain. Such a dispensation deserved reward, and Mrs. Stowe became overnight one of America's leading intellectuals. (235)

Through Kovel, we see Stowe's moral virtue nourished by the composer soil of racism itself—that is to say, nourished by the same notion of white purity/superiority (4). This "purity" of whiteness is defined in opposition to the perceived "dirt" of blackness (Kovel 4). Which is to say, the same virtue authorized by white racism is the virtue of white moral purity Stowe attempts to elide as a nonracist Christian-principled superiority. My postulation, hence, is heretofore what I refer to as the "perverse paradox" of the progressive liberal heritage: the ethical imperative that is "markedly less virtuous than ideology would have it...nourished by corrupt roots and survived by a continuously

sustained act of self-deception” (Kovel 4). To reiterate, Stowe’s narrative oblivescence may be rooted in white ignorance: the unconsciousness of the implications of her own whiteness—an ignorance of self, raced through the Other while oneself remains *raceless*. Though this self-deception may not be conscious, manipulative or malicious, the righteousness is yet *white* by the ethical imperative of white racism, which must be understood as anti-blackness—the purity distinct from the filth of darkness, or “dirt,” as Kovel astutes.

Calling back upon the grand narrative dichotomy of primitive/civilized and our Cartesian dualities, we recall that the primitive is embodied materially, pre-civilized and pre-cognitive, while the civilized is evolved to the mastering of the mind—a very (colonialist) evolutionary tale. A vital trope of this dichotomy, as cited previously by Kovel, is a virtuous purity metaphoric to cleanliness, an innocence of the soul. Anne McClintock, illustrating this trope, foregrounds her chapter, “Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity Racism and Imperial Advertising,” with a slogan from the soap company Unilever, “Soap is Civilization” (207). In Stowe’s virtuous narration of progressivism, *cleanliness* [whiteness] *is next to godliness*. Reading Stowe through McClintock harkens a textual spectacle wherein “[t]he sacrament of soap offers a reformation allegory whereby the purification of the domestic body becomes a metaphor for the regeneration of the

body politic" (214). In other words, as we have established, "cleaning-up" the (dark) shame of American slavery, reinvigorates (white-washes) America's redemption as the "land of the free."

Informedly, in this trope of civilization as progress, "panoptical time (progress consumed as a spectacle from a point of privileged invisibility) enters the domain of the commodity" (214). Which is to assert, Stowe's puritanical purity *sells*—*Uncle Tom's Cabin* is no doubt a commercial venture. The question that needs to be examined then remains: Exactly, what does Stowe sell?

Baldwin may have already answered: white innocence through the affective outrage of histrionics. The morality of progress is the pilgrim's pillage of the uncivilized, cleaning up of "filth," a making of other's into the image of one's self—in *his image they were (un)made*. Conclusively, the missionary is a colonialist, an imperialist. Stowe, therefore, aligns herself in the image of God, while those she absolves to save, are hence twice removed: not innocent of evil, but rather characterizing the innocence of the child—lacking autonomy and agency: moveable while not mobile. Stowe speaks *for* others.

The divergence of the cartel of slavery and the progressivism of white abolitionists is not at the insistence on the purity of whiteness, but rather how this perverse paradox manages blackness. While the slave-holder puts the slave

to labor to materially define whiteness' opposition, the progressive plots the black body in his own imago, an idealized vision that is perpetually "not quite/not white," to engage Homi Bhabha's (by way of Lacan's) notion of mimicry. I uptake Bhabha's concept of mimicry, not in which the colonized mimics the oppressor to become "more human," but instead isolating and stretching Bhabha's notion to rather illustrate Stowe's own attempt at humanizing the slave to a restricted extent in order to proclaim her own elevated humanity. To quote Bhabha at length,

It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come. What they all share is a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely 'rupture' the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence. By 'partial' I mean both 'incomplete' and 'virtual'. It is as if the very emergence of the 'colonial' is dependent for its representation upon some strategic limitation or prohibition *within* the authoritative discourse itself. The success of

colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace. (123)

It is in this slippage that Stowe, making herself (her whiteness) in the image of God subsumes the black body as “incomplete” and “virtual” --always already, not quite Godly and never quite white. The very insistence of Stowe on her vocalization in place of the slave’s own narrative implicates Stowe in this inversed mimicry appropriation, with disastrously similar resulting dehumanization. This is to say, Stowe, in her abolitionist tendencies, yet still fortifies black bodies as “inappropriate objects.”

To mistake Stowe’s narrative as a call for the freedom and equality for black people is a grave misreading. I contend, resounding Baldwin, that Stowe instead calls for the specific release of black bodies from the brutality of slavery, distinct from servitude, which, by her accounting of numerous “good misses” in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, she is not demonizing. The “good white” yet remains, in Stowe’s accounting, hierarchically removed from her empathetically projected enslaved body. Stowe, via *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, “desire[s] for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha 122). To repeat, Stowe’s project is a colonizer’s missionary trope: An

American tale of saving the Other (and thus self) from *evil*. To be sure, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is more a biblical cautionary tale of morality than it is a treaty of black humanness. Uncle Tom, to be grieveable, must, therefore, present as an asexual, obedient Christian—the colonized subject via Stowe's virtu(al) narrative of saving graces. Ultimately, Tom, locked into his materiality as a black man, must die in order to transcend his blackness. This represents the ultimate apex and steadfastness of never quite white. Stowe's climax reveals the perverse paradox of her protest of slavery: Tom's death has been put up for Stowe's novel to breathe through white utterances of outrage.

At this (colonialist) pass, a critical divergence must be made: the missionary's project of making Others "more human" in order to become "more human(itarian)" themselves must be at once understood as leaving behind the alibi of "good intentions." The colonized at "more human" will statically retain the status of "not quite," while, through the trope of missionary work, the colonizer is elevated to a statue of "more (than) human"—akin to saintly, even martyred. To the work of the missionary is the implicit requirement of viewing the colonized through the grand narrative dichotomy of primitive-civilized, which does the work of primordializing the subject of inquiry: this means that primitive (its Latin cognate) implies original, preliterate, pre-cultural, pre-

civilization, which semiotically marks the (primitive) subject's absence in rational discourses and paradigms. What religion does (through the missionary) is deify these inflections while simultaneously configuring the subject as an empty vessel to be filled, as well as acted upon, thus constituting the state of salvation—in Stowe's case, through sentimentality.

As Ahmed insists, the non-performativity of fine speeches and apologetic acts (of which Stowe's undoubtedly is situated), portends to renounce, untether, divide oneself from associative guilt. Stowe's sentimental moves, however, are steadfastly attached to white supremacist ideology that constitutes missionary work. With *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe proselytizes and beseeches her readers to "read" the enslaved as "human." The emotive act (to re-engage Reddy) that is performed at the front is the missionary's understanding of the "work" to be done as the civilization of the primitive—through the affective command of sentimental tropes of saving graces. In other words, up front, the missionary must see the "beneficiary" of her benediction as *in need of salvation*. Said another way, the missionary's occupation is "intervention" for the uncivilized. At the peril of dismissing Stowe's feeling right as "good intentions," we must heed her solution in the "Concluding Remarks" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,

Do you say, 'We don't want them here; let them go to Africa'?...

To fill up Liberia with an ignorant, inexperienced, half-barbarized race, just escaped from the chains of slavery, would be only to prolong, for ages, the period of struggle and conflict which attends the inception of new enterprises. Let the church of the north receive these poor sufferers in the spirit of Christ; receive them to the educating advantages of Christian republican society and schools, until they have attained to somewhat of a moral and intellectual maturity, and then assist them in their passage to those shores, where they may put in practice the lessons they have learned in America. (376)

Fundamental to the colonial project is religion. What Stowe clarifies in this closing passage of her text is that while America's salvation necessitates the salvation of the formerly enslaved, the formerly enslaved cannot act as agents in their own salvation. Specifically, Stowe's novel (and project, as she would have it) begins with saving the uncivilized from heathen American slavery in order to save the country itself from damnation, simultaneously bestowing the sacrament of civilization to the liberated heathens before they are turned back to primitive land. Commands Stowe, "You pray for the heathen abroad; pray also for the heathen at home" (376).

The dislocation of affect then names the failure to locate the African American slave as fully human (though, it must be acknowledged in this conversation that, in fact, slaves were not counted fully human, and hence, neither American citizens, but American property, as objects of possession), and in this projected mimicry of Stowe's own projected imago, the Black American is yet, again, not quite/not white. Stowe's proclamation of outrageous empathy is a *dislocated* affect—what I'll further insist as a “failed empathy.” What I'm insisting upon here is that while Stowe claims to be the benevolent mistress, her affective outrage is a mere proclamation of her own morally-just salvation. Stowe's histrionics are, by definition, performances central to her own affective resonance and materialization of morality, and hitherto, (perhaps, allowing for an unbeknownst self-aggrandizement) Stowe's outrage rather boomerangs back to her own ironic usurping of paternalist benevolence. The empathy Stowe projects onto the victims of slavery's brutality, is then in effect, mirrored back upon her salvation from damnation. Through disavowing slavery, Stowe effectively grants herself (and kin of white abolitionists) ascendance above those who in Stowe's moral trajectory will no doubt suffer the moral vengeance of eternal damnation.

The dislocated affect (and resultant failed empathy) transpiring in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* then, are an outrageous plea for Stowe herself. Her narrative arrogation as the empathetic voice of (anti)slavery speaks through (to remind us of Stowe's preface) the "Christian brotherhood" — those gatekeepers to soul's final salvation whose "hand of benevolence is everywhere stretched out, searching into abuses, righting wrongs, alleviating distresses, and bringing to the knowledge and sympathies of the world the lowly, the oppressed, and the forgotten" (Stowe 1). The protagonist in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the goodness of whiteness transcending the evil of slavery. Slaves, the "lowly, the oppressed, and the forgotten" may access the readers' affective response only through the benevolence of Stowe and her Christian brotherhood's own innocence.

Further, the question must be posed: At what juncture does this dislocated affect become perverted into pleasure? What I'm asking here, beyond the pleasure distinct to moral comeuppance, is to interrogate the desire for and pleasure in *others'* abjection, specifically as a spectator of violence, whether this violence is located through narration (as we've exhausted through Stowe) or the ocular incantations of brutality. What is the undergirded affect situated behind the front of sentimental empathy that so compels white eyes to the recountings of black death, word by word, frame by frame? Here, I'm interested in the

perversity of white affections—a deviancy that is more of the devil than of the missionary’s Jesus.

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### **On the (Short) Distance Between Desire, Disgrace and Repulsion**

*At the beginning of modernity, it may have been easier to acknowledge that there exists an innate tropism toward the gruesome. Edmund Burke observed that people like to look at images of suffering. “I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others,” he wrote in A Philosophical Enquiry in the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.*

*--Susan Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others*

Saidiya Hartman astutely fleshes such a proposal in her incisive work, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. What Hartman comes to reference as “perverse enjoyment” is the intertwining of witnessing violence and the ensuing paradoxical pleasure that rides along the coast of hedonism, affecting a “pleasure of terror” (32). Critical to Hartman’s theory is that this witnessing is most often voluntary and rarely vulnerable; her interrogations focus on white accounting (white witness) already mandating a once-removed exposition—posturing solely on the ability toward empathy: putting one in another’s place. The melodrama is rather *not* distinct in motivation from the minstrel show: both uptaking blackface to occupy the black body and its abject status. The white narrative of black pain (to be sure, the

suffering of blacks at the hands of whites) possesses the black body through this “phantasmal slipping” into the black body, read as a vacant container to be filled with the asserted empathy of white benevolent affect—conjuring a dislocated affect.

Rather than a divergence from the occupation of black corporality toward the labor of slavery, this possession retains the facticity of an “identification facilitated by a kindred possession or occupation of the captive body, albeit on a different register...the materiality of suffering regularly eludes (re)cognition by virtue of the body’s being replaced by other signs of value, as well as other bodies” (Hartman 21). Stowe’s testimony, minstrel shows and melodramas, and their heritage present in today’s ocular market of *seeing but not being seen (seeing)*, is an affective economy of possession—the exploitation of a body towards another’s fugitive harvest. Whether that uptake of appropriated proprietorship is toward the end of forced physical labor or the affective labor of perverse enjoyment, the (strange) fruit ripened is sour, in both instances—poisoned by the violent exploitation of blackness. In both instantiations, the uptake of black bodies restrains black ontology as “beings for others.” The paradox that Hartman illuminates is the double-sided coin of the possession of black bodies as property,

the fashioning of whiteness in large measure occurred by way of the subjugation of blacks. The illusionary integrity of whiteness facilitated by attraction and/or antipathy to blackness was ultimately predicated upon the indiscriminate use and possession of the black body...dependent upon the relations of mastery and servitude and the possession of a figurative body of blackness. (32)

While slavery seizes and reduces black people to corporal labor for white profit, white abolitionist sentiment likewise overtakes black people as property to be utilized, albeit, to a rhetorically divergent agendas of “attraction and/or antipathy.”

As Hartman astutes, this divergence isn't so distinct after all—perverse enjoyment is the attraction to what one despises. The “illusionary integrity” of white abolitionists is illustrated in the fine speeches put forth with the justification of waging freedom for the enslaved. What needs rectifying is the black body being supplanted from the utilization of physical labor in the plantation fields to the affective labor supplied by black bodies as abject objects to engage the sentimental spectacle of cruelty. The slave's body is metaphorically unshackled by the abolitionist only to be occupied as a vacuous being for the protestation and absolution of those “good whites” that *speak* in

outrage against slavery. Attraction and antipathy are two sides of the coin funding the objectification of blackness toward the creation of white subjects—whether those subjects are pronounced good or evil.

Hartman, addressing this “narrative sickness” engages the literature of anti-slavery, explicitly, her chapter on “Innocent Amusements: The Stage of Sufferance,” accounts of the letters of John Rankin, written to his brother on slavery’s spectacle of violence. In what Hartman refers to as the “precariousness of empathy,” the “masochistic fantasy” reveals the absurdity of Rankin’s voluntary dejection from his whiteness in order to replace the Other with himself. Rather than accessing the pain of the enslaved being tortured, Rankin can only project his own imagined pain, his own humanity for the lack of humanity he grants the slave—this duplicity resulting in an abject failing of empathy. Harman explains, “Rankin must supplant the black captive in order to give expression to black suffering, and as a consequence, the dilemma—the denial of black sentience and the obscurity of suffering—is not attenuated but instantiated,” resulting in a “facile intimacy” (19).

He, who Rankin attempts to feel into, is rather displaced, erased, silenced by Rankin's closing of aesthetic distance<sup>8</sup> to the degree of foreclosing the black body. Empathy, then in Hartman's definition (in relation to white abolitionist possession) is an affective disorder that must exchange black corporality for whiteness in order for cruelty and violence to materialize (under the white gaze). For a white sensibility to *feel* the pain of the cruel spectacle of slavery, second-handedly accounted by both Stowe and Rankin (and their thirdly situated readers) demands a supplanting of a white body for a black. The black body in pain, seen without the bodily exchange of whiteness, garners no outrage (of white sensibility).

Conclusively, what is apparent in both narrative accountings is a failed empathy. Stowe's, like Rankin's outrage, must be puppeted through the alabaster mouths of abolitionists to move not only themselves, but also, more critically, their white audience. To be certain, this slight-of-hand has been uptaken before and since Stowe's hyperbolic affect—like outrage has been writ

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<sup>8</sup> Aesthetic distance will be further employed. An overarching definition: "In literary and aesthetic theory, a psychological relationship between an audience and an artwork reflecting a certain degree of disinterest, or critical detachment from it. Some critics (influenced by Kant) have regarded distancing (or distanciation) as necessary in order to background subjective emotional responses and to cultivate an approach though to be appropriate for an aesthetic construct as opposed to everyday experiences. This is consonant with the formalist technique of defamiliarization" (Oxford Reference Online).

in letters as well as bumper stickers for the consumption of white audiences and the authors' assertions of being not one of *those* whites, but rather a "good white," which is to ascertain—a non-racist by way of a narrative or motto. The outrageous affect is put forth as a kind of emotive reparation—a performative utterance—for the exploitative action taken by those *other* whites.

\* \* \*

### **The Ocular Insistence of Deviant Affect**

*[A] trove of photographs of black victims of lynching in small towns in the United States between the 1890s and the 1930s...provided a shattering, revelatory experience for the thousands who saw them in a gallery in New York in 2000. The lynching pictures tell us about human wickedness. About humanity. They force us to think about the extent of the evil unleashed specifically by racism. Intrinsic to the perpetration of this evil is the shamelessness of photographing it. The pictures were taken as souvenirs and made, some of them, into postcards; more than a few show grinning spectators, good churchgoing citizens as most of them had to be, posing for a camera with the backdrop of a naked, charred, mutilated body hanging from a tree. The display of these pictures makes us spectators, too.*

--Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*

Baldwin may put the same question to Rankin as he does to Stowe—to ask what motivates their people to such deeds. The answer to what arouses inhumanity is that the victim must have, at the front of the spectacle, a classification of not quite human. Could it be possible, therefore, as Baldwin scrutinizes, that Mrs. Stowe, and additionally here Rankin, in their vivid accountings were titillated? Could the scopophilia (the pleasure in looking) of

the white gaze upon brutalization of blackness be perverse, “a facile intimacy” at the “obliteration of otherness?” (Hartman 19). If the black body is previewed as not quite human, why is the torture of this flesh so desired by whiteness? Susan Sontag insists, “All images that display the violation of an attractive body are, to a certain degree, pornographic. But images of the repulsive can also allure” (95).

Rankin, in his own written accounting belies a singularity of affect. His letters express not only an failed attempt at empathy for the brutalized slave (in which he must replace the black body of the slave with his own whiteness to *feel* right) but also a disturbingly erotic selection of vocabulary which materialize the scene too closely with that of masochistic pornography. Rankin “speak[ing] not only for but literally in the place of the enslaved,” narrates this failed empathy by “phantasmically becoming the enslaved,”

My flighty imagination added much to the tumult of passion by persuading me, for the moment, that I myself was a slave, and with my wife and children placed under the reign of terror. I began in reality to *feel for myself*, my wife, and my children—the thoughts of being whipped at the *pleasure* of a morose and capricious master, *aroused* the strongest feelings of resentment; but when I *fancied* the cruel lash was approaching my wife and children, and my

imagination depicted in lively colors, their tears, their shrieks, and bloody stripes, every indignant principle of my bloody nature was *excited* to the highest degree [emphasis added]. (Hartman 18)

Rankin, in feeling for himself, putting himself in the place of another in which the other is being tortured is presented as a voluntary dejection from his whiteness (which he recoups after his imagination flees the scene). The duplicity revealed through this passage exposes Rankin's failure to feel *for* the slave in his blackness, and more significantly, Rankin's ability to feel in this scene depends upon replacing the slave with himself, a white man. Rankin's empathy for the slave paradoxically depends upon maintaining his *whiteness*. This racial imperative additionally positions the inquiry of who exactly Rankin may be able to (and may be) identifying with. What I am suggesting here is that this slippery empathy occurs not only through an inability to imagine himself as the other, as a black man, but crucially, that this identification in this scene is yet fused to that of the brutalizer—retaining his whiteness. This maneuver causes a fragmentation, in which Rankin must be both within himself and outside of himself simultaneously: Rankin through his imaginary reconstruction of the scene, must become the perpetuator (symbolic of his whiteness), the victim (in which blackness has become erased) and the voyeur of this “scene of subjection.”

What I am skeptical of is Rankin's positioning of himself in the role of "proxy," as Hartman and Rankin himself account. The very titillation exposed through Rankin's word choices call his proxy of victim into doubt. "Pleasure," "aroused," "fancied," and "excited" are peculiar descriptives when narrating a terroristic scene and illuminate a "complicated nexus of terror and enjoyment," pushing forth the question, "[I]s it too extreme or too obvious to suggest that that Rankin's flight of imagination and the excitement engendered by suffering might also be pleasurable?" (Hartman 21).

Here I locate the ocular insistence of deviant affect in which the narration of the torture of black bodies becomes a form of white supremacist pornography, whether by imaginary visualization through narrative accounting or actual ocular spectacles. The spectacle of black death is the spectacle of the (dispossessed) flesh. The baring of flesh and a penetration into the flesh is the definitive theme of these narrations of abject brutality. The ontological becoming of blackness is foreclosed onto the skin, bearing the inscriptions of torture. Blackness becomes not embodied, but rather halted at the flesh, recalling Fanon's theory of constituting blackness through an "epidermal schema" — a text marked *otherwise*, marked upon.

The (Rankin's) desire for a "bare life" of blackness suffuses into a powerlessness that is titillating—the eroticism of suffering, the masochism of the spectator. Brutalizing pornography is not a witnessing of an erotic encounter, but a voyeurism that calls up desire at the breeching of the sadist's humanity for the pleasure of the other—being for another. Inextricably fused to this reduction of body to flesh is fascist power, absolute dominance. The divergence affected through this reduction must be performed on the carnal body, through the affective sensory of action perpetrated onto the body that diminishes human into flesh. Blackness, through the circulation of these performances, is instantiated a singular corporality. Black bodies, through this reinstatement of the Cartesian split, are fortified, through violated flesh, as beings handicapped through the materiality of the body. In other words, the abjection of blackness must be located in and locked at the superficial surface of the flesh in order that black bodies are unable to ontologically exist beyond corporality. Through these inscriptive conjures, the black body is cleaved from Descartes' cognitive ascension from the corporeal.

This involuntary subjection is effected by writ, upon the body, through the "hieroglyphics of the flesh" substantiated by (sexual) violence enacted (Spillers 207). The illustrative command of violence and sex concomitantly graphic the

“dissolution of boundaries between bodies and between control and the loss thereof. Abjection is the visceral rejection of those traces of this dissolution, either in the form of bodily fluids or with respect to the *social* body...eroticism stands at the opposite pole from abjection and is hence closely tied thereto” (Slane 256). The embodied humanity must be subsumed through the exploitation of the flesh—deconstructed through possessing the will and agency of the other through the material physicality of penetrating the flesh, through the puncture of the epidermal and/or the penetration of sexualized force. The reduction of the body to flesh is the debodiment to a *thing*—an objectification through which the signifier of human is capitulated. This pornography of white supremacy is what Hortense Spillers has coined as the “grammar of the *pornotrope*”: “the cross-fertilization of violence and sexuality” which “insists...witness to the machinations of pornotroping” (Weheliye 102, 106). Diagraming Rankin’s epistles through Spillers’ concept of pornotroping, translates his arousal at the scenes of subjection as an exemplar of the pornographic duplicity in the letters of white protestation narratives.

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## Lynching Postcards: Panoramic Publicity

The spectacular outrage in Rankin's and Stowe's violent accountings of the brutalization of black bodies toward a "now we know (better)" aesthetic did not, in fact, create a "doing better." Post-abolition, the brutalization of black bodies not only continued as an art form, but now foregrounded photographs over words. Lynching photographs became the new art of displaying white supremacy. Deviant, duplicitous affect no longer required translating and speculating at the underbelly of white sentiment—now we could see the smiling white faces, gathering around the trophy of a black man hanged, posing for the camera. More, the panoramic publicity of lynching postcards record desire for deviant affect without the possibility of the white alibi of *feeling right*.

These lynching photographs and postcards subsequently created and circulated from the photographs mark a significant movement in the transparency of white spectatorship in scenes of subjection. Defining spectacle as: object or event + audience = affective economy mandates the audience to (the) work (of) the spectacle's affect. Removing the myopia from this arena (where the audience remains outside the participatory circle) and extending the crime scene to envelope the witness as central and essential rather than a receptacle implicates the reach of whiteness into the crowd of violence, as perpetrators of

racism rather than as innocent bystanders. The spectacle of black death under this auspices understands spectacle as production rather than merely performance. While the witness is essential, the virtual spectacle (in the circulation of lynching postcards and presently in the circulating videos of murder of black men) not only allows audience invisibility, but also mutes the desire inherent in the pornotrope, "The happenings of desire takes place off the screen, off the map, off the charts, off the books, which is what render the symbols etched into and written by the flesh indecipherable to the extent that they do not appear as desire" (Weheliye 111). The witness to the virtual spectacle of titillating violence, therefore, (dis)appears as a voyeur.

This voyeurism isn't a peep, a viewing unconsented. Rather, the spectacle of black death is an interactive exhibition. It is a scene of subjugation constructed for consumption. The masochistic performance of white supremacy is rematerialized through the scopic and perverse enjoyment of the white gaze. Philosopher George Yancy, in *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race*, contends, "The very act of gazing...is itself a form of visual penetration by the phallogentric hegemony of the colonizing gaze...always bound up with power, domination, and eroticization" (94). Rather than an empathic pang, the white audience is interpellated into the bio-reward center of

the brain: a psychological, somatic response to witnessing the sanctity of whiteness—blackness is what whiteness cannot be, the violation upon the flesh of the black body marks the preservation of whiteness embodied. The white voyeur is simultaneously stimulated with the satiation of pleasure of not only not being black, but also relishing the assuaging of accountability and responsibility of not being *that white* who perpetrated the brutality—a proxy of an epistemological break. *The benefit without the cost: the encapsulation of whiteness unnamed.* The profit of black death continuously feeds white supremacy:

‘This appetite for document, this devouring by the eye’ must be seen as inseparable from the act of lynching, ‘as if only a camera can bring the spectator close enough for the eye to be embedded in the flesh’...the camera plays a part in sustaining that appetite’...the photograph souvenir represents a demented passion of the Real and a solipsistic desire for power, as if the spectator/perpetrator permanently ‘owns’ a piece of the victim. (Marriott qtd. in Gerk Hernandez 7)

The lynching photographs empirically evidence white supremacy, visually circulating tortured bodies for the power and pleasure of white possession. The

enjoyment remains unidentified: a secret lust, “where watching becomes doing” (Marriott 32).

The aesthetic distance between spectator and the object of spectacular violence narrows to “bring the spectator close enough for the eye to be embedded in the flesh.” The “distanciation” of “subjective emotional responses” fails, and deviant affect is foreground. The very failure of empathy here is the misunderstanding of how the artistic spectacle functions. Stowe’s and Rankin’s sentimentality are posited on not the suffering of black bodies, but the aligning of the readers’ affect with the authors. Said another way: The empathy invoked through these abolitionist narratives aligns the authors’ affects with the readers’, not the subjugated and violated black bodies. Additionally, the act of voyeurism is assumed outside the scene, already conditioning a fantastic (failed) empathy.

In other words, there is no possibility of an actual replacement of the body of a tortured black man with that of a white man under these racist conditions that substantiate the spectacle. This is also to understand that the narrative acts and visual incantations of spectacular violence cannot be alibied as objective “evidence.” Shawn Michelle Smith, in her essay, “Evidence of Lynching,” contents that these lynching photos read distinctively “to who and how and

when and why one looks" (Apel and Smith 15). Smith continues, "Because their meaning is determined by context and circulation and the interests of specific viewers, the evidence in them cannot be fixed," further,

Photographs as *evidence* are never enough, for photographic *meaning* is always shaped by context and circulation, and determined by viewers. Photographic meaning results from what we *do* with photographic evidence. Lynching photographs, finally do not deliver testimony so much as they call us to it. (Apel and Smith 41)

The desire to look upon these images of black death, or as Burke determines, to "have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others," places under inquiry what is called forth in white affections and afflictions in these desires.

As we've seen, the civilization, progressive discourse that insists a forward momentum of "getting better," has, not in fact, been evidenced through the temporal march traced here through the narrative works of Stowe to Rankin to post-abolitionist ocular work of lynching photographs and postcards. My insistence here is that we take grave measures not to historicize these works as belonging to the "past." Exhibitions of lynching photographs in the present

millennia have excited a contemporary fancy that even widens the voyeuristic audience and circulation of these death spectacles. Fantastic patronage of these exhibitions demonstrate a different kind of evidence—one insisting on the interrogation of the acerbic desire to be a voyeur of black death in the present ecology that is (as a misnomer) defined as post-race. To put this evidence into empirical data, the touring exhibition (renamed to coincide with a like book of coffee table photography) *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, began in New York, where “fifty thousand attended the exhibition in its first four months,” where “long-lines formed outside the gallery...some visitors waiting three hour on the wintry sidewalk for their turn inside;” this “enthusiasm” eventually requiring a limit on the number of patrons to two hundred per day (Lee in Apel and Smith 2).

The overwhelming patronage of this exhibit, opening in the year 2000, less than a decade into the nation’s first black president elect, demands an interrogation into the ocular insistence of deviant affect, of a voyeurism that, according to historian Grace Hale, is “too close to the spectacle created by the lynchers themselves” (qtd. in Apel and Smith 6). This is to ask, “And if we gaze with a special intensity, looking scrupulously and insistently at each detail of the lynching, we say that our scrutiny differs in a kind from the

attention of those who were present. But why do we look, and for what ends?" (Lee in Apel and Smith 6). Questioning the ocular insistence of deviant affect, whether seen through the smiling faces aside a mutilated, hanging black corpse, or a troubling affect that shortens the distance between desire and repulsion in white underbellies, is the undergird of this thesis.

The very perversion of the fantasy lies in the feigning feeling for black suffering without relinquishing the power or place of whiteness: a voyeuristic teasing of an abject position one does not, cannot, in actuality, occupy. What these narrations and ocular instantiations do, through this aesthetic distancing, is manifest an affective *experience*. Said another way, of the experience, "no matter what laundered popular way of instantaneous existential states to which some whites could respond, it was indeed a communication by art because it said, 'I feel this this, now you do too'" (Mailer). The feeling transferred in this experience is, to be clear, is an affect from one white to other whites. Here it is that the materialized affect presents in the body through measurable affections: an affliction of white supremacy that desires the torture of black bodies.

### ∞ REGISTER III ∞

#### “IN DEATH THE NEGRO BECAME A HUMAN BEING;” OR, THE INVISIBLE INK OF WHITE PROEST ON BLACK LIVES’ (MATTER)

*Racism is ultimately indivisible from the rest of American life, a fact few of us wish to face. Most commentators who wish America to eliminate the blight of racism simply observe the discrepancy between what we espouse and how we act, and conclude: see, we are not living up to our ideals; let us do so, abjure racism, become true to ourselves, or else face the consequences, which have become painfully glaring by now. But they stop here, for to go on is even more painful than to continue participating in the presently disastrous state of race relations in America. To go on, in a manner truthful to ourselves and our history, would mean seeing and dealing with the full indivisibility of our situation. In short, it would mean confronting the fact that racism has not been a matter of ignorance or oversight, nor an inexplicable evil in human nature, opposed to our ideals and better feelings. We would have to confront the fact that both the racism and the ideals spring from a deep, common, unconscious unity; that, in fact, the height of our ideals has been historically nourished by the depths of our passions, including the passions of the fantasies of race, and that these live on in dialectical union with our ideals. In fact, the West would not have needed such high ideals if a part of it had not plunged so low in the pursuit of its desires. Of course a pseudoseparation is made, by repressing the connection between the various elements of the symbolic matrix that constitute our racial situation. Otherwise we could not go on. Repression is what gives the quality of banality to great evils. Racism, as great an evil as has been wrought by men—perhaps the greatest, since it has been and is perpetuated by advanced men who claimed virtue and could have known better—is in itself the most ludicrous and absurd of beliefs*  
[emphasis added].  
--Joel Kovel

*The spectacle [of lynching] circulated in detailed written accounts of tortures, pickled and dried body parts, a radio announcement, and Edison recording, a film, and even a gruesome picture postcard send and saved: these artifacts increasingly did the cultural work of othering southern African Americans, of making whiteness across gender and class lines, for them. And from the perspectives of anti-lynching activists, the African American public that supplied the victims, and small-town boosters alike, this shift was*

progress...by the late 1930s representations of lynchings worked almost as well as  
lynchings themselves.  
--Grace Elizabeth Hale

*If we've come a long way then I suspect it sideways, further from our origins no closer to  
our destination.*  
--Dessa, "Mineshaft"

The words previous to this register have been but scaffolding and historical context in which to illuminate a continuum of the spectacle of black death in the present: viral videos of black men being murdered by police officers (acts of state-sanctioned violence). The civilization narrative of progress disallows for transparency in this continuation. Notions of post-race and "coming a long way" disarticulate a heritage of racism, a racism that is "as bad as it was before." These notions of progress contend, "We are getting better all the time." This improvement discourse denies that a dislocated affect and/or a perverse enjoyment of black death exists presently. This "now," in other words, has been cleanly cleaved of "back then when." The dialogues around this present spectacle of black death claim outrage at the murder of black men.

What can we make of the white audience to this current spectacle relative to historical spectacles that sought out the torture of black bodies? Which is to ask: Is this outrage disingenuous? Or dislocated? Could the outrage be complicated at the "now we know"? Which is to ask, does the front of ignorance

instantiate a white comfort that is disrupted—a forced cognitive dissonance—with the empirical evidence of recorded murders of black men? “At least now we know” becomes a call to action, a demand for self-reflection and a rupture of white ignorance that disallows a previous white myopia.

Though, to reiterate Baldwin’s contention, “This is precisely what the generality of white Americans cannot afford to do. They do not know how to do it” (“The Price” 841). Precisely white Americans<sup>9</sup> do not know how to do it, I concede, because the present manufacture of racism insists that white America is not, indeed, racist, and this insistence has become the white alibi of a nationalist, multicultural pride. But like any overt insistence, a covert underbelly is likely present. The state of America’s race relations insist quite a different reality, as the present manifestation of racism disclosed in these videos illustrate. Fixed in white unconsciousness is yet whiteness, which exists not in an isolated formation, but rather in juxtaposition to blackness, because, as Baldwin insists, “white people are not white” but through an opposing definition against blackness (“The Price” 835). The belief in whiteness—“the price of the ticket”—

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<sup>9</sup> Here and forth, I mark, with Baldwin, that when I write of white American, I am writing of a “generality” that forms Kovel’s “deep, common, unconscious unity” defining whiteness. This—to be clear—is to preemptively call to attention that this conversation is not enveloping of *all whites*.

is a subscription to a belief in blackness, as it has been historically defined. This subscription, at the front, is a racist notion—the racial binary of white and black rests upon whiteness signifying virtue and blackness connoting vice. That white America cannot “go back to where [it] started, or as far back as [it] can, examine all of it, travel [its] road again and tell the truth about it. Sing or shout or testify or keep it to [itself]: but *know whence [it] came*” (Baldwin, “The Price” 841), must be understood as an existential process that requires a revealing of an interdependency of whiteness and blackness—the discovery that whiteness is implicitly dependent upon blackness for self-definition and propagation. And within that discovery are signifiers of whiteness that are fraught with shame and guilt from which defensive exhalations arise: “Not all whites are racist.” (Or, “At least now we know.”)

White America must then derive a cognitive process that creates sense of the nonsensical discovery (of state-sanctioned violence upon black men)—a cognitive dissonance. Which is to inquire, how does white America digest images of black men being tortured, lynched, shot? The image of the black man historically conducts the continuity of vice, of wickedness, of criminality, albeit if this connotation has been put into an unconscious accounting. Regardless of the

fantasy of the “criminalblackman”<sup>10</sup> being overt or covert, the function of this fictive character has been demonstrated to be the very motivation of brutality against black men—an offensive defense.

Kovel, drawing the historical unconsciousness and unconscious fantasy together, avers, “The specific uses to which unconscious fantasies have been put are then the province of particular historical studies—such as the history of racism” which trace a “pervasive and powerful social field which molds our personality into the channels provided by culture—including those which underlie racism” (249-50). The fantasies of racism, in Kovel’s psychological mapping, have a start at interpellation—white America is hailed as racist through the continuation of our racist history; which is to say, “racism and the ideals spring from a deep, common, unconscious unity” (177).

Perhaps one of the most often cited and illustrious passages capturing this “unconscious fantasy” and constituting a “deep, common unconscious unity” is from Fanon’s “The Fact of Blackness” in *Black Skin; White Masks*. The essay is constructed around a vignette in which Fanon encounters a white woman and her child on the street. Foregrounded in the text is *affective* response—physiological response in which the body *reacts* to outside nonphysical stimulus.

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<sup>10</sup> “Criminalblackman”: Kathryn Russell’s coin (qtd. in Alexander 107).

Perhaps this passage can be cited as additionally illustrating where Massumi's and Damasio's locating in affect in the material body, in pre-cognitive functioning, is most apparently flawed. The child's fearful response cannot be located in some primordial knowing that the black body signifies an instinctual threat, without, in fact, insisting that blackness constitutes inherent evil. Instead, what is revealed through Fanon's accounting is that the boy's response is a cognitive display, an absorption of his mother's affect, an interpellation into the fantasy of white supremacy that requires a hailing of the black male body as criminal—to be feared. Fanon exposit,

'Look at the nigger! . . . Mama, a Negro! . . . Hell, he's getting mad...

The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the

Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering, the

nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling

because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is

shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the

handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger

is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his

mother's arms: *Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up* [emphasis

added]. (86)

The little white boy's trembling affect is a direct effect of a white American heritage, an unconscious unity that fears blackness threatens to consume whiteness—to “eat [it] up.” In fact, the cognitive dissonance *must* be made *affectively* through Descartes' corporeal bodily schema, cleaved from intelligent cognition because, indeed, as history demands, it is the black body that has been consumed by the white—the “price of the black ticket is involved—fatally—with the dream of becoming white” (Baldwin, “The Price” 835).

Fanon's *self* (through this same vignette) becomes demarcated by his flesh, his blackness. He discloses,

a slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world...Below the corporeal schema I had sketched [there is] a historico-racial schema. The elements I used had been provided for me...by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a historico-racial schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me not by “residual sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual character,” but by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories. (84)

Giving script to Kovel's (affective) "dialectical union" of the "passions and fantasies of race," Fanon speaks to a compulsory (re)cognition—the unifying discourses of rac(sim)—the construction of a "historico-racial schema." Fanon's own self is thirdly composited through the little white boy's affective register and back onto his epidermal schema—a "solely negating activity...a third-person consciousness" (84).

These affective elicitations, thus, do not originate in our physiology (black or white) but rather through a "schema" fabricated in order to elicit emotional responses so immediate (and hence, unconscious) that the mind takes heed. The information input through "a thousand details, anecdotes, stories" becomes so engrained that the body registers a response *before* cognitive processing kicks in to determine the validity of the threat. The presence of the black body under the white gaze elicits a "fight or flight" reaction that determines action *before* cognition. Conclusively, this is an acquired affect of the unconscious unity of white supremacy, a bodily reaction so engrained that it evades the brain. Bypassing a cognitive processing that would evaluate a threat through logic and empiricism leaves judgment in the realm of the body—of affective (false) reasoning. What the body knows is what has been impressed upon the bodily

schema, whether Fanon's epidermal or the physiology of the little white boy's tremors. The deciphering of the black body, in Fanon's vignette, is *illogical*.

Racism (through a "historico-racial schema" that constructs the black body) bypasses a method of intelligent deciphering, instead, relying on a "pseudoseparation." The "pseudoseparation" of our "ideals" and "desires" (of white supremacist fantasy), expounds Kovel, requires, "repressing the connection between the various elements of the [racial] symbolic matrix...Otherwise we could not go on...[It] is what gives the quality of banality to great evils...it [is] perpetuated by advanced men who claimed virtue and could have known better—is in itself the most ludicrous and absurd of beliefs" (177). Herein is the very reasoning Fanon's passage from "The Fact of Blackness" is cited with such frequency and vigor: The black body, Fanon's ontology is reduced to the flesh. His reckoning, resounds, "All round me the white man, above the sky tears at its navel, the earth rasps under my feet, and there is a white song, a white song. All this whiteness that burns me. . . I sit down at the fire and I become aware of my uniform" (86). Fanon's uniform is the burned flesh of white supremacy, hailing him, through a "historico-racial schema"—"Look, a Negro!"—reduced to his flesh, his blackness—read through the white gaze as criminality on the ready to eat up the little white boy. Baldwin,

elucidating on this white song, writes, “the ancestors of the people who became white...require of my captivity a song...a song less to celebrate my captivity than to justify their own” (“The Price” 842). Fanon and Baldwin contend that the price of making whiteness is afforded by the dehumanization of blackness.

Under this “historico-racial schema” informing white America’s very (sub)consciousness *before* cognition, eliciting an affect that fears the black body, how can we trust the very inverse response that proclaims outrage at the demise of a black man? This is to ask, if the black body is burned into the collective American subconscious as threatening to “eat up” whiteness, how can the white gaze proclaim empathy for black humanity? If blackness is synonymous to criminality, how can a criminal extinguished bring regret? How do we prize Stowe’s narrative of fond romance for the diatribes of slavery while simultaneously calling for their disassemblage? The smiling faces and souvenirs of lynching spectacles? The overtaxed patronage of the museum exhibitions decades later of these photographs of lynching?

And we must here include today’s spectacles of black death—the murder of black men at the state-sanctioned hands of police. How can we cleave this present spectacle from the perverse amusements of history? How can white America said to have sanctified themselves from the “deep, unconscious unity”

of the fantasies that found relief, pleasure even, of a black body brutalized? Where and when did the shift in white American consciousness occur that moved the unifying white affective response from pleasing to shocking? When did black men stop being criminals under the white gaze and become humanized?

Moving forward to answer these questions requires a historical accounting for the present ecology of black men's situatedness in American society, which is to ask: How are black men read sixty years after Fanon's words, after the lynching era, after Jim Crow, after slavery? "If we've come a long way," as Dessa asserts, "then I suspect it sideways." The making of whiteness through these spectacles demands not only a historical treatment (as we have most cursorily traversed), but also, more so, a vivisection of affective audiences *within* these spectacles.

Examining the white audience as an imperative, intrinsic component within spectacles of black death, as patrons, even solicitors, rather than innocent bystanders or voyeurs lends a more authentic assessment of the affecting white gaze. It is to take into account the unconscious "historico-racial schema." Colson Whitehead writes, only, "In death the negro became a human being. Only then was he the white man's equal" (139). Conclusively, this is to inquire of the white

unconsciousness: Does a black man become human (and subsequently worthy of empathy) only at his death?

\* \* \*

### **The Fusion of the “Criminalblackman”: Our Future is Behind Us**

*The idea of black criminality was crucial to the making of modern urban America.*  
--Khalil Gibran Muhammad

*Callin' me an African-American like everything is fair again.*  
--Ice Cube, “When Will They Shoot?”

*[T]he doctrine of white supremacy, which still controls most white people, is itself a stupendous delusion: but to be born black in American is an immediate, a mortal challenge...*

*...they especially do not know what to do with young black men...It is not at all accidental that the jails and the army and the needle claim so many, but there are still too many prancing about for the public comfort. Americans will, of course, deny, with horror, that they are dreaming of anything like “the final solution” — those Americans, that is who are likely to be asked: what goes on in the great, vast, private hinterland of the American heart can only be guessed at by observing the way the country goes these days.*

--James Baldwin, 1972

Emancipation required invoking the agency and will of the former slave, only insofar as the continued inhumane brutality at the legacy of slavery was re-grammared to criminality. Hartman expounds on this shift of white control of the black body from the shackles of slavery to the branding of criminal, “[T]he abased and encumbered individuality of the emancipated resulted largely from the equation of responsibility with blameworthiness, thereby making duty

synonymous with punishment...will and responsibility replaced the whip with the tethers of guiltily conscience" (6, 9). The manifestations of black subjection cannot be gauged along a hierarchical progression, but laterally, through exhibitions and maneuvers that recalibrate and rearticulate blackness on a continuum of the "uncivilized Other."

The foundation, construction and perpetuation of the nation have been inextricably interwoven with the subjugation of black bodies since the inception of America at Jamestown, Virginia. America's history has been mapped through and onto the physicalities of black people. Inherent inferiority—propagated through biological determinism, (pathologizing) social behaviorism and the empirical (mal)interpretation of statistics through social science—has been the recursive diagnosis and prognosis of blacks in America. Emancipation writ in the thirteenth amendment is a hoodwink toward inscribing free will and thus responsibility at a pre-determined criminality. "Freedom" comes at the exchange of being guilty at the first instance. The master now houses his slaves through hyper-incarceration—no longer private property, the black body is kept or terminated by the state.

Racializing systems of control have kept an American foot securely upon the necks of the black population at large; racism remains effectively and

debilitating marginalizing for a disproportionate percentage of black communities. Disadvantage is affected through restricted access to material and social collateral of dominant (white) culture. However, a distinction must be clarified within the conversation of disadvantage and mobility: While the (under)class system allows exceptional escape, a caste system is rather a “closed circuit of perpetual marginality” (Wacquant qtd. in Alexander 95). With the mass incarceration of black bodies, the castigation of felons has been legalized.

Michelle Alexander (a forerunner among the New Jim Crow authors) sequences a progression of systematic control schemas that pithily outlines her and her cohorts’ thesis: America (definitively, white supremacy) operates on a racialized caste system. Caste under U.S. construction, Alexander asserts, has evolved from a basis founded “entirely on exploitation (slavery), to one based largely on subordination (Jim Crow), to one defined by marginalization (mass incarceration)” (219). Cautioning against an interpretation of a progressive mobility toward liberation, Alexander contends, “extreme marginalization, as we have seen throughout world history, poses the risk of extermination” (219). Further illuminating Alexander’s postulation, the 2006 homicide rate for young black men was nineteen times higher than that of their white counterparts (Forman 7).

Black people are not only being imprisoned at an alarmingly higher rate, they are also dying disproportionately (by the hands of state sanctioned violence—the police force). John A. Powell elucidates further along this embodied fatalism to determine that, “It’s actually better to be exploited than marginalized, in some respects, because if you’re exploited presumably you’re still needed” (qtd. in Alexander 219). The (penal) warehousing of blacks, therefore, is a product of expendability post-exploitability. (To be sure, the neoliberalizing of prisons has manufactured an extractable profit from privatizing this formerly public institution and maladjusted its census toward further political and social disenfranchisement—scraping from the marrow of imprisoned black bodies). From “plantations to penitentiaries,” the justification of the cast(e)ing (out) of the black physicality has been pivoted from the perpetual, relentless tethering of blackness and criminality (Rev. Al Sharpton qtd. in Alexander 221).

The New Jim Crow writers theorize that caste has been regulated and legislated through a compounding of negative collateral bought with a felony conviction (too often through a plea bargain of uninformed consent and negated agency). With a felony record, discrimination is legalized (paralleling the original Jim Crow): voting rights are terminated or restricted; employment is not

protected under EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity); housing is neither legally protected against discrimination (public housing is outright denied); accessing social services (including food stamps and public health insurance) is restricted or denied; in addition to the voiding of federal education grants (Alexander 58).

That one in three black men will be imprisoned (some metropolises see the penal gaze over fifty percent of its black male youth), is, as Alexander expounds, “no freak accident” (238). The equation of “young+black+male” yields “probable cause” in American consciousness (Loic Waquant, “Hyperincarceration” 78). So “conflated...the ‘criminalblackman’” has become the hyper-targeted suspect of the collective American consciousness (Kathryn Russell qtd. in Alexander 107). Assuaging the guilt of racism, the implicitness of the New Jim Crow—while submerging black bodies with its undercurrent—allows the superficial posturing of colorblindness (to translate: covert racism). Colorblindness denies that race is the foregrounding factor still operating in the United States. The unnamings of racism without the cessation of its operation perpetuates a “terrible blindness” to a caste system drawn along racial lines resulting in an America that is “blind to injustice” (Alexander 242; 243). Continuing on the old rhetoric of moral determinism, the felony brand captures

the criminal as irreparably immoral. Americans can liberally hate the criminal, which is to say, protect (unconscious racism) and absolve (conscious racism) themselves for their fearful damnation of blacks. A black minister speaks to this condemnation:

It's a hustle...Felony is the new N-word. They don't have to call you a nigger anymore. They just say you're a felon. Once you have that felony stamp, your hope for employment, for any integration into society, it begins to fade out. Today's lynching is a felony charge. Today's lynching is incarceration...A felony is a modern way of saying, 'I'm going to hang you up and burn you.' Once you get that F, you're on fire. (qtd. in Alexander 164)

The stigma of the black criminal is so fused, that the black community is generalized with a proximity to crime that is perpetually threatening: “[B]lack criminal is redundant” (Alexander 198). The New Jim Crow “writes crime into race,” affectively making the criminalblackman the “most significant and durable signifier of black inferiority” (Muhammad 57).

That one in three black boys born in 2001 will be incarcerated has been empirically cited as being “indisputable proof of black inferiority,” rather than evidence of racialized interlocking systems of oppression (Muhammad 281; 8).

This (c) overt operation has been manipulated as a “tool to shield white Americans from the charge of racism when they used black crime statistics to support discriminatory public policies,” inscribing that inherent pathology manifests blacks to be “their own worst enemies” (Muhammad 8). Rather than being a sign of the times, the criminalblackman insignia remains a (recursive) legacy of the American black man from Jamestown captivity. Echoing W.E.B. Du Bois from 1931, “Nothing in the world is easier in the United States than to accuse a black man of crime” (qtd. in Muhammad 272). And nothing is easier than to kill a black man and without a charge of homicide. Henry Giroux addresses the state of the union by declaring young black men, “liv[ing] in the belly of a predatory system that has been depriving them of economic and cultural resources while criminalizing their behavior,” consequent “objects of a low-intensity war...[T]hey are humiliated, harassed and often brutalized and imprisoned” (2015). *This war is on blackness, waged since 1492 and unrelenting in the present*. A “failed act of mourning” recursively constitutes the hauntology of blackness (Powell 30). Whiteness, as constituted by blackness (which must be understood thusly as racism a priori) has yet to become “post-racial(ized),” because white America as yet to admit black people to legally human status in actualized, material terms.

*Thoughtful consideration of this aside, this crude “observ[ation] [at] the way the country goes these days,” in order to speculate “what goes on in the great, vast, private hinterland of the American heart,” demands a suture to “the way things are,” a counter to the epistemology of white ignorance that claims shock at police brutality. Again, I ask, what may be the underbelly of the affective response of the generality of white American unconsciousness as they see a black man (which is to read: criminal) extinguished at the hands of police? Is this affect distinct from, can it diverge from, the (sub)conscious historical collection of images: of the primitive, animalistic slave; the lynched black man accused of rape through a hypersexualization that constructs black men as always already a threat to white womanhood; the white woman in the elevator clutching her purse and holding her breath in the isolated presence of a black man; the black man on the sidewalk passing a white woman who passes to the other side of the road; the images that flood the media: mainstream hip-hop icons, reality television (specifically, the dress rehearsal for the current live-filmed murders of black men: “Cops”), the few select film roles for black men who must appear as thugs, drug lords, uncivilized gangsters to be seen on screen? “Look at the nigger! . . . Mama, a Negro! . . . Hell, he’s getting mad... Mama, the nigger’s going to eat me up” (Fanon 86).*

*Here a historical continuum of the spectacle of black death under the white gaze must be drawn to include the current hyper-circulation of videos depicting actual murder*

*of black men. This work implores us to examine the work that the spectacle does in order to comprehend how the spectacle works to make whiteness. Why are the visual images of black criminality and the subsequent images of that perceived criminality's extinguishment—the murder of black men—so essential in and to history of white America? How can we cognize the current affective responses of white empathic outrage at the spectacle of black death juxtaposed against this same American tradition? In order to begin to interrogate such a dangerous suggestion, we must examine the spectacle of black death as an American rhetoric.*

\* \* \*

### **The New Millennium, in (Sentimental) Mottos:**

#### **“If You’re Not Outraged, You’re Not Paying Attention.”<sup>11</sup>**

In “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” James Baldwin admonishes Miss Ophelia’s contestation of slavery as sentimentality, “her exclamation is the moral, neatly framed, and incontestable like those improving mottoes sometimes found hanging on the walls of furnished rooms” of “an almost indecent glibness” (11). Miss Ophelia, in present-day manifestation, is the every(wo)man’s protest bumper sticker. The articulation of indignation—the shame on *them*—not only

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<sup>11</sup> Bumper sticker motto.

indicts another other than oneself, but also fails to align oneself with the causality of whiteness implicated in slavery. This historical reverberation is demonstrated by the gasp of feigned shock under the white gaze of the brutality against black people. This astonishment is sterile, as the “acknowledge Other must assume recognizable forms” —black body criminalized through brutality. The rhetorical maneuver is a claim an ecology of post-race in stark contradiction to the spectacle. The very acknowledgement of brutality is taken up as a claim to liberal progression, a “post-race” admission to unify the state through “improving mottos.” bell hooks, on these (racist) nuances of liberal progression and multiculturalist rhetoric, explains, “[S]educated by the emphasis on Otherness, by its commodification...offers the promise of recognition and reconciliation...the Other is...offered as a sign that...the American Dream can indeed be inclusive of difference [while it] invites a resurgence of essentialist cultural nationalism” (26). The claim to naivety coupled with the declaration of astonishment rescinds accountability and responsibility of the spectator. It’s the mantra of repeal—*Not all white people are racist*—in attempt to deflect that these spectacles of violence upon blackness catapult the very landscape of white privilege. The privileging of white bodies encapsulates freedom to be unencumbered by the scene through simply asserting the spectacle as shameful.

The black body is utilized as a “sentimental resource...[an] empty vessel [for] the projection of others’ feelings” (Hartman 21).

The real-time murders are perpetually broadcast and frantically recirculate through social media. Oscar Grant’s murder numbers over a million recurrences on YouTube alone. The commentary pendulum swings from victim-blaming (the black body’s matter is constituted as always already a kinetic threat requiring pre-emptive containment) to an astonishing reveal (police brutality becomes *realized* through the white gaze). But uniformly, the present project of the matter of black lives is tempered by an ahistorical screen. Cleaved from the historical constituting of blackness as the defining opposition of whiteness, blackness defined by negation through captivity and violence, is this phantasmal witnessing of black death without prologue. Static and insular in the frames of these tapings are captioned as singular incidences with solitary perpetrators—a bad cop using (obligatory) excessive force—ending with a black body pre-marked as criminal, an ended life read as an extinguished threat. Cleaved from (white) consciousness is the recursive repetition of the spectacle of killing black bodies. Visibility of audience (participation) in the spectacle has been assuaged by the technologies of virtual life: Seeing without being seen (seeing)—voyeurism without an offender.

\* \* \*

## **Spectacle is Rhetorical: It is what it Does**

*In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life...the omnipresent affirmation of the choice already made in production and its corollary consumption. The spectacle's form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system's conditions and goals.*

--Guy Debord, 1967

The spectacle, Debord proclaims, “is not a collection of images, but a social relations among people, mediated by images” (thesis four). We must then ask: What is the relation revealed in the spectacle of black death? Who does the spectacle implicate as participants? And what does its project *do*? How does it do what it does? What is the affect elicited through the white gaze on the brutality on blackness? Is the outrage remarked solely motivated by an empathy of grief? Following Aristotle’s conception of catharsis as an affective purgation of pity and fear (resulting from the spectacle) concludes predisposition to these spectacular sensations. Which is to say, affect is not insular — affect works through the work that has always already been done prefacing the spectacle, “the omnipresent affirmation of the choice already made.” The terministic screen we view the spectacle through is the determiner of *how* we read the sociality at the

scene of violence. Said another way, the history of “social relations among people” informs *why* and *how* the spectacle is affective. This is all to assert that white affective responses of “shock” and “outrage” must be interrogated if Debord is correct, and “the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life.” *How can white American not know?*

Foucault’s postulation, “working at the level of the categories and exclusions from which a universalizing discourse is built, can be uncovered not by a generous reading of the text, but only by an investigation of its conditions of possibility,” foregrounds the audience in making the spectacle *work* (“Orders of Discourse”). Recalling the definition of spectacle—formalized as object or event + audience = affective economy—requires a priori subjects, always already hailed at the first instance. “Hey, you,” to a black body from a police officer is a pre-marked, embodied text. The interpellation of the “criminalblackman” additionally requires the perception of a victim to the perpetrator. Read through the white gaze, the very victim under siege is whiteness itself:

[T]he black body is circumscribed as dangerous, prior to any gesture, any raising of the hand, and the infantilized white reader is positioned in the scene as one who is helpless in relation to that black body, as one definitively in need of protection by...the

police...The police are thus structurally placed to protect whiteness against violence, where violence is the imminent action of the black male body. And because within this imaginary schema, the police protect whiteness, their own violence cannot be read as violence; because the black male body, prior to any video, is the site and source of danger, a threat, the police effort to subdue this body, even if in advance, is justified regardless of the circumstances.

(Butler, "Endangered" 10)

The contained or extinguished black body consequently is read as an imminent threat silenced by state-sanctioned violence, legitimated through and excessing of force under the guise of protecting against the domestic terrorism of blackness. Spectacle is a production that continues the interpellation of race, diverging through the skin, the categories of racial manufacture. Spectacle, as Debord defines at the epigraph, is "information or propaganda... advertisement [and] direct entertainment consumption." Spectacles, as George Yancy insists, are "sites [of] pedagogy" ("Theorizing Racial Embodiment"). Spectacles today visualize black "criminals" being taken out by police—this fact requires no interpretation.

*What if spectacles of black death, rather than solely inciting empathetic outrage, additionally interpellate spectators to the “total justification of the existing system’s conditions and goals?” (Debord).*

### **Michael Brown**

In 2014, Michael Brown’s life terminated swiftly as he was shot six times by the hands of Darren Wilson, a white police officer. The body of Michael Brown, laid prone, bleeding out on a Ferguson street for four daylight hours, was further violated by spectacle of his corpse. The murder and subsequent hours Brown’s body remained in the street are video documented and currently number over two million views (YouTube). Wilson was never indicted for Brown’s murder despite this evidence and eyewitnesses. Likewise, Wilson “received several thousand letters from supporters, and he has written thank-you notes to almost all of his correspondents. Many of the letters are from police officers. Some are from kids. One card reads, ‘Thanks for protecting us!’” (Halpern). Through white witness, Brown’s death is viewed through the eyes of Wilson—an enemy combatant eradicated. White empathy toward black death halts at this impasse. This sadist spectacle requires the racist masochist witnessed through a “racist illusion”—“an eye that only sees what it sees on the condition of not seeing itself seeing the other as subject...a one-way gaze of

power” (Marriott 19). A thank-you to the perpetrator of an assassination can only be comprehended as an act of self-defense in alignment with the perpetrator, a preservation of the sanctity of whiteness. *The white gaze “sees” the spectacle through the eyes of whiteness, through the eyes of the police officer.* Brown’s slaying signifies the historical continuity of the legal inability to “murder” black people, those who “may be killed without the commission of a homicide,” those always already inscribed as “bare life” (Agamben qtd. in Puar 207).

The social relations Debord defines as constituting spectacle are manifest here as a necropolitical act: A public killing, a body publically displayed. The relationship is defined by white supremacy, the praxis of which is *who* may exist and *how*. The matter of black lives is contained and constrained by whiteness. Brown’s murder under the white gaze is a snuff film, a perversion posited on whose lives matter. His corpse, paraded through the repetitive viewings, bears an uncanny phantom of the strange fruit hanging from southern trees. His body displayed, rotting in the sunlight, a horizontal lynching. Brown’s body reveals the continuity of visceral racism, the tethering of the brutality inflicted upon black bodies and their display—a strange fruit fallen from the tree of lynching: an ontology so cleaved from becoming, that it is subsequently exhibited to a putrid decomposition.

\* \* \*

## The Affective Economies of the Spectacle

*The spectacle is ideology par excellence, because it exposes and manifests in its fullness the essence of all ideological systems: the impoverishment, servitude and negation of real life. The spectacle is materially "the expression of the separation and estrangement between man and man."*

--Guy Debord, 1967

The white audiences' shock at these "scenes of subjection" requires cross-examination. Here a distinction needs to be made between witness and voyeur, and the detriment of both of these somatic optics. Witness, by definition is a confirmation of a happening, a validation of what effectively is invoked as true. Calling upon Spivak's often cited phrase, "'the 'subaltern' cannot appear without the thought of the 'elite,'" illustrates the white gaze required to bring the brutalization of black bodies into articulation (203). White supremacy's scopophilia—the literal desire to look upon the spectacle of black death—discursively elides the extinguishment of black ontology through white hands. Said another way, through death of the black body, whiteness is signified and reified as human, as life, while black death "taken in this way are not lives worth grieving...whose lives are thought not to be worth preserving" (Butler and Yancy). *Blackness appears through the performance of its disappearing.*

Through these discursive relations witness becomes ensnarled with voyeurism. The repetition of the view enacts the performative of whiteness. “Doing whiteness” becomes a truth effect through white witness of black death, a discursive interaction of viewer and viewed, where the audience in the age of social media becomes invisible. Thus, “whiteness [is] ‘a stylized repetition of acts’ that solidifies and privileges white bodies, or even leads to naïve, ‘post-racial’ universal formulations like ‘all lives matter’” (Butler and Yancy 2015). The invisibility cloak of seeing without being seen (seeing) moves witness into the perversion of voyeur, a scopophilia that derides the participation and accountability of the witness. This formula provides a bridge to the paradoxical position of feigning (even feeling) outrage while simultaneously being titillated at the spectacle of death wherein blackness is snuffed at the legitimized hand of the state, the hand of white power. *Whiteness, therefore, is reified rather than made vulnerable.* The titillation cannot come from teasing death, but from knowing the impossibility of bodily exchange that makes genuine empathy lackluster. The loss of vitality of black lives is ungrieveable parallel to what is perceived and propagated as *white humanity*:

[T]hese frames capture the current and historical epistemic and habituated embodied orders that configure and sustain the white

gaze and function to objectify the Black body as an entity that is to be feared, disciplined, and regulated to those marginalized, imprisoned, and segregated spaces that restrict Black bodies from 'disturbing the tranquility of white life, white comfort, white embodiment, and white being. The objectification of the Black body raises the issue of Black invisibility and hypervisibility as modes of further erasure.

(Yancy, *Black Bodies* xvi)

Rather than makes visible police brutality against black people, these spectacles on virtual, viral repeat manage death into vapid routine—buttressing blackness with the not quite human and always already requiring containment or extinguishment. Through the daily repetition and recirculation, through “watch again” and “share” prompts of these spectacles of black death, “it becomes increasingly easy for white people to accept the destruction of black lives as status quo, since those lives do not fit the norm of ‘human life’ they defend” (Butler and Yancy, “What’s Wrong”). Doing whiteness becomes a performative wherein violence against blackness is a required repetition of status quo. Historically, blackness is an a priori threat to white ontology and whiteness is dependent on the performative of blackness subsumed. Consequentially and

performatively, race is an action, mandating reiteration to fortify its posturing as a signifier of a noun—to be rather than *do*. This epidermal signifier translates as the “the code through which one not simply *knows* what human being is, but *experiences* being” (Scott and Wynter 183).

The spectacle is, in fact, the “*production* of the Black body [which is] an effect of the discursive and epistemic structuring of white gazing and other white modes of anti-black performance” [emphasis added] (Yancy, *Black Bodies* xix).

Technology disrupts this normative repetition and propagates an alternate field of vision, but the performance is indeed a continuance of the historical

“constitutive and constructive semiotic, material, and sociopolitical processes that hail and fix the white body as normative” (Yancy, *Black Bodies* xvi).

Blackness at the front is thus recursively defined as outside of normal—deviant, requiring the (white) empire to defend itself with the state sanctioned arm of law (r)enforcement. The affective economy of the spectacle of black death then is re/productive of white supremacy rather than a reveal to the enacted violence upon blackness. Calling back Foucault, the stage is pre-set and subject a priori—what makes the text *possible*. The conditions which the text comes into fruition must be interrogation and neither cleaved from the text itself: the black body felled: “The body is a [historical] text” (Stuart Hall).

The arena of the virtual spectacle “is the collapsing of production and consumption, image and viewer onto the same vectors, the same planes. There is no inside or outside here; there are only movement, circulation, contingent temporalities, momentary association and disassociations” (Puar 107).

Recursively foregrounding homicide of Michael Brown, this dissolving between the Lacanian Real and real time must be interrogated. The visual, visceral without language, without captions, reveals Wilson marching toward Brown, shooting repeatedly, six times into Brown’s body, manifesting the imaginary real that plays to the desire of the pornotrope. Wilson does not cease at Brown’s pleadings, “Don’t shoot.”

The killing of Brown, the aforementioned video, was spotlighted on CNN. This report and interview of the eyewitnesses, spanning over five minutes in duration, played the final seconds of Brown’s life, his extermination and fall, on loop during the CNN coverage. A split screen landscaped the coverage as the shooting repeated fourteen times during the six-minute CNN broadcast. A front of a censor, a small white circle vaguely and only partially covers Brown’s body being impacted repeatedly by Wilson’s gun. Piaget Crenshaw and Tiffany Mitchell share the counter split screen, witnesses to the homicide, testify that Brown was “overkilled” as he was holding his hands up during his murder by

Wilson. Mitchell, on repeat, stated, “I don’t get it...He [Brown] was trying to get away from him.” The production of Brown’s body degraded into mere flesh is consumed at each recursive repeat—the re-materialization unceasing in the repetition of black death. The news anchor closes this evidenced atrocity with, “We hope there is peace and there is clam in your town” (CNN 2015). Is this a repeal to protest in Ferguson? An appeal to keep black bodies *in place*?

The virtual, viral snuff films are in wide-circulation. Brown’s homicide is not an anomaly. Neither is it read as homicide under the white (racist) political gaze. The very visibility of the body is read through the episteme of the epidermal. Seeing blackness reads blackness through the terministic screen of whiteness. The black body is already subsumed by the landscape of white supremacy. Judith Butler, writing on the white gaze affecting the “reading” of empirical evidence—the live taping of the Rodney King trial states, “The visual filed is not neutral to the question of race; it is itself a racial formation, an episteme, hegemonic and forceful” (“Endangered” 17). The citations of police brutality culminating in the murder of a black person is (un)newsworthy. Justice is not the current conversation of these videos. The circulations are not the reveal of missing *evidence* of brutality. The question to be posed is instead, “[W]hen and where did black lives ever really get free of coercive force? [Why is

that] to be black is already to be reaching for a gun?" (Butler, "Endangered" 2,4). Six years after Oscar Grant's filmed shooting, justice has not only been absent, but the homicide of black people by the hands of police have been serialized through real-time accounts—unrelenting and unrepentant. Butler troubles the recorded video footage of the brutality of black men standing as empirical evidence, stating, "For when the visual is fully schematized by racism, the 'visual evidence' to which one refers will always and only return the conclusions based upon it; for it is possible within this racist episteme that no black person can seek recourse to the visible as the sure ground of evidence" (Butler, "Endangered" 17). The distinction between lynching postcards post-reconstruction and the snuff films of state sanctioned homicide of black men today is that the (white) audience cannot (see themselves) smiling. Post-race America is a hoodwink of rhetoric, a sly denial of the fact that black lives have yet to matter.

A white hand holding a sign reading "black lives matter" can be probed under numerous inquisitions: progress (requiring cognitive dissonance); white alibi (#notallwhites); anti-racist cognition disagreeing with the physiological affect of relief at a black man (read: criminal) confined or extinguished; or, a woke white person, which according to Yancy, at best, is an "anti-racist racist" ("Theorizing"). Yancy implores us to answer, "Is there an innocent white core?"

("Theorizing"). Does this impasse illustrate rather how the radical white social worker can tense up walking toward a black man as she crosses the street all the while touting anti-racist politics? This question is the motivation of this thesis.

The spectacular amphitheater of mass media echoes a spatiotemporal conformation of history, if only it would resound to ears listening. Under the script of post-racial, lynching is buried under a cemetery of a neglected history, a history not to be recollected as informing the present: the maneuver of manifesting the historical into the ahistorical. Paradoxically, it is the very apparatus of extinguishing black bodies that demonstrates the continuities of slavery: the neocropolitics of blackness—the black body instantiated as the enemy of the state, the object of offensive defense. Spillers, deconstructing post-race rhetoric, interrogates the ideology of (post) slavery, concluding,

If black people have been 'liberated,' and not one need to pretend that even the quotation marks do not *matter*, dominant symbolic activity...remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and its topics...as the human subject is 'murdered' over and over ...by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism...in endless disguise. (208)

Far from terminated, the genealogy of slavery has transmogrified into a regime that has severed itself from the rhetoric of inhumanity. Captured and contained by the rhetoric of criminality, black bodies are read as domestic terrorists, according to the “racist episteme, [the black man] is hit in exchange for the blows he never delivered, but which he is, by virtue of this blackness, always about to deliver” (Butler, “Endangering” 18). Blackness, is always already read through the white gaze as a threat to white ontology.

\* \* \*

## **To Conclude: Spectacles, Spectators, Specters and Revolving Doors**

### **Haunted: Dis/remembering**

*Yet, what the memory repudiates controls the human being. What one does not remember dictates who one loves or fails to love. What one does not remember dictates, actually, whether one plays poker, pool, or chess. What one does not remember contains the key to one’s tantrums or one’s poise. What one does not remember is the serpent in the garden of one’s dreams. What one does not remember is the key to one’s performance in the toilet or in bed. What one does not remember contains the only hope, danger, trap, inexorability, of love—only love can help you recognize what you do not remember.*

--James Baldwin

*But if you dismiss black complaints of mistreatment by police as being completely rooted in our modern context, then you’re missing the point completely. There has never been a period in our history where the law and order branch of the state has not operated against the freedoms, the liberties, the options, the choices that have been available for the black community, generally speaking. And to ignore that racial heritage, to ignore that historical context, means that you can’t have an informed debate about the current state of blacks and police relationships today, ‘cause this didn’t just appear out of nothing.*

*This is the product of a centuries-long historical process. And to not reckon with that is to shut off solutions.*

--Kevin Gannon, Professor of History, 13th

Back to the future. Every twenty-one hours a black body is murdered by the hands of police in America: "The only sure bet is that more black lives will be unjustly and cowardly taken from us. But hasn't it always been this way?...It has always been so, and might always be. There is little left to write. But the names are important to remember" (Parham). Kashif Jerome Powell invokes Derrida's concept of hauntology to the "h(a)unting of blackness," which he further names, "an American tradition," defining this "h(a)unting" as "a space in which human subjectivity is formed through a culture of terror and torture—a violence that lingers and will not go away"(6). I'm interested in how this hauntology materializes, bringing phantoms of the past into ontologies of the present. Affectively terrorizing black audiences to un/certain futurity, the affective economy proclaimed by white spectators belies progressivism's (publicized post-race) empathy; instead black bodies are fetishized through a voyeuristic narcissism of whiteness. The spectacle of black death by white hands continues the pornotroping of transcribing black bodies into (violated) flesh. "Present but without presence," the spectacle evidences what was "not even

there as having been, a phantasmatic history of a never happened that keeps on happening (blackness as the icon of this terrifying uncanniness)—a fear that is also commodified and ideological” (Marriott 6). Titillating the catharsis of fear, the dead black body is sensational only in that,

[T]his narrative is far from extraordinary. Indeed, what it shows us is the production of the ordinary... The passion of these negative attachments to others is redefined simultaneously as a positive attachment to the imagined subjects brought together through the repetition of the signifier, "white." Together we hate, and this hate is what makes us together." It is the love of white, or those recognizable as white, that supposedly explains this shared "communal" visceral response of hate. (Ahmed, "Affective" 117)

The specter of slavery, the haunting of the slave, not only produces blackness, but also whiteness through the spectacle of black death that “keeps on happening.”

That I speak of the gaze as white is not only signifying a field of vision that is fused with a racist optic, but also that the gaze itself is a discourse of power. The relation of the spectator to the subject occurs at the moment of seeing, subjugation by objectification. The moment of scopic consumption

becomes the moment of “eating the other,” “a consumer cannibalism” (hooks 31). Eating the other is to subsume the other, to dominate through possessing. The apex of being consumed is “being for another,” the ultimate raping of agency, an exploitation of an ontology stripped of autonomy. The repetitive movements of consuming black death through recirculating videos is a neurotic glutton of white supremacy. The crux of whiteness itself is a product of black subjection and black death.

The specter of slavery haunts the spectator. Tethered to white consciousness is the privilege of looking, the freedom of the gaze. As bell hooks insists, “There is power in looking” (115). To see is to read. To read is to name. To name is to possess. The stare is said to burn the flesh—the eye becomes fixed in the other, an apparatus of an ominous optic. Blackness has been denied this optic return. The gaze is oppositional. Eyes consume. To look is to consume. The black gaze onto the white body, therefore has been historically forbidden, an assault upon whiteness. To look upon, to look back has been forbidden, a “contestation and confrontation” (hook 117). Seeing is not reciprocal, “[W]hite people can safely imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over black people, accorded them the right to control the black gaze” (hooks 168). The

phantom of lynching remembers the death sentence invoked at a black man daring to gaze upon a white female body. This memory is inscribed in our consciousness. Writing from the lived experience as a black woman, hooks confides, “We are afraid to talk about ourselves as spectators because we have been so abused by ‘the gaze,’” and rather, “safety resided in the pretense of invisibility” (124, 168). The phantasmal spectacular scene of black death through the virtual visceral is recursive to the prowess of white looking and the invisibility of blackness staring back.

This isn’t an optimistic encounter, between a writer and her reader, a collection of words that propose solution—a *know better, now do better* pronouncement. This is a tired voice, a tired conscious, and a tired interrogation of how to be (perhaps...better). These are eyes that end with a release of an (unwatched) video release, this time from a police dashboard camera—A young black man, Laquan McDonald, gunned down by a Chicago police officer 16 times in 15 seconds while walking in the middle of the street. I end with Jason Parham, in camaraderie. I end in a voice other than my own:

*I have yet to watch the video of Scott’s shooting because I know the horror contained within, and my doing so will not change its outcome, or alter the reality black Americans find themselves mired in. Follow the roots,*

*this trend, the mass murdering of black men and women, the sullyng of lives even in death, and they will lead you to the legacies of colonialism, economic disparity, poverty, sexism, and patriarchy—they will lead you to the very beginning of America and its flawed, grandiose dream. These are the tools of oppression. These are the ways in which black lives, brown lives, transgender lives, gay lives, and elderly lives are suffocated day after day. Again and again.*

\* \* \*

## ❧ EPILOGUE ❧

### YARD SIGNS AND BODY COUNTS: “THE WHITE SAVIOR INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX”

- 1- *From Sachs to Kristof to Invisible Children to TED, the fastest growth industry in the US is the White Savior Industrial Complex.*
- 2- *The white savior supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening.*
- 3- *The banality of evil transmutes into the banality of sentimentality. The world is nothing but a problem to be solved by enthusiasm.*
- 4- *This world exists simply to satisfy the needs—including, importantly, the sentimental needs—of white people and Oprah.*
- 5- *The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege.*
- 6- *Feverish worry over that awful African warlord. But close to 1.5 million Iraqis died from an American war of choice. Worry about that.*
- 7- *I deeply respect American sentimentality, the way one respects a wounded hippo. You must keep an eye on it, for you know it is deadly.*  
—Teju Cole, *Twitter*, 8 March 2012

The siren of a wounded hippo is not dissimilar to the resounding outcries of the American sentimentalist. The caution to be taken is in mistaking the cry for vulnerability or liability; or, we might, alternatively, caution against a “metaphysical illusion;” which, defined by Jean-Francois Lyotard, can be understood as “treating a presentation like the situation” (*Le Differend* 61).

The affect of sentiment, as Cole warns, is a dangerous front. What lies behind that front of the enthusiastic white savior complex has been the

attempted discovery of this thesis. It remains incomplete. What I know for certain is that something is *off*—to reflect the Preface. And, in that case, perhaps we've not come so far after all. Michel Rolph-Trouillot reminded us that “we are never as steep in history as we pretend not to be.” And this is precisely why I understand intimately, this awful something to be a thing in which I am, almost inescapably, ensnared. In other words, my attempts to rigorously engage, through a hypercritical lens, what I deem white “feel right” while simultaneously locked in a discursive struggle with matters of race, matters of black bodies, and matters of black sentience, it is nearly impossible for me to fully escape the very thing in myself of which I, in turn, indict *other* whites. More, my own paradoxical pitfall here is that in eviscerating the social psychology of the “good” white, I implicate myself by proxy as the “better” white.

The hyperbolic measure, it seems, is the short distance between, on the one hand, “Black Lives Matter” yard signs being donned in racially exclusive neighborhoods and, on the other hand, the Black (dead) Bodies necessary to reify the existence of the very “Black Lives Matter” yard signs in the first place. This reification, in fact, calls serious attention to what I have thought of as a kind of “white solicitation.” This “white solicitation” functions by way of the necessary

spectacle often responsible for the production of dead Black Bodies. This is not to negate the very real terror, horror, and incontrovertible fact of racist violence; a violence, on the other hand, that is irreplaceable nor able to be relegated to the realm of metaphors by the mechanism of terminological markers and concepts like “spectacle,” “solicitation,” “hippos” and the likes. In fact, what my hypothesis, which is in fact a seriously dangerous one, propounds is that Baldwin’s indictment of sentimentality as a catalogue of violence calls attention to “white solicitation” in a kind of way: this means that the average white sympathizer of BLM yet has still to confront the motivation and manifestation of the videos cataloguing the murder of black men as spectacle. As Baldwin poses it thusly to Mrs. Stowe: “[W]hat constriction or failure of perception forced her to so depend on the description of brutality—unmotivated, senseless—and to leave unanswered and unnoticed the only important question: what is was, after all, that moved her people to such deeds?” (“Everybody’s Protest” 12).

This is all to end with the question: How can I entwine whites who do social justice work with whites who subscribe to the doctrine of “just us?”<sup>12</sup> And yet, this is the very quest that is unfinished in these pages.

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<sup>12</sup> When white people say “Justice,” they mean “Just us.” -- Black American folk aphorism (cited in Mills 0).

When I set out to write this thesis, I was at a different place both within myself and about aspects of the subject matter I have sought to engage. Aspects because, as stated at the onset of this thesis, I have thought long and hard about the several ways in which paradoxes (whether *privileged* or *perverse*) articulate themselves within the force of racist discourses and their concomitant application in and through the sentimental, the emotional.

Aspects, still, because what I thought a few years back the work that white Americans must do in order to effect some real change in this world has, necessarily, arrived at a different place, even if with the same vitriol. When I look the people around me now, never losing that self-critical edge, I cannot avoid the glaringly pervasive presence of sentimentality in all the everyday discourses that enshrine something of our existences. This is to still say that I have found myself effecting distance between myself and those individuals who, at one time, may have occupied an endearing locus within my personal (and sometimes professional) cohort.

What do I mean here?

Stowe's problematic brand of emotionality (the paradigm) and sentimentality (the discourse) occasions a dramatization of Teju Cole's epigrammatic postulates; more, and at the same time, Cole's postulates stages a

reenactment of Harriet Beecher Stowe in ways that call into question the notion of a post-racial America. Here's how: to note the absurdity of this notion, America as a post-racial social formation, is to border on pedantry. On one hand, the very presence of "Black Lives Matter" yard signs in neighborhoods where no black lives have been welcomed to live is an absurdity. On the other hand (of the same body), is a too-often white narration of the daily black body count, most-often muted by the outcry of sentimental outrage, "This is perfectly horrible...You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" As a haunting echo by Miss Ophelia can be read otherwise—putting into question the "you" that is to be ashamed. After all, if I may be so bold, concurring with Cole and extending his assertion to claim that the Black Lives Matter campaign has been uptaken by white progressive liberals to "satisfy" their "sentimental needs."

Here's what that looks like (and why it matters that "good" whites are puppeting and parading the matter of black lives):

As I mentioned in the preface, the impetus of this project began with a troubling of the propaganda in support of gay marriage, of equal signs and status quo envelopment. The epiphany, in which I could begin to articulate what had previously been a "feeling of off-ness," came in a one line tweet circa 2013: "Breaking: Supreme Court rules that gays can marry as long as blacks can't vote.

#DOMA#VRA" (The Daily Edge). Without giving a lengthy exposition, The Defense of Marriage Act (maintaining legal marriage as a union between a man and a woman) repeals coincided with attempts to strengthen voter ID requirements, appealed by the Voting Rights Act (a maneuver that has been critiqued to restrict the black vote through covert means). This granting of civil rights to *some* marginalized groups occurring simultaneously with the restricting of rights of other groups was not isolated to this occasion.

Jasbir Puar's thesis of homonationalism puts forth the theory that this very maneuver of enveloping the right kind of gays into the national fold manifests as a tactic to further displace other marginalized "not quite, not white" queers. The distinction here that must be made is at the divergence between "gay" and "queer." One of the earliest engagements of this distinction is in Cathy Cohen's article, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," wherein Cohen defines queer to encompass those that "gay" yet stays to marginalizes, "those who stand on the outside of the dominant constructed norm of state-sanctioned white middle-and upper-class heterosexuality" —inclusive of "heterosexuals on the (out)side of heteronormativity" (441, 452). What Cohen and Puar both bring to our attention is the "unchallenged assumption of a uniform heteronormativity from which all heterosexuals benefit" (Cohen 452).

This aforementioned tweet, along with my immersion into anti-marriage queer politics, had (and has) had serious implications within my own LGBT(Q) community. My friends, they were getting (gay) married. Dear friends tattooed equal signs into their skins, straight allies put up signs outside their offices and onto their cars, Ellen DeGeneres came out and had a white wedding. And my dearest friend and I had hard conversations. Health insurance, parental rights, tax benefits, and, to be sure, a verified citizenry, were appeals that garnered attention. So much attention, to be transparent, that in spite of my own ardent flagging of marriage as an apparatus of the state, I succumbed myself. My community, as it became apparent, strived under the same American ideology as it's straight counterparts. And therein lies the distinction, again: those who can benefit from gay marriage are those who parallel those who benefit from straight marriage. In other words, marriage benefits white folks in a certain class position—those whose deviancy is exclusive to their sexuality.

All of this is to say the gay rights movement is a matter of white live(lihood). To reiterate, from Cole, "This world exists simply to satisfy the needs—including, importantly, the sentimental needs—of white people."

What does this have to do with black lives? What I'm getting at here is that historically, black lives are sacrificed or ignored through the very discourses

that purport, to be clear here—“save” them. Which is to say, the white savior industrial complex has little to do with black lives other than how those bodies (dead or alive) can be utilized for the “good feels” of white people. Herein lies the work of closing the gap between the yard signs and the body count on white properties and through white tally. The real work of white folks isn’t found in propping signs of protest, but rather, in (and perhaps Stowe is not fantastically incorrect in her notion of moral salvation) saving ourselves from saving others—in which the need and inclination to “save” black people becomes a moot proposition.

Baldwin, reflecting on his strained friendship with Norman Mailer in “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy,” ascertains,

It did not seem worthwhile to challenge...Norman’s view of life on the periphery...I had tried...to convey something of what it felt like to be a Negro and no one had been able to listen: they wanted their romance...The really ghastly thing about trying to convey to a white man the reality of the Negro experience has nothing whatever to do with the fact of color, but everything to do with this man’s relationship to his own life. He will face in your life only what he is willing to face in his. (272)

Here we must prick up our ears to Baldwin's voice (rather than subsuming it): "listen," he tells us, "listen to the reality of the Negro experience." And we haven't yet been able to hear, for we are too busy talking for and over black voices. Through the white savior complex, white folks do the missionary work onto others which at the very instantiation, denies and disallows the white "man's relationship to his own life" and the "[un]willingness to face" himself. White missionary work (and here I include the kinds of white progressive liberal social justice work that qualifies as colonizing — speaking for others, for instance) claims the ignorance or impossibility of cultural rape — a forcible usurping and penetration of a people's culture for white culture, and instead turns this violence into salvation (both on the part of the culture raped and on the part of the imperial rapists). In other words, white radical social justice that concerns itself outside itself and onto black lives, must eject itself from the missionary position. Rather, white justice work must then begin with facing whiteness, unblinkingly.

Said bluntly (according to Charles Mills), authentic anti-racist work must materialize as whites actively being "race traitors." Whites cannot be authentic in racial justice while yet maintaining the benefits of the racial contract — regardless if they are signatories or not.

What does this look like?

Returning to the continuing conversation in my community, and specifically with one of my dearest friends, demands the inquiry if a (white) gay can marry, should they, in fact? Whites must interrogate whiteness by facing ourselves in relationship to the world. The denouncing of whiteness cannot be done through enthusiastic protestations and slogans. In order to inquire how we do what we (whites) do, Baldwin instructs, "To do your first works over means to reexamine everything. Go back to where you started, or as far back as you can, examine all of it, travel your road again and tell the truth about it. Sing or shout or testify or keep it to yourself: but *know whence you came*" ("The Price" 841). The failure and inability to move out of white affective proclamations, while retaining the (superficial) disassociation of whiteness, results in mere word(iness). As Baldwin furthers, "This is precisely what the generality of white Americans cannot afford to do. They do not know how to do it..." ("The Price" 841). Moreover, in general, white Americans staunchly resist doing this. Therein lies the valley between outrageous exaltations and systemic shifting.

The *making* of whiteness is perpetually reconstituted by not only overt racist tactics, but additional so through white social justice anti-racist work that at the front, insists on an identification of blackness. Said plainly, whiteness is

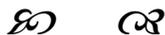
formulated through anti-blackness—even within anti-racist discourse. As Baldwin avers, “white people are not white: part of the price of the white ticket is to delude themselves that they are” (“The Price” 835). And thus, the perverse paradox of outrages’ affective economy: cashing in the trust fund, or being paid without labor: naming without (un)doing. Inversely, to narrate revolution, as in Stowe’s abolitionist text and contemporary reincarnations of protest texts, does not, in fact, materialize as action—or, more specifically, praxis: action with reflection.

Whether by “explicit or tacit” consensus, the moral authority usurped by whiteness is neither (im)moral, but foremost, authoritative in American nationalist discourse. It must be understood that the people and the state is a sneaky division when it comes to progressive liberal proclamations of injustice. The functional characteristic of the state of union, historically and presently, is *whiteness*. The price of the white ticket is afforded by this exclusive marriage; as Baldwin insists, “The will of the [white] people, or the State, is revealed by the State’s institutions” (“The Price” 839). To ascertain that progressive white will is not the will of the state is a misrepresentation, for, as Baldwin illuminates, “what it [white power] appears to surrender with one hand it obsessively clutches in the other” (“The Price” 839).

What unmaking whiteness may look like—

You go up and down the street with a group of people demonstrating against the war in Vietnam. Do you want to end the war in Vietnam or do you want to end all wars? Can you demonstrate to end all wars or can you only demonstrate to end a particular war? Do think about this, give your heart to it. I can demonstrate against a particular war, but when I am concerned with the ending of all wars, not only outwardly but in myself, how can I demonstrate with a group of people? Do you also want to end all wars as I do? Do you understand? It means no nationally, no frontiers, no linguistic differences, no religious divisions—all that. No, Sir, you can't demonstrate, you have to live it. And when you live it, that in itself is a demonstration. (Krishnamurti 287)

I close here, unended, suspended—fingers spread wide in an attempting surrender of my own obsessive clutching...always with the acute awareness that I will be fallible in my practice in living rather than demonstrating. And yet, the heart must be placed *rightly*.



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