EXCAVATING REPRESENTATIONS

by

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Indigenous Prayer for Work

Great mystery, powers of the water--I send a voice in prayer.

I am asking for entrance through the gates of knowledge; I am seeking to cross the realms.

Spirits of the water, help me be fluid today, to move easily with thy work.

I turn to the place between day and night asking for intuition.

I pray for the right doors to open, for the ability to look within and make good medicine of my gifts,

so that it supports the work and supports the Earth, and supports the friends and supports the family.

I pray that I can grow within this work and be of service to others.

Powers of twilight, I walk in your mystery and open to your gifts that want to be served today through my work.

Thank you for the blessing of work.

Thank you for the blessing of gifts.

Thank you for the blessing of the Earth.

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Mother Divine, I love you in all forms—thank you. Mother Kali, thank you for being. Thank you for everything you have done and given, for all that I am aware of, and all that I will never be able to comprehend, for the many opening paths, for the inevitable growth, for my voice which I feared was lost. Thank you for the powerful feminine example you are—all of me bows to you. Mother Lakshmi, I thank you. Mother Yemaya and Mother Oshun, I bow to you, and I thank you. Father Christ, Father Ganesh, Father Af—thank you.

My ancestors, thank you for being. Thank you for surviving. Thank you for every bit of joy you squeezed out of your journeys, that which now manifests in the laughter of my daughter, in the healing of my mother, in the relationship I have with G-d and in countless other ways. I thank you for every fight, every plan, every moment of coerced labor, every instance of freedom you wrestled from realties I cannot imagine. This endeavor is done in your names. To my grandparents, Daphne, Chandrika Persaud Seenaught and Doris Isha Baksh Persaud—may you rest well knowing I endeavor to bring your fullness into being every day. In the words of Maya Angelou, "I go forth as one, and stand as ten thousand."

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INTRODUCTION

"Our imaginations are creatures as limited as we ourselves are. They are not some special, un-infiltrated realm that transcends the messy realities of our lives and minds."- Claudia Rankine and Beth Loffreda, *The Racial Imaginary: Writers on Race in the Life of the Mind*, pg.16

On August 9th, 2014, 18-year-old Michael Brown was murdered by state agent Darren Wilson, igniting a wave of protests and national conversations regarding policing, violence and importantly, the racialized aspects of this relation. As if justifying the murder to come, Wilson's Grand Jury trial testimony was interspersed with details emphasizing a relationship between racialized difference and criminality.[1] For instance, after juxtaposing Brown's larger stature with that of his petite friend Dorian Johnson, Wilson referenced Brown's "bright yellow socks that had green marijuana leaves as a pattern on them" (208), leading jurors to make a connection between blackness and drug use and abuse. He thereafter stated, "when I grabbed him, the *only way* I can describe it is I felt like a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan" (212) before ultimately describing Brown as a demon: "he looked up at me and had the most intense aggressive face. The *only way* I can describe it, it looks like a demon, that's how angry he looked" (225). Wilson produces himself as a defenseless white subject expressly by conjuring the image of the Black Brute.

Even as Wilson deployed the familiar historical trope of the Black Brute, from the actual murder of Brown to the mobilization of stereotypes to justify his killing, his insistence that fictional depictions of non-human, violent characters were the <u>only</u> references available to him within a quotidian encounter with two black boys in 2014 begs particular questions. It appears

[1] New York Times. *State of Missouri vs Darren Wilson*. Grand Jury Volume V, 16 Sept. 2014.

that these references both justified the murder of Brown in retrospect and fueled the immediate reactions which turned this otherwise quotidian moment into spectacle of violence. First, why and under what conditions does this old discursive repertoire of antiblack images resurface in the present? Further, how do recurrent, highly publicized instances of anti-black violence mar the individual and collective imagination, circumscribing the range of possibilities available in everyday encounters between racialized persons? What are some of the nuanced ways that antiblack stereotypes continue to prop up a range of contemporary racial constructions, including that of the vulnerable non-black subject?

My dissertation *Excavating Representations* (*ER*) examines the continual (re)production of a racial imaginary which relies upon anti-black violence to build and maintain connections within the quotidian. My work is attentive to the ways the signature images and tropes of an antiblack racial imaginary operate in quotidian, rather than spectacular, ways. While we are often inundated with images of spectacular racial violence (i.e. – in footage of police killings), a robust analysis of antiblack racial imaginaries requires equal attention to *quotidian* sites where racist tropes circulate in unexpected and seemingly innocuous ways. This project is split into three chapters, each with a conclusion and afterthoughts section. The project concludes with a coda. While my first chapter highlights the material utility of stereotypes, my second chapter works to engage alternate means of creating legibility, while my third chapter investigates the undead to speak to white rage and its effects.

In their edited collection *The Racial Imaginary: Writers on Race in the Life of the Mind* (*TRI*, 2014), [2] poet and professor Claudia Rankine and Professor Beth Loffreda describe the

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[2] Rankine, Claudia, et al. *The Racial Imaginary: Writers on Race in the Life of the Mind*. Fence Books, 2016.

racial imaginary as "the scene of race taking up residence in the creative act" (17). Implied here are the various ways in which racialization infiltrates creativity across and beyond the boundaries of genre and media. The genres I've chosen to analyze—the situational comedy; bildungsroman; and horror fiction— and the media—television and the novel—attest to this and further, highlight a tension between representation and erasure. Stereotype-bound representation erases nuance to create characters that are truncated yet immediately recognizable and easily digestible. Attention to these genres emphasizes the ways in which anti-black racial imaginaries are rendered through erasure and thereafter replicated through representation. To be clear, erasure emerges as a thorough-line within this project, as I've found that it structures a variety of representations. By juxtaposing textual and visual analyses within my chapters, I work to stress differences in representational practices and dissemble recent innovations around the creation and deployment of stereotypes.

I choose to begin with the Asian American subject because "their" position within white supremacist society simultaneously indexes the violent erasures necessary to achieve main-stream success *and* the register under which this success is categorized: as that of a model *minority*. I place "their" in quotes here because even as a subset of Asian Americans are "on the rise,"[3] popular success narratives that situate Asian Americans as the "new whites" often elide the unevenness of distribution of resources within and among the Asian diaspora, while the term "Asian" similarly discards ethic and cultural complexities among those who descend from the continent. Scholar Kandace Chuh otherwise discusses a contemporary form of Asian

[3] "The Rise of Asian Americans." Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project, Pew Research Center, 30 May 2020, www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2012/06/19/the-rise-of-asian-americans/.

racialization that can be found in the figure of a model-minority identified subject, whose lived subjectivity emerges at the conjuncture of the rise of global capitalism and U.S. neoimperialism.[4]

A key term within this project, **legibility**, emerges from attention to the tension between "model" and "contagion," which structures the public space in which many descendants of Asia exist, and the concept of the model-minority identified subject. How are producers of Asian American visual media navigating the tensions which mark the Asian American body within the public sphere and popular imaginary? According to Martinican theorist Édouard Glissant, the basis of "understanding" people within western thought is transparency. Transparency, however, requires reduction to produce equality. A hierarchy is always in motion, wherein the viewer or the individual who inspects wields power over, objectifying the inspected. What kinds of erasures are employed to translate a figure historically marked as a perpetual foreigner in a moment wherein many are more adapted than ever before?

More generally, the immigrant body within this project both enforces and disturbs the boundaries of the nation-state. In choosing to center two texts which deal explicitly with immigrants, assimilation and trauma, I gesture towards a rupture which happens when one must leave home, as I unpack the need to render oneself legible, or consumable. Even as legibility speaks to the relationships between consumption and racialization, it also speaks to a need to (re)build community and connection, particularly after one has left home or was never "at home" there to begin with. One cannot desire legibility without a desire for connection.

[4] Chuh, Kandice. "Chapter 13. Asians Are the New . . . What?". Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, New York, USA: Fordham University Press, 2017, pp. 220-238. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780823278633-014

Rankine and Loffreda continue, "One way to know you're in the presence of—in possession of, possessed by—a racial imaginary is to see if the boundaries of one's imaginative sympathy line up, again and again, with the lines drawn by power" (17). The racial imaginary then, is evidenced in Wilson's testimony, as he reproduces the binaries which undergird anti-black racism within America to build a connection between himself and his audience, the grand jury. I choose to utilize this framework because it highlights the ways in which particular racial imaginaries can circumscribe one's ability to see and hold compassion for others.

I otherwise choose to complicate this framework by centering **memory,** particularly flesh and re-memory**.** As Rankine has otherwise stated, the imagination is not ahistorical. The inclusion of flesh memory—what late poet Akilah Oliver describes as genetic memory or knowledge of the experiences of past bodies[5]— and Toni Morrison's concept of rememory, "as in recollecting and remembering as in reassembling the members of the body, the family, the population of the past,"[6] obfuscates the linear relationship between history, or the dominant record of erasure, and the imagination. Recorded history posits one way of knowing which often works against compassion, in that normalized within white-washed historical narratives are racial hierarchies and other forms of domination. Memory, articulated through one's body and the recollection of the population of the past, can reorient one's thinking.

Glissant expressly resists the demand for marginalized people to make themselves "legible" to others and instead, calls for opacity, or accepting the unintelligibility, impenetrability and confusion that often characterize cross-cultural communication. Within this

[5] Oliver, Akilah. *The She Said Dialogues: Flesh Memory*. Edited by Tracie Morris, Nightboat Books, 2021.

[6] Morrison, Toni. "'I Wanted to Carve out a World Both Culture Specific and Race-Free': an Essay by Toni Morrison." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 8 Aug. 2019, www.theguardian.com/books/2019/aug/08/toni-morrison-rememory-essay.

project, I too work to problematize legitimacy by tracing the ways the creation of legitimacy depends upon truncated representations to be discernable to audiences. I otherwise offer an alternate route to legibility through flesh and rememory, which does not depend upon easy digestion but the re-collection of the dead.

Essential to *TRI* (2014) is an investigation of writers' imaginations and the racialized tropes mobilized therein to handle difference. This project is not explicitly interested in writers but the actions of the characters they create in the texts I examine: the ABC sitcom *Fresh Off the Boat* (*FOTB*, 2015-2020)[7], Edwidge Danticat's novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (*BEM*, 1994)[8] and Joyce Carol Oates' novella Z*ombie* (1995).[9] Each chapter deconstructs the mechanics of each character's recreations, or the actions they take to reinvent their positionality, in order to chart concepts including legitimacy and memory within a broader racial imaginary that often relies on spectacular acts of anti-black violence to elucidate value. Though the routine encounter between Office Darren Wilson, Dorian Johnson and Michael Brown erupted in what is arguably a spectacle of anti-black violence (even as this ending is itself routine in its repetition), the everydayness of racialized violence is erased without a focus on the quotidian. My return to everyday life through these characters enables a continual awareness of the ways in which racism punctuates social progress and shortchanges relationships between people, even as progressive instances of representation—like *Fresh Off the Boat*, the first sitcom to center an Asian-American family in over twenty years on prime-time television—are mobilized as evidence to the contrary.

[7] *Fresh Off the Boat*, Created by Nahnatchka Khan, ABC Entertainment, 2015-2020.
[8] Danticat, Edwidge. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Vintage, 1994.
[9] Oates, Joyce Carol. *Zombie: A Novel*. Ecco, 2009.

These are disparate kinds of texts which write to a range of concerns and audiences, yet they illustrate the utility of the black body to both the collective and individual imagination. As the characters I analyze contend with the extremes racialization yields in their individual worlds, the black body is instrumentalized to both convey crucial shifts in the ways they understand and perform their own racial identities and establish agency outside of white supremacist patriarchy. I use the word "produce" here to describe the process each character undergoes because the term suggests that the reimagining each character engages in part of an economic system—neoliberal globalization—which requires an unprecedented level of calculation to survive.

In her essay, "Venus in Two Acts," scholar Saidiya Hartman ponders what can be excavated beyond the terror which marks the emergence of the enslaved in the archive.[10] This call to recognize the (black and otherwise minoritized) body and being beyond their use-value to capitalist production also informs the coupling of the texts within this excavation. The utility of the captive body Hartman outlines in *Scenes of Subjection* (1998)—as an imaginative surface upon which the master and the nation come to understand themselves (7) and otherwise, as a vehicle for the master's power and truth (8)— informs my position regarding the importance of flesh and re-memory. Flesh memory inverts and expands the relations [between parents, children and trauma afterlives], offering presence (bodily immediacy, 'genetic memory,' and 'osmosis') in the face of historical loss; this loss is at once conceived of as more distant—possibly generations removed—and more intimate, figured not only as narrative, but as bodily experience.[11]

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[10] Hartman, S. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2008, pp. 1–14., doi:10.1215/-12-2-1.
[11] Smith, Laura Trantham. "From Rupture to Remembering: Flesh Memory and the Embodied Experimentalism of Akilah Oliver." MELUS, vol. 35, no. 2, 2010, pp. 112. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20720710. Accessed 28 Nov 2020.

I make the choice to mobilize zombie theory to speak to the material evacuation enabled by colonialism and white supremacy and the plantation as a specter in quotidian relations. While many theorists have used zombie theory to articulate abstract violence under capitalism, the figure of the zombie appears in my analysis as more than a trope, outlining the connections between racializing practices in America and other colonized spaces. The fantasy of zombie morphology is a way to consider what it means to actively dehumanize for individual control, comfort and desire fantasy of the zombie within Oates' *Zombie* (1995) relies on both longstanding historical desires for—evidenced in the continual (re)production of the black body as desirous object across time and space—and brutal violence toward the body.

My first chapter investigates the production of the Asian American subject, and more particularly the model-minority identified subject through attention to the representational practices utilized in ABC's *Fresh Off the Boat* (2015-2020), as they produce and reify understandings of Asian Americans through stereotypes of Black masculinity. After contextualizing the relationship between race and television through an analysis of *Amos 'n' Andy, I* analyze the pilot episode of *Fresh Off the Boat* to elucidate the manner in which value is developed within the show, and the implications of this project. The episodes I read contextualize the relationship between an index of value which emerges in the earliest episode and first, the social scripts which suggest the ideal ways to be Asian American and second, translating a narrative of Asian American immigration and assimilation. Triangulating the relationships between race-making, commodification and representation and its methods, highlights the material utility of racial stereotypes. Ultimately, becoming legible as "human beings" connotes not merely value as a human, but value within racial capitalism and within the neoliberal, globalized order.

My subsequent chapter, "Representation and Recovery in Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*," takes as its center Edwidge Danticat's novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) to analyze both the limits of migration and the promises of representation.[12] Ultimately, Danticat suggests that representation can both recognize the binaries necessary for storytelling without reproducing binary characters, interrupting the index of value demarcated in the initial chapter. While *Fresh Off the Boat* presents an intact family unit able to scale class designations quickly, Sophie's reimagining articulates what is lost *and* reclaimed in the act of migrating to the mythical America, land of plenty. Memory, Danticat posits, can and does function as a kind of reckoning and reclamation, insisting that though the ancestors may be unrecognized in and beyond the trauma of slavery, our ability to hold them is even beyond that; as I breathe, witness and grow, I carry them like the hairs on my head. In my survival, they are here.

My final chapter utilizes zombie theory to interrogate white supremacist common sense beyond the bounds of the classroom, to further articulate the violence of white rage as evidenced through the dead and the undead. The figure of the zombie captures both a longstanding historical desire—evidenced in the continual (re)production of the black body as desirous object across time and space—and a cultural product of evil, in that the actual production of the zombie figure requires a brutal misappropriation of the body. The fantasy of zombie morphology is way to consider it is means to actively dehumanize for individual control, comfort and desire. In my coda, I reflect upon my positionality as an Afro-Indo immigrant and the ways in which it has impacted

The analysis within this project builds upon critical feminist interventions by a number of scholars, chief among them theorists bell hooks and Hortense Spillers. bell hook's *Black Looks:*

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[12] Danticat, Edwidge. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Vintage, 1994.

Race and Representation (1992) was a text I encountered during my qualifying examinations and one which has sustained much of my investigations of the black body within visual representations.[13] References to this text appear in all three of my essays. Prof. Spiller's monumental essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" (1987) helps to anchor my investigation of flesh with my second chapter and more broadly, ideas around the concept of retrieval I am still sorting through.[14] I see this project as being in conversation with Kevin Quashie's recently published text, *Black Aliveness, or the Poetics of Being* (2021). Whereas he more explicitly delves into the worldmaking made possible through the work of black feminist writers and thinkers, the ordering of my chapters juxtaposes the actions of Sophie against other kinds of representational strategies, to highlight the modification she proposes.

CHAPTER I

[13] Hooks, Bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Routledge, 2015.
[14] Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Black, White, and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, by Hortense J. Spillers, Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003, pp. 203–230.

WE'RE VERY AMERICAN AFTER ALL:

Outlining the Utility of Black Bodies in *Fresh Off the Boat*

Figure 1:One of the images showcased in the 2015 New York Times article entitled "Eddie Huang Against the World."

In a 2015 New York Times article entitled "Eddie Huang Against the World," Chef Eddie Huang—whose memoir *Fresh Off the Boat* inspired the sitcom—raises the problem of legibility in describing himself as the "hip-hop Asian kid." Huang discusses this as an "**inconsistency**," as he confesses at the beginning of his memoir: "I mean, if you've ever been confused about who you are or what you're supposed to be or how others see you, and if you don't match up to the stereotypes or expectations for how you look or where you're from, this is your book, you know...this book is for everybody who has ever had an inconsistency like that."[15] The Times article[16] was accompanied by photos of Huang appropriating Black vernacular and sartorial practices: the first photo places Huang against a red backdrop and focuses on the gleam of his grill as he sneers, gold chain edged up off a black shirt, the next captures him smoking weed after coffee. Yet another is accompanied by him quoting Harlem rapper Un Kasa: "Porsche color hot banana."[17] Rather than evidencing a nuanced and "authentic" relationship to Black culture, these images depict a simulacrum of Blackness— "a model of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal".[18] Huang offers up a media-constructed stereotype of Black masculinity:

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[15] Huang, Eddie. *Fresh Off the Boat: A Memoir*. Narrated by Eddie Huang., *Random House Audio,* 2013. Unabridged Audiobook.

[16] The article is based on interviews conducted while he was filming an episode of "Huang's World" in Tijuana, Mexico.

[17] *Vice*, which built its reputation/social value on outrageous and "edgy" content (i.e., racism) is a fitting home for such a contradiction

[18] Here, I invoke the term "authentic" in conversation with John Jackson's usage of the term (as distinct from "sincerity") in *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity*. Jackson writes, "It is this unquenchable thirst for 'the really real' that empowers sincerity, displaces authenticity, and drives the paparazzi's flashbulb frenzies. Celebrity is predicated on it, this backstage access, this simulacra of transparency. We know the staged and filmed performances are simulations, even when well done, so we long for the realities that underpin them" (Jackson 29). He goes on to explain that his study "takes on this preoccupation with the real, recursively exhibiting the kinds of sincerities that give race meaning and significance in people's everyday lives. Authenticity is not the only operative window into vernacular notions of realness, and the chapters that follow offer a series of interrelated lenses for viewing the real through the sincere—less a linear, narrative march toward definitive conclusion than a circular re-rehearsing of several connected

aggressive, ostentatious, undisciplined and uncontrollable. Like Huang, FOTB curiously mobilizes stereotypes of Black masculinity in order to both contest stereotypes of Asian masculinity (as desexualized, law-abiding, model minorities) and to convey the "authenticity"/ "sincerity" of Huang's "**American**" identity for its audience. Legibility, which I posit to be the midpoint between authenticity and sincerity, emerges as a key point of tension within the pilot episode and eventually structures the first season, if not the show.

Huang's language of "inconsistency" positions "Asianness" and "Blackness" as antithetical; indeed, stereotypes of Asian Americans as "model minorities" contrast controlling images of African Americans as criminal, dangerous, and disruptive[19]. The commercial success of *FOTB*—then, the first sitcom in 20 years to feature an Asian American family on network television—evidences its importance as a cultural text.[20] Huang's performance of "incongruous" identities throws into relief how anti-Black tropes gets mobilized to energize other racial performances with nuance and "authenticity," to loosen the hold of controlling images[21] on other

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phenomenological queries" (Jackson 30). Next, I reference Jean Baudrillard's "Simulacra and Simulations".

[19] Recent texts like Chua's *The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America* are iterations of the infamous 1966 article "Success Story: Japanese American Style," naturalizing the differences in outcomes between these two groups.

[20] *Fresh Off the Boat*, which premiered on Feb. 4th, 2015 with two preview episodes, garnered 7.94 million viewers, becoming the second-highest rated comedy premiere that season.

[21] In his material, cultural and social analyses of Asian Americans on television, Darryl Hamamoto clarifies a long history of Asian Americans on television, establishing correlations between depictions of Asian Americans to racist legislation, ultimately reifying a white Christian nation. Contrary to dominant narratives of hyper-normalcy and model harmonious adjustment reflected in controlling images of Asian Americans, each group has faced tremendous legal and social pressures. Reflecting the bachelor society formed by early Chinese immigrants and reinforced by successive Chinese exclusion acts, the stereotype of the "Bachelor Manservant/domestic" dominated early television. Programs like *Bachelor Father* (1957-62), Have Gun Will Travel (1957-63), Bonanza (1959-73), Valentine's Day (1964-65), Star Trek (1966-69), Highcliffe Manor (1979), and Falcon Crest (1981-90) all featured the stock Chinese bachelor character. The image of the "Perennial Alien," showcased in programs including *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* (19697-2) would come to haunt Japanese Americans characters,

racial minority groups. The audience is first introduced to televisual Eddie's inconsistency, or the juxtaposition of "Asianness" and "Blackness," as a representational practice in the show's title sequence, by means of a remake of Biggie's 1994 hit "Juicy." Detroit rapper Danny Brown spits "Fresh off the boat/You can tell by the way I wear my clothes/That I'm fresher than a scent from a rock." The joke here, of course, is that rocks produce no scent; those who are "fresh off the boat," or recently emigrated, won't be cool, the very essence of that which has been popularized by hip hop, and attached to American Black bodies, like Brown. He continues with a reference to "Juicy" a few lines down, "So if you don't know homie now you know/ Fresh off the boat/And homie I demand my respect/Everywhere I go I rep my set/I'm fresh off the boat." Though "Juicy" recounts Biggie's hustle to stabilize his family, Brown's remake parodies that existence, comparing Eddie's family (and nation-state) to a "set," or a gang. The forceful "and homie I demand my respect" is ironic, given the supposed speaker; the image playing as the theme plays, is a young, chubby-cheeked, "Asian" kid in a two-parent family. A still image from the sequence is referenced above. The irony introduced here will continue to structure the dynamic between the characters throughout the first season, and more specifically, Eddie's negotiation of the world around him.

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reflecting the Gentlemen's Agreement (1908) negotiated between the governments of Japan and the United States, the Alien Land Law (1913) passed in California, and exclusionary legislation passed by the U.S. Congress.

Figure 2: This still image is pulled from the title sequence and is part of the background images described above.

This chapter is focused on the representational practices utilized in ABC's *Fresh Off the Boat* as they produce and reify understandings of Asian Americans through stereotypes of Black masculinity. I first contextualize the relationship between race and television through an analysis of *Amos 'n' Andy* to clarify the importance of whiteness to televisual production, and to trace a long history of whiteness through the development of radio to television. I thereinafter analyze the pilot episode of *Fresh Off the Boat* to elucidate the manner in which value is developed within the show, and the implications of this project. While this chapter does not attempt to read every episode of the show, the selected episodes reflect key themes which emerge as the show progresses, including legitimacy, value and authenticity. I thereinafter explore the relationships between an index of value which emerges in the earliest episode and first, the social scripts which suggest the ideal ways to be Asian American and second, translating a narrative of Asian American immigration and assimilation.

This chapter ultimately centers the erasure vital to the production of a televisual Eddie suitable for mass consumption. Eddie never meets Black boys like those who would become members of groups like NWA or the Wu Tang Clan, nor is there any depiction of the physical discipline real-life Huang describes when he articulates the development of his relationship to hip-hop[22]. As bell hooks explains, "the commodification of difference" within mass culture, "promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, via exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other, but denies the significance of that Other's history through a process of decontextualization."[23] Eddie's diegetic consumption mirrors the audience's, seemingly validating the casual digestion of carefully curated black masculinity, and the racial map of meaning[24] mobilized to construe that meaning there-in.

Triangulating the relationships between race-making, commodification and representation and its methods, highlights the material utility of racial stereotypes. I recently

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[22] In their study measuring the effects of televisual anti-Black stereotypes on White and Japanese students when direct contact with African Americans is lacking, Fujioka found that perceived negative portrayals affected White students' stereotypes, but perceived positive portrayals did not. While students remember both kinds of television portrayals, negative portrayals may substantially affect their evaluations of African Americans. Perceived negative portrayals of African Americans were significantly related to White respondents' stereotypes. Fujioka, Yuki. "Television Portrayals and African-American Stereotypes: Examination of Television Effects When Direct Contact Is Lacking." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 76, no. 1, SAGE Publications, Mar. 1999, pp. 52–75, doi:10.1177/107769909907600105.

[23] Hooks, B. (2015). Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance. In *Black looks: Race and Representation* (pp. 21-39). New York, NY: Routledge.

[24] "Language consists of signs organized into various relationships. But signs can only convey meaning if we possess codes which allow us to translate our concepts into language and vice versa. These codes are crucial for meaning and representation. They do not exist in nature but are the result of social conventions. They are a crucial part of our culture -our shared 'maps of meaning' -which we learn and unconsciously internalize as we become members ofour culture. This constructionist approach to language thus introduces the symbolic domain of life, where words and things function as signs, into the very heart of social life itself' (Ibid, 29)

opened my Amazon Prime Video account to find a slew of Indian (and more generally "Asian American") prime shows on the main page. As I scrolled through, trying to figure out *why* these "suddenly" appeared, I read the category header: "Asian Pacific American Heritage Month." To be plastered on the front page, as one of the main categories, is to be both consumed, and recognized as "appropriate" for consumption, by the average American. In a white supremacist nation, representation *depends* upon legibility. Asian Americans "became" legible as human beings[25] within the U.S. nation through an intense and complex process, always in conversation with Others, and an ever-present white spectator. The very term "Asian American" cannot hold the complexity of the many Asian ethnicities and communities it seeks to gesture towards yet is mobilized in public and scholarly discourse as if it can; while the term enables erasure, legibility, or the ability to be consumed and recognized by a non-Asian public, takes precedent. Erasure is then turned into a form of consumption. Though *FOTB* works to re-engineer the erasures implicit in "Asian American" representation, rendering the Black male body part of America's lingue franca necessitates another kind of erasure, one that positions the show as quintessentially American.

[25] Kandice Chuh offers a compelling analysis regarding the production of the Asian American subject, and more particularly the "model-minority identified subject" in her essay "Asians are the New…What? (2017) The common rhetoric around the "rise" of Asian America can be traced back to intentional investment in Japan and India by the United States and shifts within immigration law in 1965 and 1980. Becoming legible as "human beings" connotes not merely value as a human, but value within racial capitalism and within the neoliberal, globalized order. Through the investments Chuh notes, Asian Americans, or rather the elite class of Asian Americans who have been able to emigrate with portable skills (and replicate this value within their children), have come to be valued as human beings within a society that only values the human through their ability to produce. Chuh, K. (2017). Asians Are the New … What? Flashpoints for Asian American Studies. doi:10.5422/fordham/9780823278602.003.0014

Racial Precedents, or the Ways of Television

Television has long functioned as both an active agent, *consuming race to build and retain* its appeal, a channel by which existent notions of race are *propagated and inculcated*, and the generative site whereby emergent concepts and modes of race are *produced* through the workings of the medium itself. This trifold model, of mediation,[26] remediation and intermediation are reflected in both the history and content of the medium.

In beginning this analysis of television's relationship to race, *Amos 'n' Andy* is a useful starting point, as the debut of the show on television matched the rise of television in the home, and the critical racial divisions which characterized the period. Moreover, the development of *Amos 'n' Andy*, from a popular radio show first named *Sam n' Henry* centering two Black Southern male characters as they migrate from the Georgia to Chicago to an immensely popular television show, further elucidates long standing desires for *simulacrums of Blackness*. Racial segregation in schools was banned via Brown v. Board in 1954, heightening anxiety about racial integration. The ruling is also one of the first major wins of the Civil Rights movement. Under the Eisenhower presidency, however, the nation experienced unprecedented economic prosperity, and the growth of the middle class was accelerated. Simultaneously, the McCarthy

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[26] Marshall McLuhan, in his seminal text *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man* (1964) states "In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, *the medium is the message*. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium— that is, of any extension of ourselves— result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves or by any new technology" (7). Marshall points not just to the inextricability of medium and message, but also to the ways that a medium itself (and not just the content it conveys) has personal, social, and political meaning and "consequences". Remediation and intermediation are defined in relation to mediation, as remediation happens when new media mediate their predecessors, and intermediation, media recombination.

era was rife with paranoia about the spread of communism, urging citizens to replicate the norms and social mores they viewed on television.

In her book *Make Room for T.V.: Television and the Family Ideal* (1992), Lynn Spiegel uses popular documents to trace the conversations and relationships to television which emerged as it became a national phenomenon, highlighting the social factors that helped shape television's form in the home. Created first by Victorian ideals, the positionality of leisure within the (white) home emphasized a critical division between public and private spaces. The home itself was developed first as a private spiritual haven contrasting the hardships of work within the industrial era, and second as the ideal physical space for (white) women, primarily through the concept of domesticity.[27] In order to cultivate the four cardinal virtues (piety, purity, submission and domesticity), preferred leisure within the home was genteel and reformed, contrasting the bawdy forms found outside the home, all which were relegated to spaces where only men and fallen women should venture. Within this context, "slumming," the practice of securing professional escorts to "safely" explore illicit, often Black parts of town, emerged. Sexual energies were thus channeled away from the privatized Victorian domestic sphere into the racialized public one.

A redefinition of family leisure would come with the advent and proliferation of household machines. While, as noted by Spiegel, "machines were the ideal vehicle through which to maintain the separation between leisure and work" (23) in progressive white households, many white American families responded with ambivalence to secular, industrial society, as evidenced by the famous 1929 Middletown studies. White residents in Muncie, Indiana conveyed anxieties to the study's sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd, induced by the

[27] Another version of this, modern domesticity, would appear in the early 1920s, centering private family homeownership, children's' needs and close family ties to sell radio receivers.

erosion of “traditional”—read patriarchal white— family authority through shifts in leisure activities. Among their apprehensions were the effects of competing concerns: would all-day Sunday auto rides cause dwindling church attendance? Would the night-like space offered by theatres facilitate lasciviousness in teenagers? In order to allay concerns around industrialization, mechanization and more specifically, skepticism about mechanized amusements, technology was given traditional family functions by advertisers[28].

Radio, an “intermediate” form of leisure as described by the Lynds, helped to subdue some of these fears, as did its consequent successor, television. As early television pulled its content directly from radio, understanding radio’s positionality, and its relationship to race is useful to understanding early television’s relationship to race[29]. Though first used primarily by the Navy, commercially and by (male) amateurs, the radio was eventually domesticated and integrated into family life, primarily through functional redesign and intentional programming. Radio’s reach matched its commodification: in 1920, about one of every five hundred American households had a primitive, often homemade apparatus to receive radio broadcast compared to 1940, when 80 percent of American homes owned a mass-produced radio. In lulling the fears of local listeners, early radio worked to actively unite “white” listeners through multiethnic programming tied to religious and cultural affiliations, often garbed in anti-Black respectability.

[28] *Make Room for Television*

[29] “The earliest television stars – the ones who gained popularity during the transition from radio to television –generally came from the second ranks of radio performers. In the fall of 1948, the New York Times reported that “Vaudeville via television is upon us with a rush.” The most successful of the new TV shows followed a variety or vaudeville format in an effort to interest a wide range of viewers. The old vaudeville master of ceremonies – the role in which Bob Hope and Jack Benny among others had distinguished themselvess – became the new host of the television variety program.” Berkowitz, E. D. (2012). Make Room for TV. In *MassAappeal: The formative age of the Movies, Radio, and TV* (pp. 110-130). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

As explained by historian Derek Vaillant, early radio in Chicago simultaneously extended the racialized contours of structural inequality in the built urban environment into the air itself while affording many listeners, including African Americans, participation in musical publics that challenged the geographic fixity and hierarchies of music and urban social and cultural space[30]. To be clear, though African American music reached new ears, African Americans were effectively banned from the airwaves, and severely limited in their ability to mobilize radio as a tool for intra- and inter-community building. This contrasted with their multiethnic-, working class-, immigrant-white counterparts, who appropriated radio as a tool to reconstitute and mediate their local, metropolitan, and American selves. Vaillant notes that local radio owners often demonized African Americans and jazz in order portray their stations and affiliate businesses as respectable, and above the moral deficiencies of local dancehalls and other public gathering spaces. Early Chicago radio produced a hegemonic racial formation—a sound of whiteness—by broadcasting aural representations of African American musical culture disconnected from the Black Belt and its economic, social, and cultural relationships. Even if stations carried remote broadcasts featuring African Americans, they often practiced Jim Crow within their studios; white performers were frequently used to play popularized musical forms associated with African Americans. As reported by the Lynds, "More than one mother said that her family used to scatter in the evening---but now we all sit around and listen to the radio"[31](270). The desires of the multiethnic white family shaped the early years of radio

[30] Vaillant, "Sounds of Whiteness: Local Radio, Racial Formation, and Public Culture in Chicago,1921-1935"
[31] *Lynd, R. S., & Lynd, H. M. (1929). Middletown, a study in contemporary American culture. Foreword by Clark Wissler (p. 270). London: Constable.*

broadcasting, effectively encoding the airwaves as a domain of white pleasure and power, produced at the literal and figurative expense of racialized African Americans[32].

It was within the immediate context of early Chicago radio's hegemonic racial formation—a sound of whiteness—that *Sam n' Henry* (1926-1928), the original version of *Amos 'n' Andy*, aired. While listeners could not "see" the senior vaudeville performers Freeman Gosden and Charles Carroll at this time, their future public performances featuring white bodies juxtaposing aural blackface performances would eventually delight audiences on stage[33]and on the screen. Generally, the immense success of Gosden and Carroll was fundamentally dependent on their access to Black people and culture at a time when few white people had it. As summarized by historian Melvin Patrick Ely, both Gosden and Carroll spent their early careers preparing to play Black comical roles[34]. Gosden would later report: "We chose black characters because blackface could tell funnier stories than whiteface comics" (28). This comment reflects both Gosden, who felt he "knew" Black people because he had a Black playmate as a child, and his audience.[35]*Amos 'n' Andy*, what *Sam n' Henry* became after switching networks, would remain on the radio until 1960.[36]

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[32] Vaillant, 38

[33] Ely, Melvin Patrick. The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy: a Social History of an American Phenomenon. New York: Free Press, 1991. Page 62

[34] "Gosden and Correll's boyhood stage performances, and then their livelihood with the Bren Company, had depended largely on a type of entertainment - minstrelsy — that purported to imitate blacks. In 1925, the two men had got their first big break with Paul Ash, whose shows catered to white people's infatuation with jazz and other musical forms created by Afro-Americans. The pair 's success on the McVickers stage had owed something to a song about "kinky kids." And now, at WGN, the perennial appetite of the white public for comical and sentimental portrayals of blacks changed Gosden and Correll's lives forever." Ibid, 53.

[35] Ibid, 29

[36] Because Gosden and Correll moved from WGN, owned by The Chicago Tribune, to WMAQ, owned by The Chicago Daily News, in 1928, they worked meticulously to reestablish *Sam n' Henry* as *Amos and Andy*; WMAQ did not own the rights to *Sam n' Henry*.

Television was thereinafter developed by large corporations who held power in radio, as another more dominant broadcasting venture that would do similar work. Popularized during the post-war years as an object of and for the normative white middle class nuclear family, television became a family activity, part of a new domesticity obsessed with "exaggerated" family fun.[37] From 1948 to 1955, television was present in nearly two thirds of the nation's homes. By 1960, 90% of Americans had a least one receiver. As Alan Nadel writes in *Television in Black and White America*: "Certainly television did not invent the "whiteness" of America as a set of white colonies, or as a white post-revolutionary nation, as a white post-Civil War nation, or as a white post-World War One nation. What it did was impressively help codify and deploy whiteness as the norm for the United States in the nuclear age" (Nadel 3). The deployment of whiteness as the norm often occurred through juxtaposition with blackness as non-normative. Describing the debut of *Amos 'n' Andy*, Alan Nadel writes, "Layered with irony, television's black-and-white-era thus began with a juxtaposition of Black imagery and white reality, so that the Black face was simply an illusion, a semi-opaque overlay on *real* white men, an optical convenience intended to supplement verbal humor with the suggestion of visual reality" (Nadel 15). In fact, Gosden and Carroll were a thoroughly visual phenomenon[38]before the show debuted on

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[37] Spiegel, 34

[38] "Gosden and Correll made public appearances at parks and fairs in character (often wearing a modified form of the blackface costume); the likeness of the blackface characters – based on the physical features of the actors but with some of the caricatured features of blackface performers– was imprinted in the form of chocolate, toys, jigsaw puzzles, sheet music covers, trinkets and cardboard store window displays. Trade and popular periodicals also ran features on the actors during the show's early network years." (344) This was in addition to a visual publicity campaign launched by WMAQ programmer Judith Waller, to distinguish the new show Amos n Andy from its predecessor Sam n' Henry. "In a sense, then, Amos 'n' Andy was a visual phenomenon perhaps even before the radio narrative was heard. Furthermore, the marketing of the characters had sought to make them the 'face' of blackface minstrel comedy, signifying both a new style of delivery (transmitted through mass produced images and standardized beyond the context of the live performance), as well as a new relationship with a mass audience." (345)

television and as suggested by Medeiros, functioned as icons of "a branded popular culture authenticity" (345) beyond the generic Blackface act. While the juxtaposition Nadel alludes to be an illusion, it was more than old content in a new medium: the radio show *Amos 'n' Andy* would shift the form of mass storytelling from piecemeal accounts in a show to a continuous storyline, laying the groundwork for the situational comedy. Medeiros clarifies

> transcending the social role-playing of the minstrel genre, the characters were pitched as friends who entered listeners' homes 'every night except Tuesday.' Thus, the roots of their marketed uniqueness lay in the offer of a continuing intimacy through a synergistic visual and material presence in the home, the store and the built environment itself – an intimacy that was supposed to elevate the characters above generic 'song and dance men." (346)

The synergetic marketing employed by WMAQ to create a semi-national marketing without the aid of a network also meant that by the time *Amos'n' Andy* debuted on NBC, executives realized that caricatured Blackness not only played well to white audiences, but it could also be used to sell products in novel ways. Whereas previous images of African Americans were used to sell housewares through primitivist plantation nostalgia[39], Pepsodent, who chose to sponsor the show when they were acquired by NBC, linked their toothpaste to the 'authenticity' of the contrived personalities of Amos and Andy, the ambiguously raced popular culture simulations[40]. Ultimately, the unrivaled popularity of *Amos 'n' Andy* gave new significance to its deployment of racial stereotypes: viewers were able to both *consume* ideas regarding race which did not disrupt their own ideas, and products connected to them.

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[39] Ely, Melvin Patrick. The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy: a Social History of an American Phenomenon. New York: Free Press, 1991. Page 340

Nadel continues, "Circumscribed by artifice, this first moment of broadcast television seemed unintentionally to assert a fundamental premise: that Blackness was a figment of the white imagination" (Nadel 15). Nowhere is this clearer than in the production of black characters, Sapphire Stevens, and her husband George "Kingfish" Stevens. The first episode of the series follows Kingfish—a character represented as a combination of the coon and trickster figures—as he attempts to con Andy out of a nickel worth $250.00 dollars. The scene opens with Amos jovially welcoming the audience "Ladies and gentlemen, this is Amos. I just want to tell you about something that happened to my friends Andy and the Kingfish." This sets the tone for the idealistic world we come to know as their community. As Kingfish's con gets both Andy and him in trouble, they are defended by a black lawyer and tried by a black judge in a Harlem courtroom. Though no obvious moments of racism or the structures which produce racism exist, the products of the racist imagination are still present.

Kingfish is but one archetype present. After referring to his wife as a "battle axe," in his conversation with the postman, he heads home and immediately they argue. His wife, Sapphire, appears and is visually reminiscent of a pickaninny. Both her dark, drab clothing and her hair, styled to stick out around her head, produce this effect. He remarks "Honey, thought I told you not to come out in that rig 'til I got something in my stomach." She responds, "You just keep your big mouth shut!" In the original radio show her name was Sapphire, evoking the stereotype of black women as strong, aggressive, masculine, and emasculating figures and reflecting this argumentative characterization we witness. True to form the Sapphire we witness onscreen not only argues but is demeaning and rude, proud, and overbearing.[41] Though the characters in *Amos*

[41] This stereotype was preceded in films by the sassy Mammie stereotype. One example of this was Hattie McDaniel, a black actress who played feisty, quick-tempered mammies in many movies, including *Judge Priest* (Wurtzel & Ford, 1934), *Music is Magic* (Stone & Marshall, 1935),

'n' Andy embody stereotypes which were already in existence, their spread to televisual reality helped to solidify these ideas in new unprecedented ways.

Value, or An Education in Boundaries

> UNNAMED BLACK BOY CLASSMATE. (grabs Eddie by the shoulder and pushes him out of the way)
>
> EDDIE. Yo, man! What are you doing?!
>
> UNNAMED BLACK BOY CLASSMATE. Get used to it. You're the one at the bottom now.
>
> EDDIE. No, I'm not!
>
> UNNAMED BLACK BOY CLASSMATE. Yeah, you are! It's my turn, chink! (0:17:18-0:17:31)

Set to the music of Snoop Dogg's "Gz and Hustlas," the violent exchange outlined above between Eddie, a new Chinese American student, and an unnamed Black Boy classmate (later revealed to be Walter) recounts two common stereotypes: the emasculated Asian male and the violent Black boy[42]. Previous to this, Eddie and Walter had a complicated interaction, in which

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The Little Colonel (DeSylva & Butler, 1935), *Alice Adams* (Berman & Stevens, 1935), *Saratoga* (Hyman & Conway, 1937), *The Mad Miss Manton* (Wolfson & Jason, 1938), and *Gone with the Wind* (Selznick & Fleming, 1939).

[42] The persistence of Asian American stereotypes in visual media is marked in both their morphology and relationship to other stereotypes. The "Bachelor Manservant/domestic" figure Hamamoto describes necessitated both the sexualization and feminization of Chinese and Japanese male characters, reinforcing inequities in power. Characters were often bereft of close family and made to perform menial household tasks. This role closely resembles the "Master/Teacher" relationship, in which an Asian master tutors a young white male charge and endows him with powers or gifts (such as martial arts prowess or religiomagic wisdom) that are otherwise unattainable from white mentors[42]. The "Perennial Alien" archetype persisted in programs like *Happy Days* (1974-84), M*r. T. and Tina* (1976), *Gung Ho* (1986-87), and *Davis Rules* (1991-92). Hamamota notes "the de-sexualization of the Asian American male is closely bound with the inability to form a family with his female counterpart because of racially specific barriers erected by the state. By contrast, the hypersexuality attributed to the African American male reflects the anxiety of the master race, whose ability to affect Black family formation is much more limited. But in both cases, controlling images are useful in the reinforcement of legal-juridical constraints that selectively target nonwhite peoples."

Eddie, clothed in a Notorious B.I.G t-shirt, briefly sits with Walter in the school cafeteria, then abandons him for some white boys. In that interaction, unnamed Walter is neither violent nor prejudiced. He instead observes the curious nature of the interaction: “A white dude and an Asian dude bonding over a black dude. [Sighs] This cafeteria's ridiculous” (00:08:33-00:08:39). Interestingly, while both boys begin to talk and joke about Biggie’s album, they remove Walter from consideration. His blackness is somehow totally unconnected from the Notorious B.I.G.

I am curious about the utility of Walter in this scene, and more generally the entire pilot episode, as the tension between Eddie and Walter is only resolved when Eddie beats him up. As Eddie’s principal explains to his parents Jessica and Louis, “…he [Eddie] kicked him in the gronial area, shoved pudding in his face and unleased a string of obscenities I can’t repeat because God is listening” (00:17:43-00:17:50). The fight, itself a convenient reversal of stereotypes, neither complicates Walter’s character nor enables any explanation for his actions. Walter is interiorized primarily through the violent exclamation: “It’s my turn, chink!” While he does ask Eddie to sit elsewhere when he is rejected by their white boy classmates because of his “funny smelling” Chinese food, mobilizing a violent, bigoted term is a far cry from asserting a boundary after one has been rejected.

Further, an older version of Eddie contextualizes his younger self (and family) through a voiceover for the audience. The audience is left to assume Walter’s motivations, though he otherwise shows an awareness of racialized confines Eddie is yet to grasp. This is evidenced in his sarcastic response when Eddie returns to sit with him, after being teased for his food. Then un-named Walter states, “Oh, it didn’t go well? The white people didn’t welcome you with open arms? Whaaat?! Sit elsewhere, B.I.G.” (0:09:03-0:09:14) In his unnamed-ness, Walter is merely

a black body exploited to develop the audience's understanding of Eddie, and his position outside of particular Asian American stereotypes. In effect, the relation between Walter and Eddie reveals an index of value that is mobilized throughout the show.

The index of value I refer to is best contextualized through an accounting of the boundaries and limits *Fresh Off the Boat* observes and obscures. I include here the current thumbnail image for *FOTB* on Hulu (figure 3), which references the immensely popular *Lunch atop a Skyscraper*, the 1932 photo taken atop the steelwork of 30 Rockefeller Plaza, during the construction of the Rockefeller Center (figure 4).

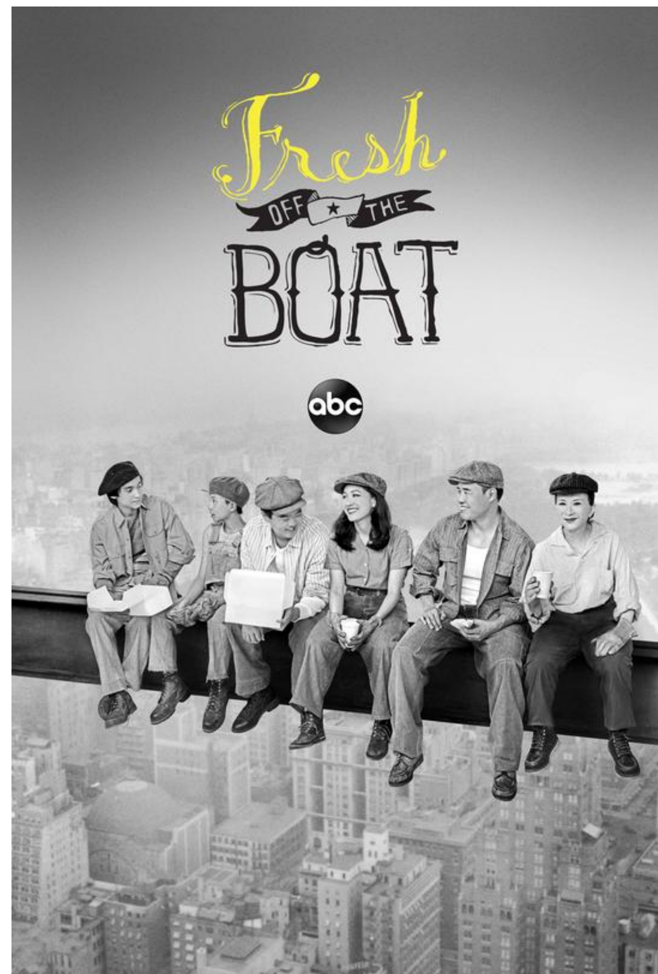

Figure 3: A thumbnail pulled from Hulu, reflecting a key marketing concept employed by the producers of the show.

Figure 4: Lunch Atop a Skyscraper, 1932.

In reconstructing the photograph to center Asian American bodies, the marketing team behind *FOTB* appropriates the connotation of the original representational visual image in order to participate in a discourse of American national identity[43]. If the original seemingly white bodies therein constitute the boundary of "authentic" Americanness, the reconstruction of the photograph both observes this boundary and trespasses over it. The marketing ploy more generally locates the metaphorical space in which Eddie and Walter operate, where-in non-white bodies are positioned in vexed ways to citizenship, and who constitutes an American.

While the opening vignette of the pilot follows Eddie as he accomplishes an ordinary task, clothes shopping with his family for school, a spectacle emerges as the camera jolts, tilts and focuses just in time to capture him slipping on a pinky ring alongside a glamor diamond

[43] While the original photo is popularly consumed as a spontaneous shot capturing the construction of American investment in building, and the immigrant workers who made it possible, the photo was actually staged for marketing purposes. The illusion that the workers were daring enough to sit atop the steelwork with nothing below them is also not true: some historians believe there was a sturdy level of the structure, then called the RCA building, just below the frame. https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/09/01/one-most-iconic-photos-american-workers-is-not-what-it-seems/?wpisrc=nl_most&wpmm=1

watch with a dollar sign on its face. The scene, set to MC Breed's "Ain't No Future when You're Frontin," gestures towards an old-school hip-hop music video. After putting on a basketball pendant, bomber jacket, fitted hat and a pair of glasses reminiscent of a profligate rapper, one message is clear: Eddie likes hip hop fashion and its excess. Another spectacle surfaces as Eddie pulls the dressing room curtain aside to reveal the outfit for his mother. Dressed in a plaid button up shirt and crochet knit sweater, the sharp contrast between the pair is a theme throughout the season, and generally the show. As the voice-over of his future self clarifies moments later: "Mom was always hard on me way before all that 'tiger mom[44]' stuff. She thought I was trying to cause trouble, wearing that Nas shirt, but she didn't understand. If you were an outsider, hip-hop was your anthem. And I was definitely the *black sheep* in my family." [emphasis added] "Black sheep" is a complex metaphor here, as Eddie is not merely an exception within his family, but he is cast as the Black exception, through proximity. Jessica, his mother, will continue to remark on his choice of clothing ("Eddie, why do you always have black men on your shirt?") throughout the season.

Eddie locates a boundary between acceptable and unacceptable for the audience through his description, as does his mother's reaction and the wide camera shot which captures Evan in a button-up shirt and jeans, Emory in a plain t-shirt and plaid pants, and his mother in a knit-sweater and button-up shirt. Generally, they are clothed in what one would consider normative, middle-class, white dressing.

EDDIE. Mom, check it. Fresh as hell, right?

JESSICA. Eddie, don't say hell.

EVAN. (interrupting) He also said 'butthole' in the car.

EDDIE: Shut up, you Chinese narc! (To his mother) "Mom, can I get this?

JESSICA: How much? (inspects price tag). Too much. (0:17:18-0:17:31)

The language Eddie mobilizes, popularized through hip hop, gestures towards the image of young black men in poorer neighborhoods, while Jessica's stern, frugal approach is reminiscent of the conservative, stern Asian mother archetype. The sign of difference which emerges here is not merely about fashion or vernacular choices but about what they signify. The "trouble" Jessica refers to exceeds the household, as Eddie will wear his clothing as he tends to his daily responsibilities. She is concerned with the assumptions that will be made about Eddie as he ventures out into the world, with a black male face plastered to his front.

Figure 5: A still image pulled from the opening sequence, wherein the audience is presented with the sharp contrast between Eddie and his mother.

Figure 6: A wide shot is used to emphasize the difference between Eddie and his family, which captures Evan in a button-up shirt and jeans, Emory in a plain t-shirt and plaid pants, and his mother in a knit sweater, button-up shirt and khaki pants. This contrasts with the aforementioned still in which Eddie is dressed in a basketball pendant, bomber jacket, fitted hat and a pair of glasses reminiscent of a profligate rapper.

The black idiom within this scene also establishes for the audience another boundary, one concerning the separation between immigrant and chic, hip and fresh off the boat. As Toni Morrison observes in "Romancing the Shadow," the second chapter in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), we "should look at how a Black idiom and the sensibilities it has come to imply are appropriated for the associative value they lend to modernism—to being hip, sophisticated, ultra-urbane" (52). While Eddie suggests in the opening monologue that his father Louis "loved everything about America" and had "full-on bought into the American dream" (0:01:14-0:01:20), Eddie mobilizes hip hop references to not merely contest his position as an outsider, but to establish himself as more than the child of immigrants and beyond the unquestioning consumption of the American dream. He is

characterized as cosmopolitan through his awareness of hip hop culture, or at the very least hip, even as hip hop itself remains a contested signifier for blackness. If the black/white binary forms a fetishized boundary, Eddie's actions suggest a trespass that promises complication.

In returning to Walter, however, one finds the failure of this complication. While Eddie disavows the derogatory weak, emasculated Asian boy stereotype through his fight with Walter, Walter is not removed from the violence associated with the Black body, nor is the audience ever made aware of the actions he takes to defend himself. Instead, his use of the word "chink" adheres to stereotypes about African Americans and their vexed relationship with immigrants. The positive characterization of Eddie as complex rests on a negative characterization of Walter as simple. In his investigation of value, *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (1999), scholar Lindon Barrett explains "value is an arbiter among disparate entities—however, an arbiter seeking to naturalize its processes of arbitration to the point of sublimation and fetishization" (12).[45] Value necessitates boundaries to establish that which is disparate to then measure them: "limits and boundaries prove the 'essential' matter of value, because they delineate the point of and, therefore, instate the need for the arbitration undertaken in the first place"(16)[46]. The unnamed Black boy character, or Walter, and Eddie, embody the disparate entities in the relation Barrett elucidates. In fighting Walter, Eddie sublimates his socially unacceptable position as perpetual foreigner, reinforcing his position as an Asian boy who is not only knowledgeable about hip hop, a kind of social currency, but willing to physically dominate others to exert control. The immediate positioning of Walter and Eddie foreshadow what is to come in future

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[45] Barrett, L. (2009). *Blackness and Value: Seeing do*uble. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 12.
[46] Ibid, 16.

episodes: a fetishization of African American Blackness to buttress Eddie's positionality as (misleadingly) cosmopolitan.

Translating the Untranslatable

In the index of value, I outline in the previous section, Eddie and Walter are disparate entities who produce and reify value through their relation to one another. Even as other Black bodies function similarly, or as "the negative, the expended, the excessive" to "form a ground of possibilities for value" (21)[47], within *Fresh Off the Boat*, they are utilized to translate an experience historically rendered untranslatable.

The rhetorical strategy I refer to can first be contextualized through the failings of *All-American Girl* (1994), *FOTB*'s predecessor. While the show was poised to shift Asian American representation from marginal to central as the first prime time television show to center an Asian American family, conflicts around "authentic" "Asian-ness and American-ness limited its ability to fulfill this desire. Similar to *FOTB*, the show was interested in the assimilation of an Asian American family and aimed to use Amy Cho's stand-up as its basis, with 23-year-old Cho as the central character. Unfortunately, the shift to a more formulaic sitcom structure essentialized Asian American culture and relied too heavily on Asian American stereotypes to produce a realistic, interesting depiction of an Asian American family[48]. In her article "'If we are Asian, then are we funny?': Margaret Cho's 'All-American Girl' as the First (and Last?) Asian American Sitcom" (2008), Sarah Moon Cassinelli clarifies,

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[47] Ibid, 21.

[48] As if in response, *FOTB* takes a completely different approach to anti-Asian American stereotypes, centering them in order to upturn them. As Hall points out, however, merely reversing a stereotype is not enough to completely shift its message.

> For them [Cho and Amy Hill, the actress who played the grandmother character], the show is "stuck" on race; the familial characters are not "specific enough" to be realistic representations of an average American family and thus, cannot be read outside of the context of the stereotypical Asian American experience. A sitcom's popularity is arguably determined by its characters, specifically the fictional, but believable renditions the actors perform. The show's attempt to create "authentic Asianness," means the audience is not given enough non-racial material to create a relationship with the characters. (132)[49]

In addition, the adversarial relationship Kim maintained with her mother, while useful for a traditional [white] sitcom, reified stereotypical understandings of Asian culture. As Lisa Lowe notes, essentializing Asian culture to the family distorts the particularities of class, gender and national diversity among Asians[50]. The desires of the audience eventually became the central focus of the show, as producers pushed Cho to lose weight in order to lessen the fullness of her face, assuming that a (white) American audience would desire "Asian" representation without "Asian" features[51]. As in earlier iterations of Asian American representation, Cho's body was distinctly tied to concerns about Asian immigration. Translating the Asian American immigrant experience across lingual, cultural and historical barriers proved insurmountable; the show was cancelled after its first season.

The *FOTB* episode "Hi, My name is" directly addresses the issue of translation, as Evan tries to decide what name to use to open his first bank account. "Do I use my American nurse name or my Chinese name that will cause me endless struggle?!" he implores, as he looks into

[49] Cassinelli, Sarah Moon. "'If We Are Asian, Then Are We Funny?": Margaret Cho's 'All-American Girl' as the First (and Last?) Asian American Sitcom." Studies in American Humor, no. 17, 2008, pp. 131–144. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/42573541. Accessed 9 July 2021.
[50]Scholar Lisa Lowe discusses this at length in *Immigrant Acts* (1996).

the faces of his family (00:08:00-(00:08:07).[52] To illustrate the relative (un)importance of names, both Jessica and Louis flashback to their early days in America. Jessica, whose given name is Chu Tsai Hsai, reflects on a moment she had in a business class, with her then professor.

> PROFESSOR. Okay, the truth is I can't pronounce your
> name.
>
> JESSICA. You can learn how to pronounce it.
>
> PROFESSOR. Are you really going to have this conversation with everyone you meet? With everyone who reads your resume?
>
> JESSICA. It's my name. People should learn how to say it.
>
> PROFESSOR. Yes, but they probably won't. It's like Butte Juice, it was always delicious but people didn't know that until it became Geyser Mist. It was the same drink. It…just went by a different name. That's what made it successful.
>
> (00:06:18-00:06:43)

Jessica, who was initially adamant about using her given name, shifts her outlook when the professor equates her decision to a branding tactic and reinforces the narrative that to be successful one requires a particular kind of assimilation. Eventually, Jessica uses the Allman Brothers Band song "Jessica" as inspiration, indicating that not only did she choose to use an American name, but she chose one from and by the dominant culture. She chose a white brand. Interestingly, Jessica and Louis both state that Evan was somehow a random name, but given this information, the decision wasn't inherently random, as the names they selected from must have been curated in their minds, if not elsewhere.

[52] Season 2, episode 20

Louis cites (black) Louis[53], an aquarium owner he meets while a server, whose style he eventually copies.

> LOUIS. That guy had it together. He even ordered cool. 'Patty melt, real cheesy."
>
> EMORY. Onions or no onions?
>
> LOUIS. Extra onions.
>
> EMORY. [nods his head "yes" as he whistles]
>
> LOUIS. Emory gets it. So, I borrowed his style. Changing my look gave me confidence and swagger. It made me feel like I was going to be okay here.
>
> (00:11:28-00:11:45)

Even as the writers attempt to destabilize the stereotype of black gangster by satirizing the notion of a gang boss ("That's Louis. He owns the aquarium. He's what we call a fish boss. Bloop bloop bloop," (00:10:46) black Louis is never developed as a character beyond the figure whose name Asian Louis takes, and whose black cool is rooted in a dangerous, aggressive control.[54] The value, then, attributed to black Louis is seemingly arbitrary. Importantly, Louis <u>imagines</u> black Louis as aggressive—there is no backstory presented to justify this assertion. Utilizing black Louis as prop to develop Louis as a character first gives the audience a familiar entrance point into an assimilation narrative that can easily become too painful to witness and second, enables several jokes which deflect from this possible tension. Uncle Barry, Louis' first friend in America who Jessica refers to as a bum, reads as particularly foolish and contrasts Louis' black cool. The index of value is stretched to accommodate both figures.

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[53] Interestingly, black Louis is referred to as "cool" Louis in the captions.

[54] Black Louis and Asian Louis go outside to fight after encountering each other in a restaurant. The fight is discontinued when Asian Louis pukes endlessly, due to seafood poisoning.

Eddie proposes an alternate option for Evan: “Little bro, you can choose the name from your parents, the name the culture gives you or the name the streets give you” (00:16:11). Eddie renames himself Topaz as he, in a dream state, ascends to the presidency of Topaz industries, a hip-hop label/clothing line/multimedia empire. In his dream, Shaquille O’Neal, the basketball player, is the president of America, while Busta Rhymes, the rapper, works for his company. While Shaq and Busta Rhymes are legible to the audience for distinct reasons, they too function as familiar points of entrance. While both figures are featured in powerful roles, the irony behind branding which positions black male figures as consumable is not lost— though branding was originally a mark of stolen agency during slavery, it now restores value or describes the updated utility of the Black body to racial capitalism.

“Inconsistent” … in comparison to what?

“I knew this would happen” sighs Louis, as he listens to Eddie’s request for money. “The downside of the greatest country in the world. Entitled children feeling like they don’t have to work to get what they want”, he continues. “My father, your Ye-Ye, made me work hard for every penny and that work ethic is how I’m able to keep the lights on” (00:04:44-00:05:06)[55]. Louis, in rooting his lesson about diligence and hard work in the memory and actions of Yéye, Eddie’s grandfather, evokes and contrasts two social scripts[56]: that of the hard working (Asian) immigrant and the entitled/lazy American. The script, Louis suggests, that Eddie should follow is

[55] This scene is pulled from season 1, episode 6.

[56] Johnson quotes Appiah: “Collective identities provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people us in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories” (p. 12). Regarding the utility of these narratives: “These scripts provide guidelines for proper and improper behavior, for legitimate and illegitimate group membership, for social inclusion and ostracism” (p. 13). These scripts become texts for determining “racial authenticity,” whether someone is “really Black” or “really Latino” or “really White,” etc. In this way, scripts may imprison, causing “racial identity… to function a lot like social incarceration” (p. 13).

that of his grandfather: "Eddie, there are no hand-outs in the Huang family" (00:08:00). Eddie ultimately assumes the role of "Fajita boy" at his father's restaurant to acquire the video game *Shaqfu*, released by basketball player Shaquille O'Neal in 1995.

When contextualized within an index of value wherein black bodies are both fetishized and sublimated to achieve assimilation, Louis' seemingly simple and universal lesson casts a long shadow. The immediate context within which this lesson emerges is equally important: the family is still working to integrate into their still-new Orlando neighborhood, after moving from Chinatown in Washington D.C. to Florida and the audience has already witnessed Jessica's struggle to maintain her sons' "successful edge," particularly amongst the white mediocrity she perceives.[57] Though it may seem counterintuitive that Jessica is concerned with white mediocrity as I point to an index of value in which blackness is simultaneously devalued and valued, the question of class, both within the narrative and within society, emerges. Even as *Fresh Off the Boat* mobilizes particular rhetorical strategies to loosen the grip of stereotypes on the Asian American body, the position of class within its representation of a quintessential Asian American family remains static.[58] As class bifurcates race, Jessica and Louis' investment in their sons' success does not merely reflect a cultural attribute, as conveyed by the model minority myth, but particular class attributes which enjoin them to a key narrative of whiteness within the United States. If the model minority myth/stereotype simultaneously functions as both fantasy (of the nation and perhaps, of the model minority-identified subject, as Chuh states[59]) and "real" within

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[57] Episode 2, Season 1

[58] In *All-American Girl* (1994), the first show to center an Asian American family, they too are business owners.

[59] Chuh, Candice. "Asians Are the New...What?" Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, by Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2018, pp. 220–238.

this representation, the absence of class complexities renders televisual Eddie apt for mass consumption.[60]

The model minority myth, as scholar Robert G. Lee notes, emerged during a crucial conflict within the Johnson administration. Specifically, President Johnson's response to the 1964 Watts riot, the demands of African Americans for economic equity and formal political rights, alongside the gradual dismantling of Jim Crow segregation in the South, and Moynihan's response, contributed to the ideological context in which Asian Americans emerged as the model minority[61], directly contrasting the 1965 Moynihan report, which positioned the African American family as a measure against which to gauge success, or the lack there-of. Despite competing portrayals within the report, the narrative that African Americans are averse to work, undisciplined and limited in their ability to assimilate to mainstream society remains dominant. Key to the argument of the model minority myth is not merely the notion that Asian Americans meet the supposed standard set by (the most successful) white Americans, but that they exceed it. Africans Americans, however, fail to meet the measure.

In addition, the U.S.' investment in curtailing its image as fundamentally unequal in the face of possible Communist threats and the world-wide breakdown of colonial systems forced critical changes within the nation's racial structure. In her book, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (2014), scholar Ellen Wu argues that Asian

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[60] As Stuart Hall warns, "The important point is that stereotypes refer as much to what is imagined in fantasy as to what is perceived as 'real'. And, what is visually produced, by the practices of representation, is only half the story. The other half - the deeper meaning - lies in what is not being said, but is being fantasized, what is implied but cannot be shown" (263).
[61] Csathy, P. (2020, February 02). Amazon Prime Video: The Stealthy, Ominous Streaming Force. Retrieved April 10, 2020, from https://www.forbes.com/sites/petercsathy/2020/01/31/amazon-prime-video-the-quiet-ominous-streaming-force/

Americans were active collaborators in this revision, touting "their putatively 'Oriental' attributes, such as the predisposition to harmony and accommodation, the reverence for family and education, and unflagging industriousness" to enhance demands for equality (5), eventually becoming an "assimilating Other" (6).[62] Wu traces the trajectory of this transformation for both Chinese and Japanese Americans through the post-war period and into the 1960s, when "Asian Americans" were collectively popularized as model minorities in light of challenges to assimilationist doctrine posed by Civil Rights activists. To be clear, racial liberalism, which emerged after World War II, touted assimilation and integration of nonwhites as a key strategy for managing America's racial diversity. Lee explains, the shift from *race* to *ethnicity* by liberal theorists, and ultimately the government, served a key purpose: "Ethnicity theory was grounded in the belief that while certain historically anachronistic patterns of racial segregation persisted, modern American society was open to the full participation of all who were willing to participate into crisis" (267); while African Americans could previously argue that the role of the state was to improve outcomes and in some ways guarantee equality, implied in this shift is that the duty of the state was limited to the dismantling of formal, legislated barriers to participation. Although the state would enable participation, equality was an individual achievement. Asian American communities, seemingly limited in their engagement with state aide served as such an example.[63]

The under-utilization of social welfare services continues to function as a sign of achievement and successful assimilation, often in direct contrast with African Americans. In her

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[62] Wu, Ellen D. *Color of Success - Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*, Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 6.
[63] Lee, Robert G. "The Cold War Origins of the Model Minority Myth." Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-wen Shen Wu and Thomas C. Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010, pp. 256–271. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1bmzn3s.18. Accessed 6 May 2020.

analysis “The Wages of Non-Blackness: Contemporary Immigrant Rights and Discourses of Character, Productivity, and Value,” Tamara Nopper traces the erasure of Black structural vulnerability through the explicit and implicit references to African Americans in the rhetoric of immigrant rights activists. Nopper notes that not only do employers of various backgrounds valorize NB-POC in relation to African Americans, African Americans are often depicted as lazy, too-militant and demanding of rights.[64] Ultimately, she notes immigrants’ economic contribution “lies in the willingness to give more than they get, a valorization that informs the aforementioned belief that immigrants have more character than African Americans who are associated with an unwillingness to suffer as much as they purportedly should, and who are associated more generally with waste, excess, and instant gratification”.[65] The mobilization of this rhetoric mirrors the deployment of “putatively ‘Oriental’ attributes” mentioned earlier, illustrating the utility of this anti-Black narrative, or the wage of non-Blackness as Nopper identifies. The benefit of being identified as a *worker* and not a *slave*, is critical to both those invested in assimilating and the economy itself.

Afterthoughts & Conclusion

When my mother, my older sister and I emigrated from Jamaica to New York City in 2000, we left with very little. I vividly recall flying over the city and observing the well-lit bridges which dotted the landscape; the extravagant buildings that I could see from the airplane window; and the boldness of the city evidenced in the density of the space. Though I was too young to understand the gravity of the shift I was to experience; I recall feeling absence. I had never had an excessive amount of things, so I didn’t miss toys or a particular

[64] Nopper, T. K. (n.d.). The Wages of Non-Blackness: Contemporary Immigrant Rights and Discourses of Character, Productivity, and Value. InTensions, (Fall/Winter 2011) (5).
[65] Ibid, 15

material object. Instead, the absence I felt was both articulated through and amplified by the experiences I had when I started school at P.S. 68 in the Bronx. I was surrounded by a mixture of African American, first-generation West Indian and Latin American children, yet something was profoundly missing from our interactions: there seemed to be little to no shared references. Food functions as a referent and in my child's mind, articulated a kind of difference in being. For instance, I was particularly tickled about orange juice and milk together at breakfast. I experienced the heat of Jamaica through this kind of choice; mixing dairy and acid in the early morning would have made me sick by lunchtime. As I digested and wrote about Eddie's experience as he transitioned into his new Orlando neighborhood, I was reminded of moments of estrangement, wherein racial similarities, structurally produced if not culturally reified, could not bridge the distance created with place and time. Perhaps one way to remove the sublimation and fetishization of African Americans is to equip students with a vocabulary around difference that does not seek to displace others but recollects history in an attempt to both recognize and venerate.

Eddie is not an immigrant, but the framing of my relocation to New York City was similarly to the one mobilized by his immigrant parents: moving to New York city would enable a kind of growth Jamaica couldn't just as his family's move to Orlando would open new avenues for growth. After Jessica and Louis come to school to handle the aftermath of Eddie's fight with then unnamed Walter in the pilot episode, Louis declares,

> This is why. This is why we moved here. I'm sorry for what happened to Eddie but it's going to make him stronger. In fact, us coming to this new place is going to make us all stronger. I came down here and I opened a wild west restaurant because this is the Wild West, a lawless land for only the bravest of families. There is opportunity here to make a

> better life for our family. I don't want to work for your family forever, no. Me, I got big dreams. I got big plans. Things were okay for us in D.C., but I want more than 'okay' for us. (00:19:15-00:19:42)

Louis' declaration of Orlando as the wild west and his family as its victors evokes a comparison to white settlers and the violence which was necessary to "tame" the space. Even as frontier history speaks to a variety of realities, including conquest, survival, persistence, and the merging of peoples and cultures which sustained America, amplified here is a particular narrative which suspends the genocidal violence used to actualize the development of the land.

Furthermore, contextualizing Orlando as a space where dreams will flourish shields the class differences at within *FOTB*, and further, migrant realities. Louis is correct is his assertation that *his* family will survive. They are educated business owners with a kinship network of family members who have already settled in America, and though Louis does not want to work for his wife's family, he is able to tap into skill-building and seed money through those connections. Coupling this, however, with the name "Fresh Off the Boat" suggests the applicability of such a narrative to all immigrants, eliding the structural inequity which abounds in everything from access to visas to relocation funds to refugee programs.

We, migrants, are not all equal in any aspect of migration or what happens thereafter. My parents, like many others from purposely underdeveloped nations that would have been previously called the third world, could not easily access the process necessary to migrate. When they did, there were other roadblocks. My subsequent chapter, "Representation and Recovery in Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*," takes as its center Edwidge Danticat's novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) to analyze both the limits of migration and the promises of representation.[66]

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[66] Danticat, Edwidge. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Vintage, 1994.

While *Fresh Off the Boat* presents an intact—read well situated and supported— family unit able to scale class designations quickly, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* centers the trauma that migration cannot fix. Instead, what is lost and reclaimed in the act of migrating is articulated.

As opposed to reifying the myth of America as a space where dreams are born and grow to into empires, Haiti is honored as home. Many immigrant narratives often work with such a binary, wherein to be a grateful American, one must dispose of the vestiges of a homeland often articulated through negative images and references in the public sphere. Sophie, the novel's protagonist, does not dispose of home. Instead, she carries her ancestors like the hairs on her head. She explains, "I come from a place where breath, eyes and memory are one, a place from which you carry the past like the hair on your head" (234). Given that Haiti exists in the popular American imagination as a place marked by turmoil, death and lawlessness, this move—Haiti as a celebrated place—feels important to me. As the first country to abolish slavery, Haiti inaugurated a call for revolution and equality we, the African diaspora, are still working to answer.

Moreover, to understand one's body as a testament to the ancestors as they are institutionally and publicly denigrated again reverses the power dynamic that many black and brown people are subjected too. The alienation from other children I articulate earlier can also be thought of as a remnant of this reality, wherein black and brown ancestors are actively erased from history texts and, as critical race theory comes under continued assault from right wing thinkers and policy makers, classroom lessons. Perhaps an embodied relationship with my ancestors feels particularly important to me given that as an immigrant, I cannot access my dead. I cannot visit their graves nor lay flowers at their feet. Just as there is no family home that has housed four generations with ease, there is no family graveyard. I lost all three of living

grandparents in graduate school and I was unable to bury them. Within my matrilineal line, three of the last four generations have been migrants; how do you recollect the family when they are spread across continents?

CHAPTER II

Representation and Recovery in Danticat's *Breath, Eyes and Memory*

won't you celebrate with me
what i have shaped into
a kind of life? i had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did i see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.
– "won't you celebrate with me" from *Book of Light*, Lucille Clifton (25)

"I come from a place where breath, eyes and memory are one, a place from which you carry the past like the hair on your head." – Sophie Caco (234)

Like the speaker in Lucille Clifton's poem "won't you celebrate with me,"[67] Sophie, the protagonist of Edwidge Danticat's novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994, *BEM)* shapes "a kind of life" from the shards of a disquieted inheritance: that of rape and violation, fatherlessness, racism, classism and sexism.[68] Though the speaker is born in America and Sophie in Haiti, the former's description of home as "Babylon" simultaneously signals the trauma of modernity the Black diaspora collectively face rooted in the *missingness* of the Middle Passage,[69] and the potentialities for co-creation there-in. For scholar Rinaldo Walcott, this missingness originates as a void of terror, marked by an inability to wholly describe, understand and re-present the

[67] "won't you celebrate with me.'" *The Book of Light*, by Lucille Clifton, Copper Canyon Press, 1996, p. 25.
[68] Danticat, Edwidge. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Vintage, 1994.
[69]I understand the term "trauma of modernity" as characterizing the position of living "in the wake," as Christina Sharpe explains in her text *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016); the category of the post-Industrial New Poor [Bauman, 1987]; and the category to which at the global level, Frantz Fanon has given the name /es damnes, the condemned, [Fanon, 1963].

crossing both for those who endured the trip and their descendants.[70] This absence reverberates continually, as a wound characterized through the nonexistence of records and rituals for the dead; the active repression of modernity's violent origins; and the willful disregard of the "African human" and their historical development. Ultimately, the disadvantaged position of many citizens of the African diaspora functions as the most complete evidence of this missingness.

Walcott clarifies, for black diaspora people, modernity is a site of trauma and ultimately, its violent origins return to structure our present. "Babylon," a metaphor originally appropriated from the Old Testament by Rasta to characterize the institutions and borders of colonial power, exemplifies Rastafari's language-as-resistance. In creating Iyaric, or Dread Talk, Rasta worked to both recognize and resist the oppression faced by black people within Jamaica's repressive post-colonial political ethos. Clifton's reference gestures towards the extensive liberatory co-creation Rasta have manifested both at home and abroad.[71]

Without a clear model for her own liberation and amidst the *missingness* described by Walcott, Sophie "makes it up" on the bridge between history and memory. After migrating from Haiti to reunite with her biological mother Martine, Sophie must confront the legacy of rape within her family. Sophie's character arc is primarily realized through her ability to render Martine's narrative legible to herself, her descendants and the reader. Martine, who fled Haiti after being raped by a TonTon Macoute and giving birth to Sophie, is unable to articulate the

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[70] Walcott, Rinaldo. "Middle Passage: In the Absence of Detail, Presenting and Representing a Historical Void." Kronos, vol. 44, no. 1, Nov. 2018, pp.64., doi:10.17159/2309-9585/2018/v44a4.

[71] I think of Bob Marley's long reach, including the use of his music during the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa as an example. Lucky Dube, South Africa's first big reggae star after apartheid fell, extended this legacy as have South Africans who've adopted Rastafari.

event and its aftermath. Sophie exposes Martine's experience vis-à-vis her presence, enabling the reader access and shifting the trajectory of her family. Martine's rape also gestures towards another series of events within the Caco family: the virginity testing of multiple generations. Sophie's actions illuminate the potentials of representation —visual, textual and otherwise— for those who live in the missingness of the Middle Passage.

In addition, her actions realize the possibilities for compassionate co-creation which exceeds the boundaries of the novel. An example exists here, as Sophie is able to speak back to Clifton's speaker and towards the reclamation project, they are both engaged in. "won't you celebrate with me," like *BEM*, is a trauma rewriting; without carrying one's past "like the hair on your head," (234) it is impossible to rewrite the narrative from trauma victim to survivor. For Clifton's speaker, though the missingness of the Middle Passage manifests in the immediate moment as a lack of a clear reflection, the invitation to come celebrate is answered by Sophie, who through the recognition and rewriting of her mother's trauma, limits its ability to reproduce within her own children. Sophie is able to both reflect has happened (history) and subvert it (memory).[72]

By writing a narrative in which trauma is as totalizing as the Middle Passage and memory acts a bridge to both connect to and subvert historical inheritances, Danticat offers an example of representation that recognizes the binaries necessary for storytelling without reproducing binary characters. The wound Walcott describes is often experienced as loss—as the loss of ancestral connection and as such, a clear sense of who we are in the world. Others feel worthless because this missingness registers in both psychological and material realms: "my inability to be

[72] Kevin Quashie's text *Black Aliveness, or the Poetics of Being* (2021) more deeply delves into worldmaking made possible through the work of black feminist writers and thinkers. Among them is Lucille Clifton.

materially successful in spite of the long-term effects of chattel slavery amplifies other kinds of failure I possess, the foremost being an unmooring I can't seem to reconcile, because I am without historical knowledge or a clear pathway to my ancestors." Memory, Danticat posits, can and does function as a kind of reckoning and reclamation, insisting that though the ancestors may be unrecognized in and beyond the trauma of slavery, our ability to hold them is even beyond that; as I breathe, witness and grow, I carry them like the hairs on my head. In my survival, they are here.[73]

The utility of such an example becomes most obvious when placed in proximity to other, popular examples of black visual representation that outright erase the ways that, as Christina Sharpe points out, class and racial inequality in America today are "normative" and "necessary" features of American democracy "in the wake" of slavery.[74] One such show, *Black-ish*, captures a turning point in American history, where after the election of the first African American president, notions of blackness are in flux.[75] Dre, the narrator and patriarch of the show, is invested in imbuing his children with a strong sense of their "blackness," often situated in relationship to "the struggle." He perpetually worries that his children will not identify meaningfully with blackness, as they did not endure the struggles circulating around money and access he faced in childhood. Even as the show seeks to present nuanced ideas about the relationships between black identity and the lived experiences of economic, political, and social struggle, it relies on a limited, culturally reductive perception of blackness, a foil against which

[73] This sentiment echoes Maya Angelou's poem "Our Grandmothers," printed in *I Shall Not Be Moved* (1990).
[74] Sharpe, Christina Elizabeth. *In the Wake: on Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press, 2016.
[75] Created in 2014, *Black-ish* is one of several recent series satirizing investments in racial authenticity. As the title suggests, the show explores what it means to be on the peripheries of "Blackness," or Black-*ish*.

the show's nuances become visible. Racial authenticity "caricatures identity," as argued by John L. Jackson, and "imprisons them within stereotypes."[76]

In episode three of the first season, titled "The Nod," Dre's anxieties erupt when his son does not nod to another black teenager he passes, on his way into the private school he attends. Jay-Z's "It's a Hard Knock life" plays unironically in the background, as Dre, perturbed, explains that his son should nod "to acknowledge that you've seen him" (00:01:00). A sense of community is built into the nod, Dre insists. His son responds, "But I don't know him," to which Dre asks "What does that matter? You two have something in common" (00:01:00-00:01:06). His son, confused, is unaware of their similarities. Dre asks, "You don't know what that is, do you?" to which his son answers again with a bewildered face (00:01:06-00:01:11). Two notions of sight are at play here, one mobilized by Dre and another by his son. Dre is invested in reversing the relationship between black bodies and white public spaces, as black people are often rendered invisible while sight for his son is dependent upon personal, individual knowledge. Dre understands "seeing" as both reaffirming his relationship to the Black community and those who are often rendered invisible in a white supremacist society. His son, who grew up with a black president, emblematizes an emergent concept and mode of racialization: existing in the "post-racial" moment and ideology following Obama's election renders white supremacy a thing of the very distant past.

The conversation about generational differences continues as the scene switches to their home. Rainbow, Dre's wife, his father, and his son are gathered around their dining room table. Rainbow, Dre's half-white, half-black wife, asserts "Dre, please don't turn this into a thing! The truth is Junior's generation has a different perspective on the struggle than you and pops"

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[76] Jackson, John L. *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.

(00:01:59). Dre and his father, in turn, reflect on another "black habit"— "a man scrunching up his face when a woman with a big butt walk by"—Dre again asserts, "you don't know what that is about, do you" (00:02:14)? His son is again confused. This refrain was first uttered when Dre mentioned the nod and is again evidence of his child's racialized "whiteness." These moments of blackness are performative, as Dre never fully explains why this is necessary. In his explanation of community, he falls short of explaining to his son the importance of "seeing," and here, he falls short of explaining the reasons behind such a reaction—simply asserting that it is black, or "basic black," in the words of Dre and his father.

An overly simplistic depiction of blackness emerges, one without historical or geographical legs. According to an analysis of popular television programs during the April 2014 to June 2016 television seasons conducted by The Opportunity Agenda, immigrants are significantly underrepresented in popular broadcast, cable, and streaming television shows.[77] *Black-ish* does not attempt to complicate the general notion of blackness by reaching towards the diaspora, even though there is a long history of intracommunal building between West Indians, African Americans and Africans. Even if an elaboration is withheld in part because African American audiences may not require such an explanation, without the useful complications offered by diasporic blackness, the show misses an opportunity to offer a dynamic portrayal of African Americans and the collective socio-cultural development leading up to Obama's

[77] "Foreign-born nationals currently comprise roughly 13.5 percent of the U.S. population, a figure that increases to 16.9 percent after also factoring in the estimated 11.1 million undocumented immigrants. Yet between fall 2014 and spring 2016, identifiable immigrant characters comprised just 6 percent of leading and minor character roles". Lazarus , Austen, et al. "Power of POP: Media Analysis of Immigrant Representation in Popular TV Shows." Power of POP: Media Analysis of Representations of Immigrants in Popular TV Shows, The Opportunity Agenda, 2017, www.opportunityagenda.org/explore/resources-publications/power-pop.

presidency for other audiences. If money indeed whitens, perhaps an explanation of this relationship would be necessary, as opposed to the forceful hand Dre uses.

Mobilizing racial sincerity, antithetical to racial authenticity, might also be useful, as racial authenticity is an inadequate measuring stick.[78] If racial sincerity is an incomplete analytical model, as suggested by John L. Jackson, he is denying his son the agency to search for his own identity.[79] As explained by Jackson,

> To talk exclusively in terms of racial authenticity is to risk ossifying race into a simple subject-object equation, reducing people to little more than objects of racial discourse, characters in racial scripts, dismissing race as only and exclusively the primary cause of social domination and death. At the same time, this position kills some of what is most interesting about the how's and why's of racial living.

In this case, Andre does not fit into the historical or "authentic" narrative Dre imagines.

Through an investigation of the structural and spatiotemporal positionality of the black female body within *BEM*, this chapter elucidates an alternative route to legibility. Whereas shows like *Black-ish* depend upon multiple kinds of erasure to produce legibility, Sophie, *BEM*'s narrator instead employs flesh memory and rememory, more particularly, the re-collection of the Caco family and her ancestors, to mitigate erasure. The retrieval of the mutilated female body—in this

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[78] "Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity." Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity, by John L. Jackson, University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 15.

[79] The question of money and class is explored in several subplots, as the two youngest children frustrate Rainbow, through conversations about possible careers (advertising agent vs doctor) and Dre makes a new friend—Charlie—at work, who comes to function as the exaggerated, lower class black figure. Charlie has no boundaries and persistently overshares, embodying the fears of middle- and upper-class black people, who are loath to deal with the perceived overfamiliarity of the lower classes, whose desire to bond over "blackness" knows no bounds. Television has reified the narrative that to be black is to be poor, and the character of Charlie embodies.

case, the women within her family from cycles of trauma— enables an eventual renaming which marks the nation and clarifies the promise of representation.

Late poet Akilah Oliver provides a definition of flesh memory in her collection of poems *the she said chronicles: flesh memory* (2021),

> flesh memory 1. a text, a language, a mythology, a truth, a reality, an invented as well as literal translation of everything that we've ever experienced or known, whether we know it directly or through some type of genetic memory, osmosis, or environment. 2. the body's truths and realities. 3. the multiplicity of language and realities that the flesh holds. 4. the language activated in the body's memory (4).[80]

Oliver's definition ponders the knowledge that exists within the body as an alternative to other modes of knowing. Flesh memory, then, inverts and expands the relations [between parents, children and trauma afterlives], offering presence (bodily immediacy, 'genetic memory,' and 'osmosis') in the face of historical loss; this loss is at once conceived of as more distant—possibly generations removed—and more intimate, figured not only as narrative, but as bodily experience.[81]

Sophie greets the challenge of migration, of adopting and realizing the (dis)connection she shares with her mother, through a focus on recuperating a usable past in the midst of compound trauma. The usable past Sophie apprehends exceeds that which functions within her mind, instead building upon flesh and rememory, or both the bodies and flesh of her people. The

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[80] Please note that this text was originally printed in 1999 but went out of print until earlier this year, wherein it was reprinted by Nightboat books. Oliver, Akilah. *The She Said Dialogues: Flesh Memory*. Edited by Tracie Morris, Nightboat Books, 2021.

[81] Smith, Laura Trantham. "From Rupture to Remembering: Flesh Memory and the Embodied Experimentalism of Akilah Oliver." MELUS, vol. 35, no. 2, 2010, pp. 112. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20720710. Accessed 28 Nov 2020.

difference Oliver recognizes between the body and the flesh is reminiscent of theorist Hortense Spillers' designation between flesh and body, which appears in her monumental essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book."[82] Flesh exceeds the body, in that what can be done to the flesh, the ritualized violence of the slavery, accomplishes a separate task than that which is done to the person. Its utility exceeds that of a person because the choice/mind/self-direction of personhood is irrelevant; instead, flesh is attentive to the violence it suffers or its (re)direction and subjection by others. As Spillers clarifies, "I would make a distinction in this case between 'body' and 'flesh'; and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject positions" (67). To be liberated is to control both flesh and body, to mobilize and direct both the soul/mind/totality of being.

Recalling hook's "oppositional gaze," I first analyze Sophie's transformation upon her arrival to New York City in order to understand and contextualize the disruption Sophie facilitates within the Caco family system. Two moments of reversal are critical to the trauma rewriting Sophie facilitates: her decision to take her daughter Bridgitte with her to Haiti in the aftermath of her own compound trauma, and her choice to "deflower" herself in the aftermath of her mother's testing. I put deflower in quotes here because hymens are fictional. There is no scientific test to measure a hymen or to prove if one is "intact" or not. The reclamation of their collective violent past is evidenced in the representation Sophie finds in their familial patterns and further, the stories told and retold during rituals like burials and births. As Sophie clarifies, "It was something that was essentially Haitian. Somehow, early on, our song makers and tale weavers had decided that we were all daughters of the land" (230).

[82] "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Black, White, and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, by Hortense J. Spillers, Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003, pp. 203–230.

Scholar Mireille Rosello clarifies in her essay, "Marassa with A Difference" (2010), no record of Martine's trauma would be accessible to readers without Sophie's ability to find a new poetics of representation.[83] She terms Sophie's ability to witness her mother's trauma, enabling us as readers an entrance into her narrative as well, a textual "reappropriation of violence." Sophie's retrieval of her own mutilated female body; that of her mother Martine; her aunt Atie; and the family matriarch Ifé through the reappropriation described proposes an alternate model of survival within global racial capitalism, answering the calls of Wynter to think, function and be from an alternate liminal space and knowledge.[84]

New Eyes

After her first night in New York City with Martine, her biological mother, Sophie is transformed:

> I looked at my red eyes in the mirror while splashing cold water over my face. New eyes seemed to be looking back at me. A new face altogether. Someone who had aged in one day, as though she had been through a time machine, rather than an airplane. Welcome to New York, this face seemed to be saying. Accept your new life. I greeted the challenge, like one greets a new day. *As my mother's daughter and Tante Atie's child*. (49; emphasis added)

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[83] "Marassa With a Difference." Edwidge Danticat: A Reader's Guide, by Mireille Rosello, University of Virginia Press, 2010, pp. 117–129.

[84] "Afterword: 'Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman'." *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, by Sylvia Wynter, Africa World Press, 1997, pp. 355–366.

The "time machine" Sophie references functions as a portal through which she accesses (re)memory[85], or "recollecting and remembering as in reassembling the members of the body, the family, the population of the past"[86] (324) and its effects are immediately palpable. Martine's nightmares, which recall the night of her rape and Sophie's inception, specifically trigger a shift in Sophie, as if she is experiencing *both* the past and the present, aging as she traverses time.

Up until she is sent to New York City to reunite with Martine, Sophie lives in Croix-des-Rosets with Atie, her aunt. The opening sentence of the novel, "A flattened, and drying daffodil was dangling off the little card that I made my aunt Atie for Mother's Day" (3) elucidates the connection between them. Sophie's admission, that she is Martine's daughter but Atie's child, further underscores the differences in their relationships which unfold as the narrative progresses; kinship operates both horizontally and vertically within the novel, in that it is both oriented towards lineage yet exceeds this designation. The loving intimacy Sophie shares with Atie severely contrasts the violence she experiences with Martine. Trapped in a past that infiltrates and renders meaningless the present and the future, Martine experiences a "death of time"[87]; each night the (past) event of her rape becomes her (immediate) present and her future too, in that an end to the nightmares is never anticipated and never comes.

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[85] I bracket (re) here because Sophie accesses both the original memory and the recollection at once, as Martine relives the moment as if it is the present perpetually: "It's like getting raped every night" (190).

[86] *Mouth Full of Blood: Essays, Speeches, Meditations*, by Toni Morrison, Vintage, 2020, pp. 322–326.

[87] "The phrase 'the death of time' refers to the discontinuity between past, present and future that survivors of collective trauma experienced and transmitted to their children" (611). Connolly, Angela. "Healing the Wounds of Our Fathers: Intergenerational Trauma, Memory, Symbolization and Narrative." Journal of Analytical Psychology, vol. 56, no. 5, 2011, pp. 607–626., doi:10.1111/j.1468-5922.2011.01936. x.

Martine's disordered relationship to time is mirrored in the narrativization of Sophie's experiences. While Sophie is the narrator, the fundamental rupture lies in neither her exile nor her testing but Martine's. Raped by a TonTon Macoute, she leaves Sophie behind, and flees to New York City. If Sophie ages as she traverses time to maintain a relationship with her, it is because Martine exists in the present but lives in the past. As Sophie clarifies, New York City did not relieve Martine from hard labor or usher her into a life of comfort as Atie anticipated: "It was as though she had never stopped working in the cane fields after all" (42).

Recalling hook's "oppositional gaze,"[88] Sophie's "new eyes" are produced first, through her position as a spectator. Sophie occupies the position of spectator through the decisions of those around her, as she is neither allowed to participate in the decision-making process nor the timeline for her departure. In fact, she is the last to know of the decision, as a plane ticket arrives almost immediately after Atie is directed by Martine to send her daughter. Atie also shares the information with M. Augustin (who tells his wife and she her friends) before Sophie is directly given the news. In the midst of this moment, Sophie is aware of her gaze: "I tried to listen without looking directly at the women' face. That would have been disrespectful, as bad as speaking without being spoken to" (12). Sophie is again chastised as she hears the conversation: "She gave me a reprimanding look that said: 'Why aren't you playing with the other children? I quickly lowered my eyes, pretending to stuff some random pebbles on the ground" (13).

Sophie's position as spectator is reinforced as she witnesses the (re)presentation of her mother's rape: "…I heard that same voice screaming as though someone was trying to kill her. I rushed over, but my mother was alone thrashing against the sheets. I shook her and finally woke

[88] hooks, b. (1992). "The Oppositional Gaze." In *Black looks: Race and Representation* (pp. 115-131). Boston: South End Press

her up" (48). In addition, her relationship to Martine's nightmares, produced when words betray the gravity of a traumatic event, function as the opposite of storytelling. If the oppositional gaze promises to break open the coeval violence of race and gender,[89] Sophie's new eyes foreshadows her position as the Caco woman who breaks several intergenerational cycles of violence, including virginity testing, and more generally, understands her liberation as that which exists outside of commodification. She transforms from an innocent child who produces cards with flowers to an adultified child who protects, to a woman in opposition to violence faced by the women in her lineage.

Disruptions, Part 1

In understanding the disruption Sophie facilitates within the Caco family system, two moments of reversal are of primary concern to me. Whereas Martine is raped and leaves Sophie behind to flee to New York City, Sophie takes Bridgitte with her to Haiti in the aftermath of her own compound trauma. This seemingly simple reversal is coupled with another, Sophie's choice to deflower herself in the aftermath of her mother's testing.

Sophie's virginity is initially tested by her mother after she returns from an outing with Joseph, her neighbor and secret love interest. She is again in the position of spectator: "In my mind, I tried to relive all the pleasant memories I remembered from my life. My special moments with Tante Atie and with Joseph and even with my mother" (84). Sophie's decision "to see Tante Atie's face" (84) within the immediate aftermath is perhaps the beginning of "looking back," or

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[89] Ibid. As hooks explains, to mobilize the oppositional gaze, she would "not be hurt by the absence of black female presence, or the insertion of 'violating representation,' interrogated the work, cultivated a way to look past race and gender for aspects of content, form, language" (122).

disidentifying with the spectacle of regression presented to her.[90] Like the black female spectators described by bell hooks who shut down the parts of themselves that object to racism and sexism within popular cinema to momentarily identify with the admiration given to white women on screen, Sophie could choose to withstand the testing like the women before her, in order to preserve the relationship she and her mother had been building. After all, her mother tells her the story of the Marassas to distract her (84) but suggests an incestuous bond therein: "You and I we could be like *Marassas*. You are giving up a lifetime with me. Do you understand" (85)?

According to scholar Mireille Rosello, the position of the critic is compromised when confronted with a representation of rape. Are we, as critics, to foreground the means by which the trauma is created, "the undeniably literary qualities of the novel" (117), or the rape of the character?[91] To say, however, that the reader is ultimately overpowered by the novel would be to deny the interpretive freedom enabled by the narrative itself. From this juncture, Rosello instead reads the "textual trick" that becomes a textual performance: Sophie's appropriation of the marassa folktale Martine retells as she tests her daughter. Though Martine tells the story as she is assaulting Sophie in such a way that the story becomes indistinguishable from the assault itself, Sophie does not opt into the tale, an incestuous relationship with her mother or the cycle of testing with her own daughter. Danticat makes a "specifically literary contribution to the representation of rape" by inviting us to reconsider the distinction not between fact and fiction, but the narrator who can choose to make rape the subject of a story and the body defined by an

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[90] hooks describe some black female spectator's ability to pull pleasure from cinema by shutting down parts of the self that objects to racism and sexism in order to glean comfort as submitting "to that spectacle of regression through identification" (121)
[91] "Marassa With A Difference." Edwidge Danticat: A Reader's Guide, by Mireille Rosello, University of Virginia Press, 2010, pp. 117–129.

event that usurps the place that the storyteller should normally occupy (122). Sophie ultimately enacts a "new poetics of representation," (122) enabling readers to access Martine's tale even while she is unable to tell it. While Martine's position as storyteller and witness is usurped by horrific dreams, Sophie narrates the representations of the trauma and its effects.

I agree with Rosello that Danticat produces a specifically literary contribution to the representation of rape by distinguishing the witness who narrates the trauma from the body who endures it, yet the *promise* of representation beyond the confines of a literary work also exists in such an intervention, wherein though the subject is unable to wholly inhabit their subjectivity, their narrative is still presented *and* in such a way that enables the liberation of others. According to Hall, visual representation constantly falls outside of fact and fiction, instead suggesting *both* what is imagined about Othered subjects and what is considered real. The imagining, as clarified by Wahneema Lubiano, is *ongoing* and as such, remaking and making blackness through each production.[92] With its heavy reliance on memory, and specifically the folklore of the Haitian peasant class to anchor the novel, Danticat speaks back to missingness produced by the Middle Passage and the underdevelopment marked by that class position while also presenting a narrative in which the narrative recognizes the binaries necessary for storytelling without utilizing them to produce characters irresponsible in their responses to racial capitalism or fundamentally un-whole.

An example of black aesthetic theorizing, Sophie never presents a positive or negative fantasy of her mother for readers to contend with, instead choosing to grapple with the connections she makes about her mother's narrative and her position therein. In addition,

[92] Lubiano, Wahneema. "Standing In for the State: Black Nationalism and 'Writing' the Black Subject." Is It Nation Time? Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism, University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. 156–164.

Sophie's continual choice to recollect her mother (upon "greeting the challenge" after arriving to New York City (49); upon confronting her mother about the testing (170), for example) is a choice to recollect black futurity, as the black mother is both the material and metaphoric site of collective past and black potentiality. The peace Sophie claims at the end of the novel is only possible through such a reclamation.

Disruptions, Part 2

The importance of the representational choices Danticat makes is again realized in Sophie's observation as she prepares to begin school in New York City:

> A lot of other mothers from the nursing home where she worked had told her that their children were getting into fights in school because they were accused of having HBO—Haitian Body Odor. Many of the American kids even accused Haitians of having AIDS because they heard on television that only the "Four Hs" got AIDS—Heroin addicts, Hemophiliacs, Homosexuals and Haitians. (51)

The positionality of Haiti within the American imagination, exemplified through accusations of poor hygiene and disease, is reminiscent of much bare life imagery which has circulated within the international sphere for Haiti's existence. This imagery includes both post-emancipation narratives and later Hollywood films, filled with stereotypes of voodoo, zombies and untethered bodies marked only by suffering.[93] Haiti continually returns as a liminal space contrasting the social and political practices which constitute life in Western society. The fact that Sophie must return to Haiti to undo the damage realized in America directly works against such a narrative. Upon speaking with her grandmother about her marriage to Joseph and the effect of testing, she

[93] Fischer, Sibylle. "Haiti Fantasies of Bare Life." The Idea of Haiti: Rethinking Crisis and Development, by Millery Polyné, University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

clarifies "I call it humiliation. I hate my body. I am ashamed to show it to anybody, including my husband. Sometimes I feel like I should be off somewhere by myself. That is why I am here" (123).

Whereas Rosello contrasts two moments of bodily shift to evidence Sophie's ability to "transform hurt into a love letter" (123),[94] I instead suggest that she completely opens up the possibility of agency when she opts to use a pestle to remove the veil that held her mother's hand back—her hymen. Sophie's nightmare, in which she fears her mother would "squeeze" her into a photo frame, entrapping her (8) and the instance in Haiti Express in which she desires to "shrink… and slip into the envelope" to reach Atie (51) both entail her physical diminishing. While she is protected by Atie in the initial scene and willing to transform in the second to experience Atie's support and affection, her choice to deflower herself does not require her to become less, as much as change form and initiate a new set of circumstances. Importantly, Sophie's goes to the kitchen to retrieve the pestle but does not pierce her flesh immediately; instead, she shares the tale of a woman who wouldn't stop bleeding with the reader before proceeding. The woman bleeds for twelve long years, "blood constantly spurting out of her unbroken skin" (87) as she visits doctors and specialists but is unable to find a cure. Finally, she visits Erzulie who transforms her into a butterfly. The metamorphosis doubly signifies transformation, as she is transformed into a butterfly, the very animal who signifies transformation due to its life processes.

Though Sophie does not have to choose between existing in non-human or human form, she must choose what *kind* of woman she wishes to be, just as the spectator's hooks describe

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[94] Rosello, Mireille. "Edwidge Danticat: A Reader's Guide." Edwidge Danticat: A Reader's Guide, edited by Martin Munro, University of Virginia Press, 2010, pp. 117–129.

must choose how they wish to participate in the debilitating narratives presented to them through cinema. Sophie's choice both ends the relationship she has with her mother rooted in fear and possession, and initiates several others, including marriage to Joseph and a journey to recover comprehensive intimacy and a loving relationship to her body.

The story is one of two within this section of the text, with the other being the tale of the marassas Martine shares with Sophie during testing. The re-emergence of Haitian folklore within this section (other stories appear in the initial section of the text and in the latter two sections) both foreshadows Sophie's return to Haiti and offers a ground for her to stand on. The folklore interwoven within the text undergirds the position memory holds within the novel, as folklore is both the collective memory of her community, and that which Sophie recalls when she needs to process what is happening around her. Moreover, matriarch Ifé's declaration before sharing a tale, "Let the words bring wings to our feet," underscores the importance of both stories themselves and (re)telling them: without the storyteller, the story dies yet without the representations therein, the listener risks remaining trapped, without the liberation the story can offer.

Though Sophie struggles to physically have sex with her husband during the first year of her marriage and hates her body after birth, she ultimately claims a space for herself that previous Caco women are not able to. She begins a journey resolved by returning home to Haiti, her ancestors and her people. As Rosello suggests, *BEM* urges readers to clarify the distinction between narrators who can *choose* to tell a narrative of trauma and the body defined by the trauma yet incapable of narrativizing the tale. I add however, that readers are furthermore offered an alternate model of a spectator who mobilizes an oppositional gaze to not merely break from the coercive power of her mother's trauma but more specifically, the objectification and

commodification embedded within modernity, illustrated through Martine's totalizing trauma. While Sophie is able to narrativize Martine's tale, interrupting the totalizing nature of her trauma, she also offers a model for interacting with trauma one cannot retell.

The commodification of Sophie, which leads to her testing, happens only after she is objectified by her mother. This begins upon their first meeting, when Sophie descends from the plane and is "spun like a top," so Martine can inspect her (40). The way Martine treats Sophie's body is alarming: she spins her, with no thought of asking Sophie to do this herself. As Martine's daughter, is Sophie herself first or an object for Martine to do with what she wills? If Sophie were her own being, wouldn't she be asked to "model," as some Jamaicans would say, as to show off herself? Would an adult spin another adult around, one they have rarely formally interacted with? Martine continues to kiss Sophie on the lips, then her cheeks and to pat her on the head (41). Perhaps condescending, her doll-like treatment of Sophie foreshadows what is to come, the presentation of an actual doll who holds Sophie's place for Martine.[95]

In the moment Sophie meets the doll, "caramel colored with a fine pointy nose" (44), she becomes aware of her difference: "I had never seen an infant picture of myself, but somehow I knew that it was me. Who else could it have been? I looked for traces of in the child, a feature that was my mother's but still mine too. It was the first time in my life that I noticed I looked like no one in my family" (45). This moment will repeat several times, as Sophie observes others searching for physical similarities between herself and her mother. The pain of the dissimilarity

[95] In her discussion regarding the dimensions of objectification, Nussbaum (1995, 257) lists seven different forms: instrumentality (treating as a tool), denial of autonomy (treating as lacking autonomy), inertness (treating as lacking agency), fungibility (treating as interchangeable), violability (treating as permissible to smash), ownership (treating as saleable), and denial of subjectivity (treating as lacking experience and feelings) (257). A tension exists within between protection and control, though at eighteen, sexual exploration is appropriate behavior.

is realized when Martine admits, ". now when I look at your face, I think it's true what they say. A child out of wedlock looks like its father" (61). Sophie looks neither like her mother, nor her placeholder; she is a remnant of rape, and her mother admits as much.

Martine warns Sophie: "You are going to work hard here, and no one is going to break your heart because you cannot read or write' (44). Inscribed within Martine's words are first, the Caco family's position as peasants, and thereinafter, the sexual economy in which they must survive as peasants. If a commodity is an external object whose value is established by use, and use, convention, Sophie's virginity, and by extension Sophie, is commodified due to its potential use and the value therein. The convention as clarified by Sophie's grandmother is male pleasure; a husband expects to spill virginal blood on his marriage bed, and it is the duty of the women of the family to make it so. While the cost of protecting the value of virginity is astronomical, the cycle continues as a kind of family tradition, with Ifé testing, or raping, both Atie and Martine, and Martine testing Sophie. The liminal space in which they exist is excavated by these very actions.

Memory and Liberty

The initial scene of Sophie's return to Haiti clarifies two key tropes within the latter half of the novel: memory and liberty. Upon disembarking from the taptap van, she clarifies to the driver: "I need to remember" (95). That she admits this as they discuss other Haitians who forget creole (or claim to forget creole) upon their return recalls Fanon's analysis of the colonized subject and language. The scene concludes as Sophie hears the female street vendors call to each other, "'Ou libéré?" Are you free from your heavy load" (95)? That the women both carry the loads and check in on each other, particularly in a moment in which the driver desires Sophie and would crawl inside her dress and live there (93), both elucidates for the reader the positionality

of women within the community and foreshadows other key details which emerge as the section develops.

Sophie's ambivalence towards capitalism is initially evidenced in her relationship to creole upon returning to Haiti. As Fanon clarifies in the first chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, "to speak means being able to use a certain syntax and processing the morphology of such and such a language, but it means above all consuming a culture and bearing a civilization" (2). Her choice to both remember and utilize creole when she arrives is commended by the driver as he remarks "People who have been away from Haiti fewer years than you, they return and pretend they speak no creole" (95). Sophie ultimately does not adopt a language different than the community in which she is born, even after it has come to constitute part of her identity. The transformation Fanon describes, of a split and a shift evidenced through such an adoption never comes. Instead, the journey she begins by removing her hymen is concluded in Haiti. The shift away from community and towards the metropole Fanon suggests is seeming expected, as evidenced by the driver, yet it is Louise's prodding which reflects another side of this reality—a desire for the seeming safety and opportunity America represents. Upon seeing her, Louise asks "'How is there?' Her eyes were glowing. 'Is it like they say? Large? Grand? Are there really pennies on the streets and lots of maids jobs" (98)? Even as they discuss the precarity in attempting to reach America by boat, Louise insists "Spilled water is better than a broken jar" (99).

The investment Louise feels is mirrored in Atie's reaction upon reuniting with Sophie. "We have always heard that it is grand there. Is it really as grand as they say, New York?" The tension introduced with the evocation of Fanon is further fleshed out, as Sophie responds, "It's a place where you can easily lose yourself." Interrogating the supposed differences between the

metropole and Haiti, Atie clarifies: "Grand or not grand, I am losing myself here too" (104). The co-constitutive nature of state violence is evidenced within these two scenes, as though Fanon speaks to the violence of colonization and its prolonged effects upon both those at home and abroad, the ever-shifting but never-changing reality of colonial power suggests that the positionality of Louise, Atie and Sophie will never be alleviated without an internal modification; Atie is suffering like Louise is suffering like Sophie is suffering. The border itself merely changes the kinds of violence they will experience, not their chances of experiencing violence.

The importance of Sophie's return to Haiti is mediated through her initial re-collection of her expatriate mother and their individual and collective memories of trauma. This reassembling of all members of the family evidences the multiple ways in which Morrison's concept of rememory animates the text. In her discussion of rememory and *Beloved* (1987), Morrison states "not only is the major preoccupation of the central characters that of reconstituting and recollecting a usable past…but also the narrative strategy the plot formation turns on the stress of *remembering, its inevitability, the chances for liberation that lie within the process*" (324, emphasis added). Because *BEM*'s plot is both *attentive to* and *directed by* the trauma the characters experience, liberation is fundamentally tied to remembering; Martine must recall then confront the moments of her rape and her daughters' inception to quell her nightmares and finally be freed from their psychic hold; Atie must release her hesitation as an adult learner and remember letters to write and read, eventually declaring herself a poet and embracing her bisexuality; the entire family must recount their history of testing to eventually purge the practice from the family system while Sophie must evoke her lineage and ancestors to shift their collective.

In developing and mobilizing rememory, Morrison desired to both liberate herself and her readers. She clarifies, “I could strike out for new territory: to find a way to free my imagination of the impositions and limitations of race and explore the consequences of its centrality in the world and in the lives of the people I was hungry to write about” (323). The impositions of race she references are laid bare elsewhere, in the national history she could not trust nor the writers she could not reference, as a reference there-of would corroborate and reify the totalizing impact of race/racial reality (literary or historical) she wished to subvert (324). In choosing to mobilize her own literary heritage of slave narratives, she binds the reader to a new kind of thinking and looking—for to redirect the readers’ attention from that which was already studied/reified/referenced/canonized to an alternate set of facts and histories forces another kind of seeing— generating a new demonic ground from which Danticat would emerge with the writing of *BEM*.[96]

To evoke Wynter, the governing system of meaning Morrison identifies is generated through history; to wage a war (and win!) between history and memory is to enable the liminal space to speak, a space not governed and legitimized through the nation-state by way of recorded history but instead that which is rooted in the folk/dispossessed/new poor and flesh memory. A memory is told and retold to maintain its beingness while history survives because it is simultaneously legitimized as it is recorded; the archive is the retelling. Morrison legitimizes the liminal space through the memory of the dispossessed, enabling Danticat to do so thereafter: the mother soared, and the daughter knew her name.[97]

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[96] McKittrick, Katherine. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
[97] Griffin, Farah Jasmine. “That the Mothers May Soar and the Daughters May Know Their Names: A Retrospective of Black Feminist Literary Criticism.” Signs, vol. 32, no. 2, 2007, pp. 483–507. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/508377. Accessed 2 Feb. 2021.

The recollection and retelling of silenced ancestral experiences are likewise central to the radical strategy of survival mirrored in Sophie's experiences. If, as Morretti argues, the bildungsroman is a vital cultural technology for the legitimation of capitalism, in that it naturalizes the capitalist order by rendering its perpetual and structural crises as temporary events in a progressive historical arc toward social stability ultimately functioning as a "symbolic form,"[98] *BEM* offers a critical complication: Sophie's narrative culminates in a return to her ancestors and Haiti, a space continually (re)presented as dying and dead; in perpetual decay; cursed; filled with illegitimate figures on the outskirts; filled with bare life[99]. She returns to the *past*, refuting the continual march of modernity towards the future and an "uncomplicated" adaptation to and settlement within the capitalist order. Sophie is liberated by way of laying down her burdens to, for and with her ancestors; even as Sophie grasps for her words, Ifé her grandmother gives her some: "Listen, before it passes. *Parol gin pie zel*. The words can give wings to your feet…There is always a place where, if you listen closely in the night, you will hear your mother telling a story and at the end of the tale, she will ask you this question: 'Ou libéré?' Are you free my daughter?' Now, she said, you will know the answer" (234). "'Ou libéré?" can function as the [metaphorical] question Morrison asked her ancestors after excavating their experiences from the recesses of history and repositioning them within the

[98] Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, Verso, 2000, p. 11. "[the bildungsroman] has produced a phenomenology that makes normality interesting and meaningful as normality" (11, italics in original).

[99] "Fischer, Sibylle. "The Idea of Haiti: Rethinking Crisis and Development," by Millery Polyné, University of Minnesota Press, 2013, pp. 69–86.

American imaginary just as it functions as the literal and metaphorical question Sophie, and Danticat, through her own repositioning of the Caco narrative, asks and answers.

The new poetics of representation (122), as Rosello suggests, Sophie initiates is not merely responsible for her own survival but the survival of her mother too, as the novel cannot exist without a perspective besides and beyond Martine's. Martine, in her failure to "organize herself and thereafter, her tale" (122) risks reinforcing the silence of trauma.[100] In losing time, Martine forecloses the possibility to coherently fashion a narrative regarding her trauma; without such a narrative, we the reader and witness could not exist. Moreover, to witness Sophie's reversal, or the ocular shifts she lends both to her family and the reader, is to witness a lifting of the liminal space or the space of loss Smith demarcates in her analysis of Oliver, or the "African-American female misnaming" (258) as Spillers clarifies.

Sophie's reclamation of her interior space is a reclamation out of the liminal space/the place of loss/misnaming because it reverses the fungibility /violability of the Black female body. If Sophie's body is a meeting ground of Martine's various investments, including Martine's desire to control; her neighbors' investments in the 'right' bond between mother and child; and Atie's protective and loving intimacy and collective investment in progress (or futurity, or as Martine states "holding the heads" high of all who have come before her), how can she claim any space for herself? Marc, Martine's boyfriend also projects his desires unto Sophie: after she clarifies her aspiration to be a secretary, she notes "He didn't seem too impressed" (56). While the concluding moments of the text seek to speak to Martine's liberation, Sophie constructs her own.

[100] Rosello, Mireille. "Edwidge Danticat: A Reader's Guide." Edwidge Danticat: A Reader's Guide, edited by Martin Munro, University of Virginia Press, 2010, pp. 117–129

Theorist Hortense Spillers states "Even though the captive flesh/body has been liberated, dominant symbolic activity, the ruling episteme that releases the dynamics of naming and valuation," (or in Sophie's case, "marassas" (85); "young charcoal covered beauty" (94)), remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation so that it is as if neither time nor history, nor historiography and its topics, shows movement, as the human subject is 'murdered' over and over again by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism, showing itself in endless disguise" (68).[101] The "archaism" Spillers references manifests in both the cyclic testing the Caco's face and the reproduction of the class system. Obsessed with improvement, the testing is done to protect Sophie's commodified virginity in order to enable her to rise in rank or to leave behind the peasant position of her family. After all, if America's streets are lined with pennies, what else would be possible? Dismissed therein is the impact of the violence Martine faces and the ways in which they mount her psyche; while marriage to a respectable Haitian man is presented as the conscious goal for Martine, her desire to control and to own in the face of destabilizing trauma is the real motivation.

In returning to Haiti for Martine's funeral, Sophie describes her mother as the "heavy luggage that went under the plane" (228), reminiscent of enslaved fore-parents who were human-as-cargo beneath ships crossing the same sea. Building upon this evocation, the final chapter of *BEM* offers an alternate positioning/naming of the Black ungendered female body. Martine, who fled Haiti after the death of her laboring father in a sugarcane field and her violation at the hands of a TonTon Macoute, suffers a similar unmaking as her foreparents who were culturally unmade as they were "thrown in the midst of a figurative darkness that 'exposed' their destinies to an

[101] "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Black, White, and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, by Hortense J. Spillers, Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003, pp. 203–230.

unknown course" (72). In constructing a narrative in which a survivor of trauma is unable to narrativize that reality, experiences a death of time and language, births a child from the violation she cannot mother due to physical resemblances to the father-violator yet one she aims to protect through commodification and another through death, Danticat positions the reader that much closer to slavery's machinations and impacts. She also implores the reader—in the vein of Spillers and Wynter—to speak truth, as Sophie eventually frees herself by speaking of all the buried bits and pieces.

The freedom imbued in the cycle of death and rebirth is exhumed through Sophie's knowledge of the folk canon: "She is going to Guinea, or she is going to be a star. She's going to be butterfly or a lark in a tree. She's going to be free" (228). At the makeshift wake, Sophie realizes "it was neither my mother nor my Tante Atie who had given all the mother-and-daughter motifs to all the stories they told and all the songs they sang. It was something that was essentially Haitian. Somehow early on, our song makers and tale weavers had decided that *we were all daughters of this land*" (230). To claim the ungendered black female body as the body of the collective nation, such that songs of women's lives ("Ring sway to mother. Ring stays with mother. Pass it. Pass it along. Pass me. Pass me along") are sung at wakes and other rites of passage is to refute the historical abject/subjectless positioning of captive flesh. The narrative energies which undergird the naming and renaming of the nation within the parameters of Daughter does not come from the grid of associations stemming from slavery. Instead, Sophie's revelation points us towards an alternate body of knowledge, an alternate means of naming. Martine's freedom is claimed beyond the phantoms of rape and suicide. The collective humiliation of Martine's trauma does not force a (re)naming of Martine or the Caco women within a grid of associations stemming from enslavement of colonialism; she is dressed in her

most crimson dress because she is going to Guinea, not heaven and she is named Daughter, butterfly, lark and star.

Afterthoughts & Conclusion

As part of the joint Ph.D. program in English and Comparative Media and Practice, I created two media objects, a four-minute video entitled “Lament for the Dead,” and a webpage detailing my search for a lost cemetery, which takes up a crucial aspect of this chapter—recollecting a usable past to build a sustainable future. How do I recollect the family when they are spread across continents and what future is possible given that reality? As Akilah Oliver suggests, the body itself bears witness in ways one may not immediately understand and can provide intuitive truths one may otherwise not have access to. I found this to be true when my family and I visited federally held Indigenous mounds here in Georgia. Our first visit to the Ocmulgee mounds left me reeling. Though signs explicitly asked for visitors to be respectful of the space they were entering into, white families walked their dogs and played football amid ceremonial and burial mounds, as if those buried there did not live and love as they did, as if these dead were disposable.

Figure 7: Image of Ocmulgee Mounds

My body taught me something that day, as I stood in tears and anger. I was mourning for those who were buried there as I mourned my own dead. My three living grandparents died during graduate school and like the Indigenous people who could not directly retrace their lineage back to the dead at Ocmulgee or live proximate enough to visit them, I could not directly trace myself past my dead grandparents or even directly mourn them; their bodies were somewhere else, across national boundaries and thousands of miles away from me. My body felt something there, a kind of connection I could not immediately categorize. My body felt deeply the anguish of those who cannot be completely remembered, because their identities were erased through conquest.

What would a retrieval of these beings from the clutches of genocide and its aftermath teach me? What can the dead teach any of us? What do the dead connect to us to? The video I

created and produced, “Lament for the Dead,” does not center retrieval as much as mourning, and yet, as I re-watch the video and extract myself from the feelings I experienced as I worked on it, I recognize their interconnection. What does mourning teach us? I felt I could not mourn my dead because I could not retrieve their bodies from the places and times in which they existed and are buried, at least not without dynamic, creative thinking. As Sophie reminds the reader, our bodies are a testament to them, to the ancestors we may never meet (again) in this life. Do I need to retrieve my grandparents’ bodies to mourn them, to recognize all that they gave me? I carry them, like hairs on my head.

Beyond the Ocmulgee site and my grandparents, I was also mourning the recovery of Indigenous children’s bodies from the Kamloops Residential school in Canada; the treatment of undocumented people who are kept in cages in the United States and the many who die or are sexually and otherwise assaulted there; and the desecrated remains of Delisha and Tree Africa, two young people who died in the 1981 MOVE bombing. Flesh memory reminded me of the recurrence and interconnected nature of state violence; the pain of sons and daughters and cousins and wives and husbands and friends and play cousins and neighbors and all kinds of kin must have immediately felt when they realized their loved ones had died in conquest and couldn’t be retrieved from the indignities therein.

As I stood there, feeling deeply the anguish of loss and alienation, I realized the extent to which recollecting a usable past could not merely depend on recollecting the members of one’s biological family. Yes, this is reparative work for us but also for others. Flesh memory calls all kinds of kin and therein, asks us to see past and beyond. A usable past cannot hang on the disposability of any one body—that would ultimately lead to the present we have now, wherein folx seek to suspend their individual disposability by throwing it on another.

My last chapter turns to another kind of dead, the zombie figure, to further explore subjective degradation and disposability marked by evacuation. Though zombies are also the dead, the central figure in Joyce Carol Oates' novella *Zombie* (1995) is not interested in mourning them, but instead producing a zombie to simultaneously enact domination and pleasure. Mourning is ultimately displaced by consumption and disposability.

As part of my research into the weaponization of lobotomies reflected within the text, my partner and I drove from Atlanta to Milledgeville to visit the now abandoned Central State Hospital. The site and its history functions as an intersection, wherein we are able to witness the work of overlapping genocidal systems: the asylum was funded through the theft and sale of Native land, while enslaved men and women were utilized as laborers to keep operating costs down. It was also one of the first of its kind in the United States and would help set the trends for psychiatric treatment in the years to come. Around 25,000 disabled and dispossessed people are buried on the grounds.

The text likewise functions as an intersection, wherein the terrors of plantation slavery; colonization; contemporary consumption; and white rage merge to realize the quotidian nature of violence we would otherwise consider to be merely reminiscent of the horror genre. In this case, both the undead and the dead are instructive in understanding the disposability of the body under neoliberal capitalism as aided by white rage.

CHAPTER III

ZOMBIES AND SLAVES

Capitalist market-society overflows with monsters. Indeed, and slaves too. Addressed to the white reader, Sartre's preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* introduces a taxonomy, contextualizing the boundaries of power manned by the category of the monstrous.[102] Sartre clarifies, "The European elite decided to fabricate a native elite; they selected adolescents, branded the principles of Western culture on their foreheads with red-hot iron, and *gagged* their mouths with sounds, pompous awkward sounds that twisted their tongues. After a short stay in the metropolis, they were sent home, *fully doctored*. These *walking lies* had nothing more to say to their brothers; from Paris, London, and Amsterdam we yelled, 'Parthenon! Fraternity!' and somewhere in Africa and Asia mouths echoed '…thenon!..nity"![103] Though he never uses the term zombie in this section nor the entire opening paragraph, the relationship he describes is zombification, one analytic for subjective degradation, monstrosity, and social disposability vitally marked by evacuation.[104] Importantly, as noted by Webb and Brynand, zombies cannot be subjects because they are outside the symbolic order, the domain of language: they utter, but don't articulate, cannot speak. At the entrance of zombification, they exited the symbolic order and thus cannot desire in the psychoanalytic sense. To be zombified then is to be evacuated of one's humanity[105].

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[102] Fanon, Frantz, and Jean-Paul Sartre. "The Wretched of the Earth: Frantz Fanon." *The Wretched of the Earth: Frantz Fanon,* Grove Press, 2004, pp. xliii-lxiii.
[103] Ibid, (xliii).
[104] Webb, Jen, and Samuel Byrnand. "Some Kind of Virus: The Zombie as Body and Trope." *Zombie Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sarah Juliet Lauro, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, p. 122.
[105] Webb, Jen, and Samuel Byrnand. "Some Kind of Virus: The Zombie as Body and Trope." *Zombie Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sarah Juliet Lauro, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, p. 122.

The differences Sartre realizes are fundamental to colonialism's power relations; without the border between metropole and colony, there would be no use for the production of such difference. He continues,

> Europeans, open this book, look inside. After taking a short walk in the night you will see strangers gathered around a fire, get closer and listen. They are discussing the fate reserved for your trading posts and for the mercenaries defending them. They might see you, but they will go on talking among themselves without even lowering their voices. Their indifference strikes home: their fathers, creatures living in the shadows, *your* creatures, were dead souls; you afforded them light, you were their sole interlocutor, you did not take the trouble to answer the zombies. The sons ignore you. The fire that warms and enlightens them is not yours. You, standing at a respectful distance, you now feel eclipsed, nocturnal, and numbed. It's your turn now. In the darkness that will dawn into another day, you have turned into the zombie" (xlviii).

I transcribe here the full passage, to clarify both the tone of accountability evidenced in the direct address to Europeans and the implications of colonization as a zombifying practice. The term zombie returns to describe the locus of the metropolitan European in the midst of decolonization, "eclipsed, nocturnal and numbed" (xlviii), as object; what they enabled oversees becomes them.[106]

That Sartre implies collective participation, signaled through his recurrent call to metropolitan Europeans, clarifies both the material value of the split between humanism and differentiation and further, its cultural value, evidenced in the presence of *white supremacist*

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[106] Fanon, Frantz, and Jean-Paul Sartre. "The Wretched of the Earth: Frantz Fanon." *The Wretched of the Earth*: Frantz Fanon, Grove Press, 2004, pp. xlviii

common sense.[107] Scholar Wahneema Lubiano uses the term to characterize the resistance of students, both black and white, to empathy and their investment in the dehumanizing practices of the state within her course, "Prison, the U.S., and the Citizen." She specifies, white supremacist common sense is "individually aestheticized as the right to declare the imprisoned a threat to civilization and, therefore, deserving of whatever carceral systemic horrors they encounter."[108] In a moment wherein both white domestic terrorism and the violence perpetrated by unjust domestic policies are under renewed interrogation, Sartre's descriptions from 1961 attest to the shifting yet never-ending contours of colonialism and its unceasing production.[109]As evidenced by Lubiano, the incarcerated are zombified, treated as beings who have no capacity for subjective phenomenal experiences or for ethical or affective judgment—and this alone is reason to dispose of them.

This chapter utilizes zombie theory to interrogate white supremacist common sense beyond the bounds of the classroom, to further articulate the violence of white rage as evidenced through the dead and the undead. Based on the life and crimes of infamous murderer Jeffrey Dahmer, Joyce Carol Oates' *Zombie* (1995) traces the homoerotic, homicidal tendencies of protagonist Quentin P., as he captures, rapes, murders and at times, dismembers, multiple young men with impunity. Unlike Dahmer, Quentin is never captured, and due to his class position as the son of an established academic, lives to fantasize and plot his next moves with the support of his family. Though Quentin

[107] Lubiano, Wahneema. "Affect and Rearticulating the Racial 'Un-Sayables.'" Cultural Anthropology: Journal of the Society for Cultural Anthropology., vol. 28, no. 3, American Anthropological Association, 2013, pp. 540–43, doi:10.1111/cuan.12021.
[108] Ibid, 541.
[109] I refer here to aftermath of the January 6th, 2021, insurrection on Capitol Hill, wherein lawmakers are grappling with ways to manage increased hate-crimes and domestic right-wing terrorism, in addition to President's Biden (potential) expedition of student loans forgiveness, which would impact black, Latino and Native Americans more than other racial groups.

seems like an outrageous, unbelievable figure in both his fantasies and actions, he is the logical continuation of both the systems which maintain white supremacy and the white men proceeding him, who through the consumption of the Black male body, were able to develop and maintain dominant notions of the self. His name, Quentin, references William Faulkner's Quentin Compson, who commits suicide due to an investment in the Old South. While Quentin desires a sex slave, his insistence on using the term "zombie" brings to the fore critical power relations. He does not root his interest in zombies in the historical figure of the Haitian zonbi[110] but instead in Western science, foregrounding both the histories of psychiatry, the development of surgery through experimentations upon the enslaved body and the physical and sexual consumption of the enslaved body during slavery.

The figure of the zombie within *Zombie* (1995) is more than a trope. The fantasy of the zombie within the text captures both a longstanding historical desire—evidenced in the continual (re)production of the black body as desirous object across time and space—and a cultural product of evil, in that the actual production of the zombie figure requires a brutal misappropriation of the body. The fantasy of zombie morphology is not a way to consider what it means to be human but instead, what is means to actively dehumanize for individual control, comfort and desire. Quentin's zombie speaks to circuits of capitalist production as realized through systemic evils, like the severing of hands in Belgium's Congo or the smoking of an enslaved person after they have been beaten and thereafter "seasoned."[111]

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[110] Had he rooted his interest therein, a contrasting set of relationships would have emerged, highlighting instead the ways zonbis complicate historical power between the oppressed and the oppressor. Please see Elizabeth McAlister's essay "Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites" for one discussion of this complication. McAlister, Elizabeth. "Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites." *Zombie Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sarah Juliet Lauro, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 63–84.

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I first situate the volatility characterizing Donald's Trump's ascendency to the Oval Office within a long history of (white) reactionary violence to clarify its many producers. Though many Americans were shocked by his election, Carol Anderson's *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (*WR*, 2016) situates anti-black violence within the aftermath of African American progress, contextualizing both its quotidian nature and structural erasure. I thereafter analyze Frank Meeink's *The Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead* (2009) to exemplify the ways in which whiteness constructs itself through erasure. Arlie Hochschild's *Stranger's in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (*STOL*, 2016), further contextualizes erasure a narrative scheme, wherein the myth of whiteness is erected through continuous structural erasures and distortions. Inherent in her treatment of racism as novel and at times, paradoxical, is a willful narrative based on compassion without accountability; she mobilizes structural amnesia to generate empathy. Before utilizing zombie theory to analyze Joyce Carol Oates' *Zombie* (1995), I further clarify the ways in which whiteness, though consumed as natural, functions as a performance.

(re)Situating White Rage

In the aftermath of Donald Trump's 2016 winning presidential campaign, the mediascape was peppered with pieces by pundits and average citizens alike interrogating the reasons behind his appointment. The overarching narrative evidenced by the public grappling—in the New York Times, Huff Post News, Slate and Twitter among others—was bounded simultaneously by bewilderment and recognition. Whereas the New York Times had previously printed an article

surmising a Trump victory based on votes of non-college educated white people,[112] many were surprised at the rates of white college educated men and women who contributed to his victory: 53 percent of all white female voters who participated in the election chose Trump, in addition to 54 percent of white men with a college degree. Reflexive think pieces followed from white allies, diagnosing with fury the lack of allyship from other white people[113]; as if his election lifted a veil, the active support of antiblack racism by many white Americans was seemingly irrevocably recognized for the truth it was. As clarified by Carol Anderson, without a clear motif linking outwardly disparate moments of reactionary white violence, the election of a xenophobic, sexist and racist individual can feel like a bewildering aberration.[114]

The long history indexed in her text *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (*WR*, 2016) confirms anti-black violence as both normative within American society and moreover, testifies to its silenced position. Yet, the choice of these voters— to protect white supremacy from the perceived threat of Muslims, immigrants, diasporic Black people and Others who Trump railed against during his campaign, even as his ascendency could destabilize the entire nation—evidenced another truth inherent in Anderson's choice to catalog otherwise recorded incidents under the descriptor of "white rage": the simultaneous (archival) erasure of white violence and (re)production of the (white) hegemonic imagination.

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[112] Fessenden, Ford. "Donald Trump's Big Bet on Less Educated Whites." The New York Times, The New York Times, 7 Nov. 2016, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/11/07/us/how-trump-can-win.html?searchResultPosition=4.

[113] Sara Ruiz-Grossman's "Dear Fellow White Women: We F**ked This Up," published in HuffPost News on Nov. 9, 2016, exemplifies this:"https://www.huffpost.com/entry/dear-white-women-we-messed-this-up-election-2016_n_582341c9e4b0aac62488970e

[114] Justice, Elaine. Anderson Explores Country's Racial Past, Present in 'White Rage'. 31 May 2016, news.emory.edu/stories/2016/05/upress_white_rage_anderson/campus.html.

In her text *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (2007), scholar Emilie Townes' mobilizes the interactions of history and memory as a discursive frame to consider how the imagination works to create stereotypical images that buttress systematic evil—evil as a cultural production.[115] "Evil" is contextualized within the systematic construction of truncated narratives designed to support and perpetuate structural inequities and forms of social oppression. She combines Michel Foucault's understanding of the imagination and Antonio Gramsci's use of hegemony to clarify how the imagination—the fantastic hegemonic imagination— "plays" with history and memory to spawn caricatures and stereotypes. To be clear, the construction of whiteness within the United Sates has long relied on multiple kinds of erasure. In her analysis of white identity making, American liberal theologian Thandeka identifies negation in self-identifying racial language; silence within the white home; and the suppression of feelings that could derail the unity of the domestic sphere as central to the formation of white racial identity.[116] In her text *Good White People: The Problem with Middle Class White American Anti-Racism* (2014), scholar Shannon Sullivan otherwise juxtaposes white liberalism and white supremacy to unearth the (shared) racist mechanizations of whiteness within these seemingly divorced ways of being. As white liberals mobilize class differences to uphold their "goodness" as lower-class whites are cast as the "true" perpetrators of racism, abjection emerges as constitutive of white self-making within America.

Frank Meeink's *The Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead* (2009) likewise confirms connections between rage and racism as a pattern, or "way," "of white folks."[117] Ultimately,

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[115] Townes, Emilie Maureen. *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
[116] Thandeka. *Learning to Be White: Money, Race, and God in America*. Bloomsbury, 2013.
[117]Meeink, Frank, and Jody M. Roy. *Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead: the Frank Meeink Story*. Hawthorne Books & Literary Arts, 2009. I otherwise reference here Langston

white supremacist ideology functions as a means to rationalize the whiteness Meeink does not possess due to his Italian-Irish lineage and dysfunctional family, while Black, Brown and Jewish people are to be blamed for the class privilege he ought to be able to access due to his white body, but which he cannot because of societal and structural limitations. His father was a 19-year-old young man, traumatized by the death of his younger brother, and his mother a 17-year-old budding drug abuser and alcoholic when Frank was conceived. Central to his early development is the division between his paternal Italian family and his maternal Irish family: intrawhite divisions kept them from uniting to both reform their young adult children and fully support their grandson. He notes, "She was nineteen and I was two when we moved in with her parents deep in South Philly's Irish quarter. At first my father tried to visit me, but my grandmother Meeink always slammed the door in the face of the 'dirty Italian' who had soiled her 'pure Irish daughter'" (25).

His father's absence created a wound reinforced by his abusive stepfather (whom his mother constantly chose over him, even as he is pummeled by him daily) and the racial divisions in his South Philadelphia neighborhood. By the time Meeink happened upon "Identity Ideology" or Nazi Propaganda, the emotional emptiness, depression and rage he felt was at a head, and he needed somewhere to aim it. As he recalls:

> ZOG [the Zionist Occupational Government] had all but destroyed the white working class in America, stealing our jobs through Affirmative Action and our rightful place in society through Civil Rights laws. In the name of 'liberalism,' ZOG force working class whites to live amid 'mud,' who brought gangs and

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Hughes' collection of short stories *The Ways of White Folks* (1934), which explores the fickle behaviors of white Americans.

> drugs into what had been moral neighborhoods. ZOG had humiliated men like my father so much that they turned to dope to escape their pain, and men like my stepfather so much that they unleashed their rage on innocent children. Worst of all, the Jews who controlled Hollywood were brainwashing whites to think 'race-mixing' was cool. (55)

Meeink needed a way to understand his reality while preserving the integrity of both his father and stepfather and white supremacist ideology allowed him to do this. He effectively erased their problematic and abusive behavior through the adaptation of racist ideology. His rationalization is in line with David Roediger's analysis of whiteness in which he mobilizes Du Bois: "the status and privileges conferred by race could be used to make up for alienating and exploitative class relationships" (13). Meeink adopts a radical white ideology in order to protect the "public and psychological wage" whiteness confers upon him in his desperation.

Carol Anderson's archival intervention both captures the fantastic hegemonic imagination in action and helps to further clarify erasure as a key narrativizing strategy which has helped to stabilize the myth of whiteness within the public sphere. Grounded in Michel Foucoult's "Fantasia of the Library" (1980), Townes pushes the boundaries of Foucoult's perception to elucidate the unlimited nature of the fantastic beyond the world of literature. She instead suggests that the fantastic forms a part of the cultural production of our realities, structuring the quotidian. Gramsci's notion of hegemony as ideological domination that is moral, political, and cultural transmitted through language then enables an understanding of the fantastic hegemonic imagination as one that "traffics in peoples' lives that are caricatured or pillaged so that the imagination that creates the fantastic can control the world in its own image. This imagination conjures up worlds and their social structures that are not based on supernatural

events and phantasms, but on the ordinariness of evil" (21). As Anderson moves past Reconstruction to the Great Migration, into the Civil Rights era and to the reception of President Obama, she provides extensive examples of reactionary violence in various forms. She clarifies "these seemingly isolated episodes reaching back from the nineteenth century and carrying forward to the twenty-first, once fitted together like pieces in the mosaic, reveal a portrait of a nation: one that is the unspoken truth of our racial divide" (6).

Anderson's second chapter opens in 1918, in the Southern part of Georgia, with a white plantation owner named Hampton Smith, who had trouble hiring persons to till his land because he was in the habit of abusing his workers. Because of this, he customarily used the local jail system as a means to an end: after paying the fine for seemingly random black men, he would then put them to work on his farm, well beyond the point of resolving the debt. After beating one such man by the name of Sidney Johnson, he was shot and killed. Retribution came quickly as at least eleven African Americans (of no relation or affiliation to Johnson) were hunted down and killed. The wife of one of these men, threatened that "if she knew the parties who were in the mob, she would have warrants sworn out against them" (40). Mary Turner was eight months pregnant at the time, and after being strung upside down, naked, she was burned alive, after which her baby was cut out from her belly and smashed to bits. As Anderson explains "In one form or another, this scene was repeated over and over and over again throughout the South, including lack of consequences: no arrests, trials, convictions, or prison sentences for murdering black people, even in broad daylight. The economic, political, and legal vulnerability meant that no one, not even an eight-month-old fetus, was safe" (40). The denigrating myth of white biological superiority structures this violence and for its perpetrators, justified the alarming cruelty Turner, her husband and their unborn child were subjected to.

Rather than framing the disparate actions of radical right voters through a long history of racial violence evidenced by Anderson as explored above, renowned sociologist Arlie Hochschild frames the myth of white superiority through the use of empathy. Her text *Stranger's in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (*STOL*, 2016), is primarily interested in scaling the "empathy wall," a term she uses to describe "obstacles to deep understanding of another person, one that can make us feel hostile to those who hold different believes or whose childhood is rooted in different circumstances" (5). This investment in tolerance characterizes the deliberate, if not sympathetic, style of the text. *STOL* follows Hochschild as she tries to scale empathy walls in an effort to understand the widening critical division within American politics between the right and the left. As she states, "partyism, as some call it, now beats race as the source of divisive prejudice" (6). This is a problematic differentiation, as constructions of Otherness are critical to the partyism she refers to.

Hochschild gives much context for "partyism," explaining that the right has moved more right, now calling for critical slashes to the federal government and austere immigration laws, alongside critical cuts to (if not the death of) the Environmental Protection Agency and various forms of social programs. She theorizes that this "newly" emerged radical right is angry and reeling from a great loss. Using the environment as a crucial issue, Hochschild's travels to Louisiana to research those at the center of divide who are on the far right but seemingly in need of the federal government. This she calls the Great Paradox. By delving into the Great Paradox, Hochschild seems to not desire a resolution, but an understanding of the critical loss these human beings are facing. White rage emerges within this text as structurally violent.

Hochschild begins the narrative of Louisiana's Tea Party electorate by interviewing eighty-two-year-old Lee Sherman, a longtime Louisianan who once held a job pouring toxic waste into

its waters and is now an ardent environmentalist. Lee, both an environmentalist and a dedicated supporter of the Tea Party, holds seemingly contradictory positions. This opens the door for critical understanding on the behalf of Hochschild, which she exemplifies as she listens to Lee describe his childhood and subsequent shift from the left to the right. As a young man, Lee campaigned for Senator Scoop Jackson, "a Cold-War era liberal democrat who championed civil rights and human rights" (26). Lee moved to Louisiana after training as a coppersmith in the U.S. naval shipyards near Seattle in order to work, which he did at Pittsburgh Plate Glass (PPG) as a pipefitter. The company website states:

> Today, PPG is a global supplier of paints, coatings, optical products, specialty materials, and fiber glass. Through leadership in innovation, sustainability and color, PPG helps customers in industrial, transportation, consumer products, and construction markets and aftermarkets to enhance more surfaces in more ways than does any other company.[118]

This minimal description leaves out the dangerous process by which PPG manages to manufacture the paints, coatings and other products they sell, which includes processing lethal chemicals like ethylene dichloride (EDC), mercury, lead, chromium, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and dioxins. Lee was the worker repairing pipes carrying these chemicals and was often exposed to them. He describes a negligent culture within the company, in which safety was tertiary to completing tasks and performing as working class, capable men. Hochschild writes

> Eventually the general foreman issues badges to the workers to record any overexposure to dangerous chemicals, Lee says, "but the foreman made fun of them. It's supposed to take two or three months before the gauge registers you've reached hit the limit. My badge did it in three days. The foreman thought I'd stuck it inside a pipe!" Such was the scene in

[118] "Facts about PPG." PPG: We Protect and Beautify the World. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Mar. 2017.

> the late 1960s at the PPG plant in Lake Charles, Louisiana. (28)

Lee was the victim of at least two accidents, one in which he was doused head to toe in liquid chlorinated hydrocarbons. This would leave him unable to bend his legs and rise up, at which point he was put on medical leave. Lee worked for PPG for fifteen years, not only exposing himself to lethal chemicals as he fixed pipes, but as he poured toxic waste into Lake Charles' marches. He was terminated due to absenteeism, a cover for the company's determination to not pay for his medical disabilities. Lee is but one of many Louisianans Hochschild interviews in an attempt to reconcile the actions and realities of Tea Party supporters in the south. Many, like Lee, earned their living, and honor, working for companies who would later destroy not only the habitats they are so fond of, but their hard-earned dollars (through property damage), their health and the health of loved ones. Hochschild writes

> Lee had been mad when PPG fired him, two guards marching him out to the parking lot. "I have a gun," he tells me, "And I didn't think of hurting people, certainly not my coworkers, but the place, yes. I was *that* mad." But at the same time, the workplace had been where he had experienced his finest hour, had shown his great skill, his bravery, his endurance, his manhood. And when he added it all up, he was madder at the government. PPG gave him money. The government was taking it away. (63)

Lee recalls two stories about the government, each justifying his resentment and anger. At the forefront was a bitterness about taxes, which seemingly "went to the wrong people—especially welfare beneficiaries who 'lazed around days and partied nights and government workers in gushy jobs" (35). He had been kicked off of with Social Security for a year after accidently working too many part-time hours. He had also been taken advantage of by the IRS office, after a poorly dressed (according to his Mormon standards) woman calculated his taxes incorrectly

and gave him less than he deserved. Folks like Lee stand at critical intersections, at once a segment of the dominant majority, but on the peripheries of power, perceived and otherwise. The actions they are taking to reconcile themselves to, and remedy this situation, is central to understanding the growing divide between the right and the left. Ultimately, Hochschild locates three concerns critical to mobilizing those on the right: taxes, faith and honor. Lee chooses to support the Tea Party in the face of seemingly ridiculous tax laws which alarm and anger him. Many other working class white people are reacting similarly to what they see as threats to the American dream. Most, if not all of their reactions, seem to function in at least one, if not all three of these registers.

Descendants of French Catholic Arcadians, Harold Areno and three generations of his family have "fished, caught game, and raised gardens on land around and beneath" (40) their home. They have experienced much loss as a result of powerful industrial companies like PPG, including loved ones lost to cancer, declining property values and local poisoned ecosystems. Like Lee Sherman, the Arenos hold dear a principled divorce of the perceived liberal federal government and support the radical right as a means to uphold their own values. They have voted twice for Christian conservative Bobby Jindal. Though they valued and grieved for their ecosystem and other critical losses, they were most invested in protecting their Christian faith, which had been fundamental to helping them get through these tribulations. A vote for Bobby Jindal was not only a vote for their faith in Jesus, but both his place within the American Dream, and his ability to protect them as they fought to attain it.

An investment in taxes, faith and honor is not the only cultural practice Hochschild finds, but in addition, a principled defiance against regulation. The Louisianan Tea Party devotees are critically invested in their positions against big government and against the manipulative liberal

media. In other words, they were fully invested in positive freedoms and paid little attention to negative freedoms. They did not want to be told how to feel by the "liberal media" or whom to sympathize with. Those feelings and actions were regulated through their religious practices and faith. They also did not want to be told what to purchase in stores (the promotion of LED light bulbs, for instance), what to eat ("forced" salads on menus" (69)), where to drive (no sidewalks) or how to raise their children (child protection devices). This resentment of encroachment hardly ever made it to their vote however, as an investment in these small freedoms were offered up in place of an investment in the right to a healthful environment.

Hochschild manages to illustrate these positions to the reader by not only climbing empathy walls, but through the use of deep narratives, or "the story feelings tell, in the language of symbols," (135) irreverent of facts. She constructs a deep, general narrative depicting the feelings of these Louisianans, which she shares with the reader and with them themselves. In it, the Tea Partiers wait in line, along with people similar to themselves, to get to the American Dream. They are weary, for the sun is hot, the line is seemingly not moving, and the American Dream is some ways away, over the hill ahead. Suddenly, people—women, immigrants, African Americans, refugees—are cutting the line and their position is not merely endangered but shifting. With the election of President Obama, America seems to have become a foreign place, where people who have never historically made great strides, like the President, are making great strides attending Ivy-League universities and attaining not merely the American Dream but the Presidency of the United States. How is this possible? Those in line are seemingly pushed further to the back, as more and more "line cutters" emerge.

This storytelling strategy is but one way in which Hochschild manages to not merely explain the points of view of those on the far right but enable readers to empathize with their

positions and understand them holistically. The unceasing charitable tone she uses functions similarly: while Hochschild sometimes expresses surprise, she does not express extreme criticism of these viewpoints. She is constantly thankful, as this book is a product of kindness: these strangers were kind enough to let her not merely into their homes, lives and histories. While this may very well be the strength of the book, it also acts of its blind spot. Little rhetorical space is given to critiquing these perspectives factually, as the text is nearly complete by the time she does this.

Hochschild's focus on the feelings of the radical right elides the factual realities. According to Professors Abrajano and Hajnal, not only does the average white American overestimate the number of illegal immigrants in this country, but they do also so astronomically. In addition, there is an inherent racial hierarchy in perceptions of immigrants, with Asians facing much lower percentages of prejudice when compared to Latino immigrants[119]. Abrajano and Hajnal state

> The fact that just under 70 percent of whites view Latinos as particularly prone to be on welfare suggests that the connection between Latinos and welfare is now firmly in place. Latinos and crime is another readily available script throughout the nation. Crime, terrorism, and undocumented immigration account for fully 66 percent of the network news coverage of Latinos. Concerns about immigration therefore should be linked to attitudes on crime, welfare, education, and the like. (12)

Abrajano and Hajnal are not only interested in how immigrants are perceived, but where those perceptions come from. Hochschild mentions repeatedly the source of the news watched by the

[119] Abrajano, Marisa A., and Zoltan Hajnal. *White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics. Princeton University Press*, 2017.

Tea Party supporters: they were incessant consumers of Fox, known for its radical prejudicial stances on immigration, crime, police brutality and various other critical issues. Critical to the issues of taxes is not merely then the practical question of who gets government funds, but perceptions about whether or not those people, whoever they are, deserve that comfort. What does that sort of value judgement rest on, if media such as Fox newly create and perpetuate false connections between phenotype and place in the world? Professor Gest diagnoses the radical right turn epitomized in these positions as reactions to immediate shifts in power. Because wages dropped for white working-class males since the 1970s, they are now rebelling against those perceived to have caused it, like immigrants. This, however, ignores the long trend of violence, like that documented in *WR*, which have plagued America since inception.

Whiteness as Performance

> "White people wanted to be white just as much as we did. They worked just as hard at it. They failed just as often. They failed more often. But they could pass, so no one objected.
>
> *Negroland: A Memoir* (51)

Utilizing erasure as a narrative strategy elides the continuous (re)production of whiteness as an ideological way of being in the world. As clarified in Langton Hughes' *The Ways of White Folks* (1990), class and respectability are critical fault lines within white mythmaking[120]. Margo Jefferson's *Negroland: A Memoir* (2015) and Dr. Carolyn Wilkins' *Damn Near White: An African American Family's Rise from Slavery to Bittersweet Success* (2010) outline both the contours and breaks within whiteness. Key popular representations of whiteness likewise rely on class and gender to manifest themselves as truly "white." These representations do not reflect the

[120] Hughes, Langston. *The Ways of White Folks*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011.

lived realities of all white people within the United States, but a fantasy which is upheld, in part, through popular media. Sustaining a narrative which imagines the average white person as upper middle class necessitates other narratives which imagine non-white people as the classes that sustain that matrix. This again, only partially reflects the lived experiences of non-white people.

Explored in Jefferson's *Negroland* is the classed and gendered *performance* of whiteness instilled by Jefferson's parents and consumed by the world they inhabit[121]. They worked hard at *being* white, a reality mediated both by their physical appearances, measured in careful distance from stereotypical Black features which could "call instant attention to your race and…incite demeaning associations" (Jefferson 53) and codes of conduct. Margo Jefferson describes her childhood as part of "Negroland," "a small region of North America where residents were sheltered by a certain amount of privilege and plenty" (Jefferson 3).

Jefferson opens with a straightforward yet critical line: "I was taught to avoid showing off" (3). To "show-off," or to "seek to attract attention by conspicuous behavior" was not the conduct mandated by the Jeffersons. Instead, she continues, "I was taught to distinguish myself through presentation, not declaration, to excel through deeds and manners, not showing off' (Jefferson 3). The "presentation, deeds and behaviors" she refers to gestures both towards the class position the Jefferson's possess, and that which they seek to protect against: they are of the upper middle class, and this requires constant attention and awareness, to protect against lapses in performance, or assumptions of stereotypical Blackness. As she makes clear later on: "… as I grew, I learned that in the world beyond family and family friends, your mistakes—bad manners, poor taste, an excess of high spirits—could put you, your parents, and your people at risk. All of you could be designated, at a stroke and for life, vulgar, coarse, and inferior" (Jefferson 5). Inherent in their

[121] Jefferson, Margo. *Negroland: a Memoir*. Pantheon Books, 2015.

access to whiteness is an expectation of consumption without excess-- “normal” is something you become, something you must aspire to be.

Precarity undergirds the quality-of-life Jefferson’s people strive for and is their unwelcomed but ever-present specter. She identifies early in her life the specific class and gender performances expected of the select few who lived in Negroland. The expectations of lives and bodies lived in close proximity to whites and whiteness were severe and exact: Jefferson aims to unpack “the compass of privilege” and “what made and maimed her” (Jefferson 9) in the process of exercising this advantage. She warns: “Privilege is provisional. Privilege can be denied, withheld, offered grudgingly and summarily withdrawn. Entitlement is impervious to the kinds of verbs that modify privilege. Our people have had to work, scrape for privilege, gobble it down when those who would snatch it away weren’t looking” (Jefferson 37).

Public performances of Blackness were often at odds with the expectations of its most private citizens, the Black upper middle class. Ultimately, each facet of their performance showcases whiteness as property, both metaphorical and otherwise. Each chapter of *Negroland* explores various aspects of the performance of class and gender expected of both Margo and her sister Denise and observed by her mother. Wealth (“Are we rich?”), lineage (“Do we have Indian Blood?”) and beauty are among them, as Margo notes her grade of hair in comparison to what was most desirable (*dead* straight, followed by *glossy* hair with waves then tighter waves with less shiny texture, which she nor her sister possesses (Jefferson 53)). Sammy Davis Jr. on *The Milton Berle Show*, Dorothy Dandridge on the *Jerry Lewis Colgate Comedy Hour* and Lena Horne on *the Frank Sinatra Timex Show* are “seminal moments in the viewing mores of the nation” and the social mores of the Black elite (Jefferson 65).

In observing Davis, they note the excess oil he puts in his hair and the way he mobilizes language. He “enunciates crisply, with no trace of a stock Negro accent,” employs the “racially neutral vocal stylings of Nat King Cole and Billy Daniels” and “the racially white vocal stylings of Cory Grant, James Stewart, and James Cagney”, all which is both “cheeky and very satisfying” (Jefferson 65). This contrasted with the two quiet, portly, balding men who accompany Davis, but follow an older racial code: their “generic smiles of vaudeville” mirror their “mild and genial Negro accents,” to which their father responds, “it’s time for them to go” (Jefferson 66). Davis has learned the new ways of Black folks (or the ways of white folks) and possesses the cultural capital praised by the Black bourgeois.

The kind evaluations of Davis contrasts sharply with the comparisons and observations made about and between Dandridge and Horne: while they both possess bodies and faces compliant with desired standards of (near-white) beauty, Lena “never has the lapses in taste Dorothy has” (Jefferson 69), an insult at the lack of cultural knowledge by the latter. Both possess disciplined nostrils which do not flare and are none too full; maidenly lips which too are none too full; malleable hair and none too big behinds. Horne married white man Lennie Hayton and benefitted, while Dandridge mobilizes a sexuality Mrs. Jefferson view with contempt, and failed to marry up. In viewing Dandridge’s rendition of “Smooth Operator,” her mother asks, “Why doesn’t she just say, ‘Master and sing it standing on an auction block?” (Jefferson 70) Though the Jefferson’s are pleased with the presence of Black people on television, the grade of representation matters: those are part and parcel of stereotypical notions of Blackness should be replaced with those which show social acumen and awareness.

Damn Near White charts Dr. Wilkins as she attempts to reclaim a lost connection to her blackness by tracing of her well-to-do grandfather J. Ernest Williams. The book begins with one

citation of this loss, her first-ever college party. As she stands pouring herself a drink (and faking her enjoyment of it), a white woman first stares at her, then approaches her from across the room. The white woman immediately questions her background:

> "You know what I mean. I mean, what ethnicity are you?" Here we go again, I thought. A familiar knot began to tighten in my gut.… There was no escape. "I'm black," …A wrinkle of irritation creased her face and twisted her thin lips into a pout. "No, you're not," she said. "Your skin is nowhere near black. You're more like tan. Are you Israeli?" "I told you, I'm black." My mother had raised me to be polite to strangers, but this was getting ridiculous…. "I know. One of your parents must be white, then," an onlooker piped up. "You definitely don't talk like a black person," offered another voice from the back of the room. "Yeah. You don't even have a southern accent." (Wilkins 1)

The loss Wilkins feels is multifold: she is both denied connections to her race and potential friends in this moment of lost connections. The alienation present is startling; multiple people suggest ways in which her learned whiteness is working, somehow absenting her Blackness. In the face of public scrutiny, because her privilege contrasts with the dominant narrative of African American reality, Wilkins is never believed. As she explains after the fact, "growing up in the clannish environment of Chicago's light-skinned elite" (Wilkins 3) gave her limited knowledge of both Blackness and herself. Her position mirrors the warnings of Black Bourgeoisie: connections to Blackness will be lost if investments in whiteness, and the codes therein are all people focus on.

Another popular example, *All in the Family* (1971-78), epitomizes whiteness as a construction. The show brings to the fore the narrative of the white working class at a time when

unions were breaking apart, and white unionized workers were struggling with an onslaught of workers of color. Archie, the racist yet lovable protagonist, humored viewers as his characterization assured them that the title of "racist" was not a permanent or critical character flaw. After all, Archie was loved by his family, and supported. The show attempted to unpack his prejudice without alienating him, potentially encouraging its viewers to do the same, or at the very least sort through their own viewpoints. The characterization of Archie rests on classed terms: the working-class racist man may well have been more easily digestible in this moment than a rich powerful racist, as the material realities of racism would have been harder to ignore.

The first episode of Norman Lear's *All in the Family*, titled "Meet the Bunkers," opens with a serenade to, and a yearning for, the past. The constant refrain "Those were the days" clarifies the message: the years preceding the Civil Rights movement were wonderful. Every allusion in the theme song centers around the late 20s, 30s and 40s—now the world is changing. The Bunkers are a white, lower-middle home-owning family, living in Queens, New York, grappling with the change. The first episode mobilizes this theme immediately, as viewers are introduced to patriarch Archie Bunker, and his "traditional" ways. Though it's his 22nd wedding anniversary, Archie has done nothing for his wife, and to protect her mother's feelings, his daughter Gloria organizes with her husband Michael an anniversary brunch. As Gloria explains, Archie "will have a fit…but this will make Mom's Day." The opening scene takes place in their living room, as will all the scenes within this episode and the majority of episodes there in after. The comfort of the home is central to the explorations and open conversations we witness Archie is able to work through his limitations because he is in a white, private space. The "past" Archie and his wife sing to is imagined as a temporal and physical space where only white people exist.

The characterization of Archie as a problematic yet lovable figure is both dependent upon the structure of the situational comedy and the erasure of material implications within the narrative. Generational differences abound and are presented through the two couples: Archie and his wife Edith, and Gloria and her husband Michael. Whereas Archie continually refers to his wife as a "pip" (and other times as a "dingbat") and asks her to shut up ("Stifle, Edith, stifle!"), Michael attempts to seduce Gloria, hugs her continuously, and supports her in her endeavors, like this anniversary brunch. This is one point of contention—when Archie sees them kissing later, he insinuates that some things are not appropriate for the day-light hours—as is the fact that Michael is in college, and not working as Archie did at his age. He is also studying sociology, something Archie does not understand the use-value of. When the conversation turns to Archie's racism (though they never use the term racism, but prejudice), the conversation never specifically speaks to the material, and often deadly realities of racism.

> Michael: "Now, I suppose you're going to tell me that the Black man has had the same opportunity is this country as you?"
>
> Archie: No, more. He's had more. I didn't have no million people out there marching and protesting to get me my job.
>
> Edith: No, his uncle got it for him.

The five-part sitcom structure does not offer a nuanced conversation about race. Just as *Amos and Andy* depended on stereotypes for easily digestible characters, *All in the Family* mobilizes basic conversations about race. Here, Archie's *feelings* are up for debate, with no mention of unemployment rates, the Black/White wealth gap or the variety of other issues connected to employment. The nature of these conversations follows the general nature of television. Though the mere mention of these issues was unprecedented, this neither erased or eased the damage

already done by previous images, like that of *Amos and Andy*. The images of the lovable, yet racist, white middle class patriarch and his more progressive white son-in-law capture a shift in attitudes toward racial equality in this period, but these attitudes do not destabilize the white middle class home. The series works to show that even the politically divided white middle class home remains emblematic of Americanness.

"My Lord they are stark Mad after Negroes."[122]

While Quentin desires a sex slave, his insistence on using the term "zombie" foregrounds critical power relations, as have been realized within zombie studies. As clarified by Embry and Lauro, "the zombie's paradoxicality (as living/dead, for example) is the source of its symbolic potential" (xi). Though initially introduced to U.S. audiences through eroticized racial differences in films exoticizing the Caribbean, one fundamental turn came with George Romero's 1968 *Night of the Living Dead*.[123] Separated from earlier associations with the Haitian zonbi—a myth and ritual blatantly invested in decolonization and the rearticulation of slavery's power dynamics—the figure of the zombie has come to express precarity of various kinds, "including fears of disease and the body's vulnerability, the uncertainty of life after death, the susceptibility of the polis to outside influences, the fragility of law and order in the face of widespread chaos, and—especially with the addition of the zombie's cannibalistic nature—the

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[122] Quoted in Pressley, 27. Letter from Mr. John Dobell, June 11, 1746, Colonial Records of the State of Georgia 25: 72.

[123] "The philosopher David Chalmers has identified a number of "turns"—or categories— of zombie, the better known being the Hollywood form, of reanimated flesh-eating corpses; the Haitian form, of living people deprived through magic or medicine of soul and free will; and philosophical or p-zombies, which look like humans but lack consciousness" (112). Webb, Jen, and Samuel Byrnand. "Some Kind of Virus: The Zombie as Body and Trope." *Zombie Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sarah Juliet Lauro, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, p. 122.

rapacious hunger of a capitalistic and increasingly corporate society, but also much, much more" (x).[124]

The capitalist monster in this narrative is not the zombie, but Quentin P, whose desire to produce a zombie and then consume Othered, zombified bodies and flesh apprehends the entire capitalist circuit. Quentin's yearning, an extension of his (racialized/white) desire to own the body and possess the mind, is realized through the use of lobotomies. First mentioned in section nine, after a dazed Quentin enters a university amphitheater in which his father, Prof. P-, is lecturing about black holes and unquantifiable matter, his mind thereafter begins to explore the contours of a racialized society.

He immediately feels that a university student would make an ideal zombie, "except: you would want a healthy young person, male. Of a certain height, weight & body build etc. You would want somebody with "fight" & "vigor" in him. & well hung" (29). He clarifies further

> But the University students have been forbidden to me. After that ignorant incident that, lucky for Q__ P__, turned out O.K. It was dark behind the dorm & the kid was drunk & stooped over vomiting & gagging & when he looked up hearing me the tire iron slammed down over his ear crashing him to the ground before he could register seeing me, so it was O.K. I was wearing my hooded canvas jacket & there were no witnesses, still I panicked & ran as I would never do now with more experience. But it was O.K. A lesson was learned. (29)

In choosing his victims, Quentin is careful to select those on the peripheries of society. Though constantly losing track of time and space, due to both drug and alcohol abuse and a

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[124] Sara Juliet Lauro's introduction to *Zombie Theory: A Reader* offers a complete overview of zombie studies.

mental illness for which he is on lithium, he is able to understand his positionality within dominant structures, and that of his victims. His mental illness does not erase his relationship to white privilege in his imaginary or otherwise but broadens the ways in which he mobilizes what is available to him. Sanity is rendered a performance; Quentin is his most true self when he outside the gaze of caretakers and others who have power over him. The lesson Quentin learns is about human value within the capitalist order. He continues:

> & in Ypsilanti a long time ago so long I can't remember really I came to the same conclusion I think. For the fact is: any University student (with the exception of the foreign students who are so far from home) would be immediately missed. Their families care about them. & they have families.
>
> A safer specimen for a ZOMBIE would be somebody from out of town. A hitch- hiker or a drifter or a junkie (if in good condition not skinny & strung out or sick with AIDS). Or from the black projects downtown. Somebody nobody gives a shit for. Somebody should never have been born. Walked out of the amphitheater in the midst of the voice droning & went to the psych library to look up LOBOTOMY. (29)

The stream of consciousness-like writing Quentin mobilizes lends itself to trust; he portrays himself as honest through seeming transparency and the lack of filter. The casualness of the writing, inclusive of short-hand signs and partial, incomplete sentences enables an understanding of the text as a diary, in which Quentin unleashes his innermost thoughts, desires and secrets without fear of repercussion. This contrasts with the descriptions he gives of himself out in the world, often avoiding the eyes of others. More specifically, he is highly aware of his actions and carefully calculates his behavior to uphold a concept of himself as weak and

incapable. This façade is continually complicated as the text unfolds, whereby minute details expose extremely violent episodes. For example, the Ypsilanti episode is described for the reader in four sentences, betraying both the seriousness of the crime and his position within it. Even as the reader is given a barrage of details, reproducing the continuous force of the moment through the incessant use of "&," the archive betrays the reader; together with the use of "O.K.," Quentin's lack of recognition elides the violence mobilized against the student and instead reinforces his position.

If to zombify is to conceal the violence and dehumanization of the existing racial order[125], Quentin's aim to apprehend an individual who never should have been born promises to do just this. Further, Quentin's "safety" calculation bonds him with the killing state, in which zombification functions as a cultural imaginary that expands the logics of killability beyond skin color and other racial signifiers. In this example, a human being from the black projects downtown is indistinguishable from a hitchhiker, a drifter or a "healthy" junkie; the figure of the zombie schematizes killability to include all those socially excluded and dispossessed others on the business end of police and state violence[126].

Quentin's unconscious connection between the abjected human being and the lobotomy realizes extensive state violence, fundamentally archived in and through psychiatry. The earliest asylums within the United States were treated as dumping grounds. In her archival investigation of the infamous Georgia State Lunatic, Idiot, and Epileptic Asylum, which opened its doors in 1842, Segrest clarifies, "These early entries overall show that whatever the range of reasons for

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[125] Linneman, Travis, et al. "The Walking Dead and the Killing State." *Zombie Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sarah Juliet Lauro, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 345.
[126] Linneman, Travis, et al. "The Walking Dead and the Killing State." *Zombie Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sarah Juliet Lauro, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 345.

commitment or "causes of insanity" listed, there was what I have come to think of as a 'tripwire back home.' A family or community member's violent behaviors, cognitive differences, recent or worsening illnesses, peculiar or "irreverent" actions, or other suddenly excessive needs could cause them to stumble over this tripwire and end up getting them committed" (112). Insanity within settler-colonial culture then was not merely about cognitive differences, but social differences, which were policed by family members, with the help of the state. Furthermore, funds from confiscated Indian land caused a nationwide surge in asylums and encouraged the consolidation of U.S. psychiatry as an asylum-based profession[127].

Quentin's investment in a sex slave-cum-zombie is an extension of this imagination. His description resembles the desires of slave masters, and their need for ultimate and total domination. "A true ZOMBIE would be mine forever. He would obey every command& whim. Saying "Yes, master" & no, Master." He would kneel before me lifting his eyes to me saying, "I love you, Master. There is no one but you, Master." (169) His use of the term "master" expands his definition of a "zombie," as he does not merely yearn for a person who resembles the walking dead" but a specific power structure, which would imbue him with complete and utter control over this person. The nicknames he mobilized both for his victims and those he comes into

[127] Segrest explains "In 1837, Georgia, along with other states, received a payment from recent federal sales of western land stolen from its native people. Georgia's slice was $1,051,422, deposited into the Central Bank of Georgia. From 1835 to 1840, riding this wave of largesse, Georgia charged its citizens no taxes, as the U.S. army forced more Cherokees westward so that white settlers had more land. The Georgia General Assembly used the federal payment to allocate the initial $44,000 from 1837 to 1841 to build the first building of the Georgia State Lunatic, Idiot, and Epileptic Asylum and to hire Superintendent David Cooper as its leader. The same generation of white men who from the Milledgeville capital developed even newer ways to expel the Cherokee people and to develop newer and more brutally profitable forms of slavery—these same men also built and oversaw the Georgia Lunatic Asylum. For example, asylum founder and trustee Dr. Tomlinson Fort, whom Benjamin Rush (the "father of American psychiatry") had taught medicine in Philadelphia, served as president of the Central Bank of Georgia from 1832 to 1844."

contact with further evidence his hegemonic imagination at work: "VelvetTongue" (44) and the Tease" (44), his names for two black men in one of his therapy groups, reflect his sexual desire; "Flatface," a PhD student, reflect the "abnormality" of what he sees, or its deviation from European beauty standards (118); and "SQUIRREL" (93), his name for his only white victim, reflect the social ordering he believes in. His humanity is both dependent on their inhumanity, or proximity to animals, and objecthood. In fact, the only people he calls by their actual names are those he has no power over, including his family, his doctors and his parole office.

If, as bell hooks claims, "The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling,"[128] (21)" Dahmer and his fictional reflection Quentin use the bodies of their Black victims to experience a "new delight." It is worth noting here that Quentin does not just spend his time downing Quaaludes and alcohol but eating American fast-food and watching television. He is an *avid* consumer of popular American culture, flickering between MTV, and X-rated channels. His delight in the bodies of Others is evidenced in Quentin's description of Big Guy, one of his black victims. Quentin is not merely drunk with infatuation, but delighted with both his access to, and his possession of, a black body.

> Also, BIG GUY for a part-nigger part-Huron Indian drop-out college basketball player-junkie-dealer from Lansing was weird, he was so *healthy*, I mean looked *healthy*, his hair thick & glossy-black, & his bones so long and hard, his muscles, flat stomach & chest hair &his penis a length of blood sausage, his skin a deep rich plum-black I was crazy to lick with my tongue &my teeth to gnaw. Even his toes, his big toes! —JUST CRAZY FOR HIM. (56)

[128] hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. South End Press, 1992.

As he reduces Big Guy to his size and body (literally, a "big" "guy") Quentin simultaneously licks and gnaws, making food of his victim. The body itself is "weird" to Quentin because it is so extraordinary. Quentin eventually rapes an (unconscious) Big Guy, in an effort to "discipline" (57) him, mirroring historical realities of consuming slaves as both an act in discipline and delight[129].

"Sight," a critical theme in the book, is central to understanding the boundaries and boundlessness of whiteness Quentin elucidates for us, as he desires both to be unseen and seen, simultaneously. His father, a distinguished professor at Mt. Vernon State University with dual appointments in Physics and Philosophy, is able to *see* him in ways he fears, and as a result, he often attempts to avoid his father, and the judgements he levels on him. If to be seen is to be measured, his father constantly measures and weighs him against his expectations, and Quentin is never able to measure up.

> DAD'S EYES behind his shiny glasses. Looking at me like when I was two years old& squatting on the bathroom floor shitting and when I was five years old playing with my baby dick& when I was seven years old& my T-shirt splotched with another kid's nosebleed& when I was eleven homes from the pool where my best

[129] Woodard clarifies "In the public domain, whites, I have shown, either repressed the topic of human consumption or spoke of the consumed slave as a philosophical and moral issue. However, the slaves, having less to lose, described their enslavement as a form of appetite and epicurean hunger for black flesh that whites cultivated in the context of physical abuse, sexualized abuses, and all manner of daily master/slave relations. In John S. Jacobs's slave narrative, entitled "A True Tale of Slavery," he frequently described scenes he witnessed on the plantation in a language suggestive of consumption. He opened his narrative by describing the slave trader as a 'human flesh monger.' His own masters he describes as "hungry heirs" to a general "feast of blood." This feast included black men who were hunted down and beheaded and slaves who were beaten so that their flesh was 'like a steak.' One narrative contained in the massive collection The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography describes how male slaves were beaten and then "hanged up in the smoke house by their thumbs" (77). Joyce, Justin A., and Dwight A. McBride, editors. "Sex, Honor, and Human Consumption." *The Delectable Negro: Human Consumption and Homoeroticism within U.S. Slave Culture*, by Vincent Woodard, New York University Press, 2014, pp. 59–94.

> friend Barry drowned & most fierce DAD'S EYE when I was twelve years old that time Dad charged upstairs with the *Body Builder* magazines shaking in his hand. "Son? *Son?"* (34)

Sight is not merely measurement but being apprehended—Prof. P. continually catches his son in inexplicable situations, and though he maintains some of his secrets, makes little secret of the shame he feels for Quentin in these moments. Though his family, particularly his father, scrutinize him, without their complicity he could not have survived the lifestyle he was living. His family furnishes him with both a lawyer, to reduce his chances of imprisonment after he is charged with and convicted of child molestation, and a job, which he needs for his probation. They not only ignore signs of trouble but maintain secrets to protect the family from general shame, and him from their judgements. This happens multiple times with his father, including at the age of twelve, when his father finds muscle-men magazines with lewd drawings scrawled all over them and thereafter, when his father drops in at his caregiver's quarters to invite him to dinner. These examples form not only a pattern with his father, but one with his family: his mother and grandmother lend him money in secret, and his father helps him burn the magazines.

Afterthoughts& Conclusion

The first time I read *Zombie* (1995) this text, I was afraid. I had to it down multiple times. My visceral reactions, to both his descriptions and the knowledge I had of Jeffrey Dahmer, were immediate and considerable. The one story that replayed in my mind was the young man who was cleared to return with Dahmer after he is stopped in the street. Despite the hole that was drilled into his head, the police officers took one look at Jeffrey and thought nothing more. The young man (he wasn't over 18) didn't register to him as someone's child, as a being worthy of care or protection. Though this isn't a direct example of white rage, Dahmer's actions, like Quentin's,

couple the sadism of the plantation and a desire for intimacy. So much of white rage works around these vectors. I thought of his mother, this boy with a hole drilled into his head. I did not have a child in that instance of first reading, but I thought of the pain she must have felt.

CODA

I am the daughter of a Guyanese mother and a Jamaican father, the great grandchild of an Englishman and a Chinese indentured laborer. I am the progeny of enslaved Africans and indentured Indians, the product of post-independence Jamaica, born in Russia and living in America. Before the age of 18, I attend 10 schools: three high schools in two states, one middle school and six elementary schools in three countries. It is not enough to speak of land as colonized— people are colonized. The human consequences of colonialization are complex, dynamic and ever unfolding. The year is now 2010 and I am graduating from the Frederick Douglass Academy (FDA) in a few months. My peers receive their college acceptance letters, celebrating SUNYs and private institutions. I await my CUNY Hunter College acceptance letter, understanding fully that an acceptance anywhere else would mean nothing. I am undocumented but I can go to CUNY. I receive a scholarship but file no FAFSA. I cannot accept the scholarship. My mother takes out a personal loan. I am a winner only in theory.

To be "a winner only in theory" is not my story alone. It is the story of many people who strive to work through and beyond institutional limitations but find that a moment of achievement cannot thwart the precarity they once existed in and still haven't escaped. It is the story of those who cannot attain citizenship and of those who do attain citizenship, and yet, are left with civic estrangement. It is the shared narrative of the overpoliced. It is the story of Indigenous people, African Americans, West Indians and many other immigrant populations within the United States who fail to arrive even in the midst of completion. The ambivalence I recognize in these narratives form the basis of this project, which is most interested in further outlining the contours of ever-changing white supremacy while investigating the relationships formed within its bounds.

When I first began this project, I was interested in how people survived; how stereotypes could be weaponized to loosen while they constricted; how people coped with suffering under white supremacy. I did not realize that I was simultaneously unpacking disparate parts of my own history and contemplating my individual sociopolitical position within this country. In fact, this did not dawn on me until several events transpired and I was able to connect them together in retrospect: the death of my grandmother, my Nani, in 2020; vigorous writing about Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) and the protagonist Sophie, who emigrates at the age of twelve and is swept up in a series of relationships that are not her own, but which impact her tremendously; and a re-encounter with a "personal" statement I crafted about seven years ago, which is interwoven into this reflection.[130] My grandmother's death opened a portal. In struggling to mourn her as I pushed towards degree completion while mothering and reading about the continuity of memory in Danticat's text, through and beyond our minds buried deep within our cells, I was forced to recall the length of the trip. I had been working towards this all my life; there was no relationship that fell out of my thinking.

Like Sophie, I emigrated at a young age and held the remnants of relationships that had nothing to do with me. The most pressing relationship I withstood was the one the adults around me had to the system which governed us all. Boasts to my peers about traveling and interesting conversations with teachers camouflaged another reality: movement was my mother's means of protecting us from circumstances outside of her control. My older sister and I were born in the midst of my parents' studies. My mother finished her degree in Monumental Art from the Moscow School of Industrial Art and found herself in Jamaica, ignorant of the struggle that was there: the low paying jobs, classism and racism. My father reeled upon his return to Jamaica. He

[130] Danticat, Edwidge. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Vintage Books, 1994.

knew of the low paying jobs and nepotism, abuse at the hands of the Jamaican Constabulary Force concentrated in inner-city Kingston neighborhoods and that degrees meant little on an underdeveloped island. The combination of her ignorance and his evasiveness necessitated corrective action, the sort that would give her female children lives without the misogyny that lurked in the streets of Kingston, among other threats. By the time I was eight, flying over New York City, I too knew of curfews, the cost of food and Christmas gifts, and the "sufferation" of the masses.

While my project inevitably shifted as I worked, my interest in relationships within the quotidian didn't. When I began researching and writing my first chapter, I reflected on many relationships I've observed, between lovers; friends; colleagues; and intimate strangers, wherein people grappled with institutionalized limitations while striving to build connections. Again, I often wondered how folx survived the kind of ambivalence which requires you to both live on your knees *and* move with intention, plotting and planning to avoid costly mistakes. I often wondered too, how is sense made when one recognizes the limitations of the "system" and yet, still yearns for its prizes and rewards and more so, what is beyond it? Sometimes the connections I saw were not about fostering care but about fostering power, as if in response to the debilitating impact of white supremacy. I witnessed the active weaponization of stereotypes against employers and lovers alike, rendering the stereotype a tool in moments of economic and emotional insecurity. It appeared to me that the utility of stereotypes was not merely relegated to representations in the public sphere, but a core part of how folx enacted their desires and agency in the private sphere too. The tension here, between victim and active participant, is one I hope to more fully investigate in future projects.

The cosmopolitan possibilities inherent in migration often conceal various kinds of violence sustained by émigrés. My mother admonished us daily to remember that in a world where I was called "Snow White" walking home, I was also poor and from nothing. I was commuting before I knew what commute meant and hurrying before I knew it as a poor person's verisimilitude, redefining time by condensing it. To build something would mean fighting. Reading lessons started young, as did time-telling, spelling and writing. They continued in Wakenaam, Guyana, where my Nani and Nana had a small library filled with the remnants of their seven children including old National Geographic magazines, '70s romance novels and classics of English literature. I learned tenacity, riding my cousin's bike over and over again, continually moving into unestablished spaces, confronting my fears and fighting.

Sophie's experiences otherwise illuminate the violence one sustains upon arrival. Her first trip on an airplane is marked by state and personal violence: her neighboring passenger, a young boy, sobs as the plane takes off.[131] His father is the victim of state violence minutes before he is shuttled onboard. Even as she is able to accrue cultural capital as a French speaker, learning the English language itself is a daunting task. She is now a contagion:

> My mother said it was important that I learn English quickly. Otherwise, the American students would make fun of me, or, even worse, beat me. A lot of other mothers from the nursing home where she worked had told her that their children were getting into fights in school because they were accused of having HBO—Haitian Body Odor. Many of the American kids even accused Haitians of having AIDS because they had heard on

[131] Ibid, 38.

television that only the ‘Four Hs’ got AIDS—Heroin addicts, Hemophiliacs, Homosexuals, and Haitians.[132]

Quotidian racialized violence structures Sophie’s life in New York City. Within her domestic sphere, her relationship with her mother Martine is likewise painful. Martine, raped as a young girl, fled Haiti, leaving Sophie with her sister Atie. Rebuilding their bond through the multiple traumas of assault and abandonment is a complex task, arguably only successful after Martine dies of suicide.

While Sophie’s trip to New York City reunites her with her mother, Martine flees the bodily violence she is subjected to only to import its lasting effects to her immediate location. Systemic precarity is the underlying fact of this project. To fight against precarity is to fight against the forceful ordering of the immigrant body as synchronously fuel and detritus. Though the nation exploits immigrant labor, immigrants are also considered disposable. Barack Obama’s use of cages to house immigrants was worsened by Trump’s “zero tolerance” immigration policy, yet the separation of immigrant children from their families within the United States is only slightly worse than the rapid expulsion techniques otherwise used, often leaving migrants in more dangerous situations.[133]

As clarified by the Frassanito Network, considering migration as a social movement with a distinct perspective enables a kind of opening, one that has the possibility to challenge domination and exploitation[134]. Perhaps this was the possibility Donald Trump had in mind when

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[132] Ibid, 51.

[133] Semple, Kirk. “Asylum Seekers Say U.S. Is Returning Them to the Dangers They Fled.” The New York Times, The New York Times, 17 Mar. 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/03/17/world/americas/immigration-guatemala-us-asylum.html.

[134] "We Didn’t Cross the Border, the Border Crossed Us": Movements and Struggles of Migration in and around Europe. The Frassanito Network, May 2006, www.fluechtlingsrathamburg.de/content/TheFrassanit%20Network_Mai06.pdf.

his team debuted the "New Deal for Black America" plan two weeks before the 2016 election. He explicitly connected the devastation wrought on African American communities to illegal immigration: "Illegal immigration violates the civil rights of African-Americans." He continued, "No group has been more economically harmed by decades of illegal immigration than low-income African-American workers."[135] Texts like Paul D. Moreno's *Black Americans and Organized Labor: A New History* (2008)[136]; David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness* (2007)[137] and Philip S. Foner's *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1981* (2018)[138] highlight a more complex history, in which non-white immigrants are not the linchpin in African American economic progress.

While African American voters were not the primary voting population responsible for his electoral win, the idea that immigrants collectively work against African Americans is a dangerous one that can vitalize white supremacy and expand its bounds. The ADOS movement, while correct in its assertion that African Americans are entitled to reparations, was for a moment caught in the energy of Trump's historical erasure and manipulation. The alienation of Indigenous people, African Americans, West Indians and many other immigrant populations within the civic space helps to maintain whiteness as America's mythic norm. Importantly, those who are promised protection under a system of precarity are generally unable to develop free of concern about the threatening, precarized others; they are obligated to obedience and

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[135] Vitali, Ali. "Donald Trump Outlines His 'New Deal for Black America'." NBCNews.com, NBCUniversal News Group, 8 Feb. 2017, www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/donald-trump-outlines-his-new-deal-black-america-n673566.
[136] Moreno, Paul D. *Black Americans and Organized Labor: a New History*. Louisiana State University Press, 2006.
[137] Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. Verso, 2007.
[138] Foner, Philip Sheldon. *Organized Labor and the Black Worker: 1619-1981*. Haymarket Books, 2018.

subordination. While whiteness is mediated as natural and cohesive, it is a structure produced by precarity and one that helps to produce precarity. I recognize the miracle it is that I sit here completing a task like this while my cousins in Guyana, Jamaica, Venezuela and Brazil are not able to. I am otherwise happy I did not find only suffering during the course of my investigation, but recovered a usable past, one entrenched in the knowledge of ancestors; Jamaican and Guyanese radical theorists; creatrix like Nanny of the Maroons who made her way in the world as she fought for her community; joys like rice fields and the coconuts my dear grandparents used to use to make oil in Wakenaam; and the radical redirections possible in the sufferation.

Even as narratives about lives marked by ambivalence testify to interconnected violence across geopolitical regions, they otherwise testify to the ability of those who are disenfranchised to support others. My time at FDA was integral to my understanding of myself as an empowered actor. To be clear, I have never known poor people to sit in their suffering. The nightly news in Kingston relayed brutal murders and kidnapping <u>and</u> poor people marching and building roadblocks to protest the injustices they faced. Poor people within my imagination always knew their power. Unfortunately, the state did too.

The Frederick Douglass Academy was one of the few spaces in which I was encouraged to be wholly myself. The classrooms of Ms. Breen and Mr. Harris gave me life! I was able to have all kinds of discussions and experiment in variety of ways, without feeling like I had to leave parts of myself behind. I was Brown *and* Black *and* curious and really excited about Zorra Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and analyses of Obama, and I was encouraged in that[139]. I did not worry about producing myself for consumption, at least not consciously and not with adults in mind.

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[139] Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. HarperLuxe, 2008.

My history, and that of countless others, is an intersectional one, an examination of layers of loss, emanating from translation and dislocation, from generational discontinuity, conflict, negation, spacelessness and ultimately, illegitimacy. To be illegitimate is to be unauthorized; unlawful; unaccepted and inauthentic. It is an existence entrenched in negation. Perhaps I've erases critical class differences within my narrative retelling, as one can be abjected from the civic space and still be part of the middle or upper middle class. To achieve and yet fail to arrive still designates a kind of privilege; it is the failure of this privilege which erase all boundaries. In the words of Claudia Rankine, you cannot class out of race in America[140]. The irony here too is that one can be educated and poor, for example…worthy in one way and yet unworthy in another. Perhaps the freedom we attach to economic stability is antithetical to the system one must navigate to attain it. Perhaps, as Bobby said, we work in iniquity to achieve vanity.

[140] Poet and professor Claudia Rankine mentions this in a 2020 interview conducted at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, entitled "Black on White." Bech Dyg, Kasper Bech Dyg. *Claudia Rankine Interview: Black on White*. YouTube, YouTube, 17 Sept. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=GoAIpuQ_7G4.

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CHAPTER 1

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