

# **The Eschatological Dilemma: The Problem of Studying The Black Male Only as the Deaths That Result from Anti-Black Racism**

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**Introduction**

The sensibilities of the Black American intellectual concerning race have historically been cemented to their ascendancy within empire. How one writes about race, offering hope for change in opposition to the totality of racism, and communicates an aspiration for the possibilities made available by American ideals like freedom, justice, and equality has separated the radical from the progressive. In "The Failure of the Black Intellectual," E. Franklin Frazier describes Black intellectualization as de-niggerization of Black scholarship, a retreat from using Black experience as the foundation of theorizing the Blackness, or an "emptying of his [her] life of meaningful and content and ridding him of all Negro identification."<sup>i</sup> The study of Black folk under the integrationist milieu shows the danger Black intellectuals, the Black bourgeoisie pose to our conceptualizations of, our thinking about Blackness, which was described by Carter G. Woodson's *Miseducation of the Negro* (1933). In trying to distort the content of Blackness to fit within the confines of disciplinary study, the study of Black folk by the academic class simultaneously reflects the desire of the Black intellectual to be the beneficiary of anthropological histories/post-racial possibilities of white humanity, while separating themselves as a class from the pathological representation(s) associated with the Nigger which inhibit their transcendence. Assimilating canonical knowledge(s) then acts as the means by which life is grasped—revelation, pulling the Black intellectual away from the wretchedness sown into the flesh of Black people and the death of Niggers. As Woodson notes, "One is reminded of the words of Langston Hughes in *Ask Your Mama*, where he says that 'the African visitor finds that in the American social supermarket blacks for sale range from intellectuals to entertainers. Thus, it appears that the price of the slow integration which the Negroes are experiencing must be bought at the price of abject conformity in thinking.'"<sup>ii</sup> The effect of racism is much more complicated than the blanket history of exclusion usually offered as the master narrative of slow arduous progress in the academy. It is undeniably true that Black scholarship was denied entrance into the American university, but the scholarship and thought allowed in the academy was moderate, and rewarded for taking integrationist and feminist stances far removed from concrete realities of poor working class Black folk.<sup>iii</sup>

Today, the Black intellectual writes and assimilates Blackness into the categories of disciplines to escape death—real physical death—and attempts to distance themselves from this death through class mobility and social recognition. The Black academic class is an aspiring middle class able to observe the dying of poor working class Black folk from a distance. In this sense, Blackness is written out of the academic enterprise generally and forced into conceptual expressions of convergence and canonical imitation, while Black maleness is altogether ignored and erased specifically, thought of only as pathological; the platform from which other gendered discourses form in reaction towards. In spite of the world before us, where young Black boys—children—are murdered by the state, and other white vigilantes for their potentiality and propensity to become Black men, academic writing—the research it aims to convey, remains categorically indifferent to the contradictions that Black maleness holds in a white supremacist state that not only denies "manhood," to Black men and boys, but imposes patriarchy upon them as seemingly endless and unfettered violence. This patriarchal violence enacted against Black

men and boys is not only wielded by white men and women, but rationally enforced by the state.<sup>iv</sup> To resist the hegemony of these studies, writing about Black males is not enough. There must be a reformulating of the (sexual) vulnerability the racialized male endures under patriarchy.

Despite the failure of gender scholars to empirically substantiate the claim that the maleness of Black men and boys confer privilege within a patriarchal society, intersectionality remains committed to asserting that Black male vulnerability is predominately due to race, not sex.<sup>v</sup> While Black men suffer disproportionately more from police violence, incarceration, unemployment, and under-education than whites and their female counterpart, none of their disadvantage is thought to originate from being both racialized as Black and biologized as male. In this way, gender theory denies Black males the ability to be subjects of study or subjects which offer insights into the sexual racism they experience at the hands of white patriarchy. Liberal arts disciplines and scholars often condemn any research focusing on Black male experience as patriarchal and disadvantageous to the study of the Black woman. This erasure of the Black male from philosophical and conceptual study is not the result of ignorance or one's failure to attend, rather it is part of a deliberate effort to displace and eliminate our knowledge of the realities which facilitate the death of Black men, and the violence against Black boys. This casting away of the Black male is by applauded by scholars and rewarded by disciplines, because such disregard maintains the division between disciplinary knowledge and the "problem people" observed—the poor violent Black males understood solely as objects of study and condemnation.<sup>vi</sup>

### **In the Violence of Concept: Anti-Blackness Untranslated**

It is no secret that the modernization of America's economy during the 1970's and 1980's had dire consequences for Black men.<sup>vii</sup> The post-civil rights economic prospects for Black men, who had traditionally been blue collar workers and laborers, was marked by poverty, and a growing unemployment for the latter part of the twentieth century. As economist Amadu Jacky Kaba observes unlike their female counterparts, who have seen tremendous economic, political, and educational gains over the last several decades, Black men have not seen vast strides in their mobility from poverty, or comparable gains in education. In many ways, their position indicates only further social and political marginalization.<sup>viii</sup> In the late seventies, James B. Stewart and Joseph W. Scott observed that Black males, because they are racialized men, suffer from deliberate and institutional programs designed to remove them from society. Stewart and Scott maintained that the institutional decimation of Black men through police violence and incarceration emerged from a political economy that deliberately confined young Black men to poverty, exploited Black males for cheap labor, and rationalized their death as a consequence of their deviance and undesirability in American society.<sup>ix</sup> Unfortunately the institutional decimation of Black males continues uninterrupted for the last several decades. The consequences of this practice have been so severe that some authors have begun referring to poor Black male youth as "disconnected," and economically doomed since "long-term disconnection correlates highly with low-income family backgrounds but also with poor future economic prospects—for the individuals themselves, their spouses or partners, their communities, and their children."<sup>x</sup> In short, Black males exist in a world of violence, predicated on a very tangible social exclusion whereby they become sanctioned by society, not participants within it.



Ronald B. Mincy's edited volume *Black Males Left Behind* (2006) offers extensive proof that the poverty Black men suffer resulting from being uneducated and unemployed is cyclical and in many ways inescapable.<sup>xi</sup> Because Black boys are less educated than their white and Black female counterparts, they lack the necessary education to qualify for many jobs that would offer social mobility. Recent research not only finds that employers are less likely hire Black men after they are incarcerated, but discriminate against Black men more generally because "the high rates of crime and incarceration among young [B]lack men are likely to reduce the employment prospects of those with no criminal background themselves. Employers frequently cannot distinguish accurately between those who do and do not have criminal backgrounds."<sup>xii</sup> Even in those instances where Black boys find themselves reared in a viable middle class family, they are much more likely to be victims of "downward mobility," or falling out of the middle class altogether as adult Black men.<sup>xiii</sup>

Unprepared and lacking options for employment, many Black men turn to illegal activities as a means of economic sustenance. Participating in criminal activities, in an effort to survive within a society that will not educate, hire, or train Black men and boys, inevitably places these young Black males in contact with the criminal justice system and the ever-expanding prison industrial complex. Following the institutional decimation of Black men pointed out in Stewart and Scott's (1978) work on the relationship between prisons and poverty, Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010) argues that "mass incarceration...is the most damaging manifestation of the backlash against the Civil Rights Movement."<sup>xiv</sup> Mass incarceration destroys Black families, removes fathers from homes and makes Black men, both literally and figuratively, a disenfranchised and unemployed undercaste. According to Alexander, the prison industrial complex targets Black men. She writes "our criminal-justice system has for decades been infected with a mind-set that views black boys and men in particular as a problem to be dealt with, managed and controlled. This mind-set has fueled a brutal war on drugs, a get-tough movement and a prison-building boom unprecedented in world history."<sup>xv</sup> This largely overlooked aspect of incarceration, which both *feeds* and *feeds off of* the poverty of Black men, remains descriptive in most scholarly works dealing with Black males. This grim reality is not only proof of racism, but the consequences of the peculiar sexual violence and caricatures that have come to represent Black males as deviants and rapists in this society.

Far too often Black men and boys, are recognized only as summaries of raw sociological data: idle collateral, figureless subjects vacated in person and defined by number. These Black males are thought to be little more than the numbers which indicate that Black males are social problems: on the street, inevitably dead, or permanently locked away. Black males are not imagined as living human beings. Black males are merely thought to be particular expressions of group phenomena—individual examples of a problem population that are the criminals, deviants, and dangers which plague society. Their lives are not seen, because death is normal for him; he—they—are disposable. The Black male who escapes death, but is held within the prison is no more visible. As Becky Pettit points out in *Invisible Men: Mass Incarceration and the Myth of Black Progress*, this is an epistemological problem with real political and policy consequences. By not seeing Black men who are incarcerated, the study of Black men is deprived by a collective blindness that "hinders the establishment of social facts, conceals inequality, and undermines the foundation of social science research, including that used in the design and evaluation of social policy."<sup>xvi</sup> Because we do not understand the actual realities of Black males, we conceptualize them as they are imagined—ruled by stereotypes masquerading as theory—



and remain trapped by the narratives of Black males as problems. Rather than viewers invested in the complexities of Black male life, theorists embrace the racist caricatures of Black men as concepts. Consequently, Black males are written into gender theory as the dangers the academic theorists fear—the stereotypes Black men and boys are represented as within society.

Anti-Black racism, the urban landscape which is its architecture, and the brutality of the police state, all operate to confine Black men to poverty and various cycles of abuse and death. It is often thought that the academic scholar, the theorist, rises above the sociological realities like poverty, death, and criminality which surround the Black male. Far too often, scholars studying Black males ignore the extent to which these social phenomena synonymity with Black men and boys are also interiorized within the mind of the scholar. Our current theorization of Black males mirror this social reality rather than challenging it. Even in theory, Black males become the origins of social problems rather than victims of them. Ontologically, Black men are made synonymous to social evil. Sociologically, they are simply conceptualized as expressing this nature.

Current theory only perpetuates this absence of Black men in thought. Their representation as problems and dangers deserving of death, who are incapable of the complexities gifted by life, lie behind our present descriptions them as violent patriarchs set upon domination and self-destruction. Black males desperately need new ideas to account for the violence (economic, political, and industrial) which turns Black men and boys into corpses. Currently, Black maleness is conceptually confined by its social result—Black Death—rather than life; sociality. These patterns of perception, of collapsing death into the undesirability of thinking the Black male, sustains the disciplinary disposition towards Black men generally, and show little possibility that these people/humans/lives can be thought of as more than the cessations of their existence in the minds of most.

For young Black boys, maleness in a white supremacist society is fraught with difficulty and the all too likely outcome of death. Even as men, this racialized maleness is never a process leading to an ontogenic end, or recognized as a suitable social identity. Instead the masculinity impressed upon these Black bodies is known through its uncontrollable excess, its lack of maturation, and demonstrations of the more primitive and uncivilized aspects of a not yet evolved savagery. As Geoffrey Canada, president of the Harlem Children Zone, remarks, “The image of the male as strong is mixed with the image of male as violent. Male is virile get confused with male as promiscuous. Male as adventurous equals male as reckless. Male as intelligent often gets mixed with male as arrogant, racist, and sexist...Boys find themselves pulled and tugged by forces beyond their control as they make the confusing and sometimes perilous trip to manhood.”<sup>xvii</sup> The milieu from which manhood springs is saturated with racist caricatures which seem to legitimate the fear Americans have of Black men. The images and perception of Black men as dangerous to society, women, and themselves ultimately creates a pattern of thinking that allows the seeming inevitability of death for the young Black male to be justified. Understanding the relationship between anti-Black racism and the sexuality of Black maleness is not simply describing a cultural pattern of anti-Blackness imposed on the lives of the Black male by the larger white supremacist society. It is simply not reducible to the posit that the Black male’s gender can be explained by him being incapable of structurally asserting and ideally emulating the historical identity presented as white male patriarchy. In reality we must grasp that the effect of anti-Blackness on Black men and boys is a denaturing of Black manhood.

The Black male is not born a patriarchal male. He is raced and sexed peculiarly, configured as barbaric and savage, imagined to be a violent animal, not a human being. His mere

existence ignites the negrophobia taken to be the agreed upon justification for his death. Black male death lessens their economic competition with, as well as their political radicality against, white society. It is this fear of Black males that allows society to support the imposition of death on these bodies, and consent to the rationalizations the police state offer as their justifications for killing the Black-male beast (the rapist, the criminal, and the deviant-thug). The young Black male's death, the death of Black boys, is merely an extension of this logic—the need to destroy the Black beast cub, before it matures into full pathology. The Black boy, that child, is seen as the potential to be the Nigger-beast.

### **The Sexual Violence Ignored: Racism's Sodomizing of Black Men and Boys**

The sexual violence of Black men and boys has remained a routine aspect of racial violence. In our everyday lives, Black men are publically assaulted sexually and exposed to the sexual coercion of the police state. Unfortunately, their stories and these public displays of racism's sexual component remain an unapproachable subject for study under our current disciplinary arrangement of knowledge, specifically the gender category itself. On January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2014 Darrin Manning, a 16 year old Black boy, was castrated by a female police officer that found him suspicious. Mr. Manning was a child, a straight "A" student, he was searched, patted down, and then his testicles were squeezed by this woman of the state so hard that they ruptured as indicated by an audible popping.<sup>xviii</sup> This is not as uncommon as one might think. Young Black males are constantly subjected to sexual assault and coercion by their daily encounters with the state, in the seclusion created on the street through police interrogations, and under the aegis of the now unconstitutional surveillance practices known as "Stop and Frisk."<sup>xix</sup> On August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Abner Louima, a Haitian man, was sexually assaulted by officer Justin Volpe in a Brooklyn police station. Louima was arrested for allegedly striking Volpe in a crowd. Once transported to the police station, Louima was forced into a bathroom, where Volpe grabbed his testicles, kicked him in the groin, and then anally penetrated him with a bathroom plunger. Showing no remorse, or rather the sexual etiquette of the police state towards Black men, he paraded the plunger around the station as proof of his conquest.<sup>xx</sup> On August 28, 2004, Coprez Coffie was stopped by officers Scott Korhonen and Gerald Lodwich. In an effort to find drugs, officer Korhonen stuck a screwdriver in Coffie's anus.<sup>xxi</sup> Even when white officers assault other non-white peoples, there is an association with the sexual violence committed by the police with Black men. Angel Perez was raped into submitting to be an informant. In October of 2012, the Chicago police sodomized him with a pistol, with one officer yelling, "I hear that a big [B]lack nigger dick feels like a gun up your ass."<sup>xxii</sup> The sexual violence of the police is not isolated to the act of sodomy. The fear that white men have had of the Black rapist, the mythical beast conjured within the white imagination to justify lynching, also serves as a justification for violence against Black men. On September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013 the white state replied to a 911 call of a white woman fearful of a Black man asking for help at her door step after surviving a car accident. Her fear of this Black man named Jonathon Ferrell led to his murder by the white men of the state.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The state is not the only perpetrator of sexual violence against Black men and boys. Though Trayvon Martin's death has been extensively covered by intellectuals, media pundits, criminal justice experts, and social justice activists for years, it has been exclusively explained as a narrative of race-based violence. While it is true that Trayvon Martin's death serves as a grim reminder of anti-Black violence, there has not been one article, blog, or public conversation



dealing with the possibility of Martin being sexually assaulted by Zimmerman, despite Rachel Jeantel announcing to the American public that she told Trayvon Martin that Zimmerman could have been a pedophile.<sup>xxiv</sup> On January 10, 2013, in Joliet, Illinois, two young Black men were strangled by four white assailants. Two white women and two white men killed Eric Glover and Terrance Rankin. These white murders surfed the bodies of these two Black men, and then had a threesome on top of their corpses.<sup>xxv</sup> This story received little national coverage, and to this day remains untouched by the literature or problematized as a racist act of necrophilia. Even when Black males are murders and sex acts performed upon their dead bodies, there is an inability to attribute sexual vulnerability to Black men and boys.

These sexualized aspects of Black male victimization are denied in our current analyses, because Black male death is viewed as generic. It is normal; a routine and emotionally repetitive occurrence. Black men and boys dying has been morally condemned as the heinous acts of racism, but is dealt with as little more. Let me be clear: this erasure (in theory) that accepts the normalcy of Black male death (in society) is oppression; the outgrowth of Black male's dehumanized status. This act leaves Black men to be understood primarily by their dying, and allows these deaths to be weighed against other political interests or more ideal subjects, by consequence. Dehumanization finds its extremity in making the lives of the oppressed inconsequential; it is not being able to think of the Black male beyond their corpse that is the real result of racism's dehumanization. Racism "thingifies" Black life, and the reduction of Black men and boys to the event of their dying leaves the aim of racism, accepting the racially oppressed as not human—nothing lost—unquestioned. Making the suffering of Black men and boys a second thought, weighing it as less valuable because it is so common, saying maybe he should not have died, but, does not affirm the lives of Black males. The deaths of Black men and the lack of a category, or the empathy, to understand the fullness of their suffering in a racist society, empowers others to interpret their lives for them. This has the effect of lessen their lives in death. Because Black men die, and Black men are decentered as the normative subject of thinking, there is a collective forgetting that collapses Black males to their corpses and not their living. When a Black boy is raped, his rape is thought to be exceptional, since rape is often thought to be the province of the female body. However, exceptionality is not a comment upon the oppression of the Black male, only a commentary concerning how other interpreters who are not Black males see and think about the violence committed towards Black males. If violence matters, if erasure matters, if the accuracy of understanding the lives of Black men are the aim of study, then we must concede that we are not liberating people in reality when we deny aspects of their lives that do not fit into academic categories. Not assigning gender, or sexuality to Black men, does not mean they do not suffer from sexual violence. What this refusal to "see" shows is that there are disciplinary problems of knowledge that refuse to acknowledge the violence Black males suffer. It shows that the disciplinary theory used to explain the Black male is inaccurate, or better yet inapplicable in its current state. Erasing the sexual violence against Black men is not only a political blindness, but began with arranging sexual violence and rape as a heteronormative endeavor which excludes the victimization of males. This denial of the rape of men is not confined to our present moment. It began with our reading of American slavery and persists even now in the cultural assumptions shared in our meanings of gender.



**On Thomas Foster's "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery":  
Engaging Saidiya Hartmann's *Scenes of Subjection* on Gendered Grounds**

Whereas the institution of American slavery is often offered as the origin of the Black female's sexual exploitation, the origin of Black male's oppression during slavery is confined to race. Despite the various examples of (homo) eroticism at play in the murder and rape of Black men in our society, the sexual subjugation and rape of Black males during slavery is denied as a horror they suffered under. Adrienne Davis asserts in "The Sexual Economy of American Slavery" that "slavery's political economy forced enslaved women to labor in a second way that was not required of any other group... enslaved women, and only enslaved women, were forced to perform sexual and reproductive labor to satisfy the economic, political, and personal interests of white men of the elite class."<sup>xxvi</sup> Even Joy James, who correctly notes that "gender analyses expand critical depictions of the neo-slave narrative and the historic role of Black Americans as commodities or racial text for (white) consumers and activists,"<sup>xxvii</sup> only considers gender within slavery as the domain of women. James continues, "Considering gender, one sees that racial-sexual violence marks black women bodies as spectacle."<sup>xxviii</sup> Similar to the paradigm first commented upon in Angela Davis's *Women, Race and Class*, gender and its subsequent vulnerabilities are assumed to be the province of the female body. Davis understood that "the slave system discouraged male supremacy in Black men...[because] the promotion of male supremacy among slaves might have prompted a dangerous rupture in the chain of command,"<sup>xxix</sup> but fails to extend this account into Black male's sexual vulnerability to white men and women. In other words, the account of slavery offered by Davis conceptualizes Black men as vulnerable to racial violence because of their lack of power within slavery to resist it, but does not imagine this same vulnerability to sexual violence within slavery because they are male. There is nothing about the male body she finds particularly or sexually vulnerable to the desires of whites. The Black female body however is thought to be perpetually vulnerable to sexual violence. Davis writes: "As females, slave women were inherently vulnerable to all forms of sexual coercion. If the most violent punishments of men consisted in floggings and mutilations, women were flogged and mutilated, as well as raped."<sup>xxx</sup> For Davis, rape is a technology specific to the female body—"the uncamouflaged expression of the slaveholder's economic mastery and overseer's control over Black women as workers."<sup>xxxi</sup> Male bodies are presumed to be immune from sexual assault and rape at the analytic level, since the category of gender implies that rape is female specific.

The problem with these aforementioned accounts of slavery is that they assume slavery, an institution which denatured and distorted the very concept of the human, nonetheless preserved and cherished humanist categories like "race, gender, or worker," as useful designations applicable to enslaved Black bodies. Enslaved Blacks were animals that possessed none of the intersectional categories of our day in any meaningful way, especially insofar as one could assert these categories if they did apply could remain ordered upon our present notions of heteronormativity.<sup>xxxii</sup> Slavery did not denature the human, but leave the precious category of gender untouched. Over the last several decades, Robert Aldrich's *Colonialism and Homosexuality* and Ronald Hyam's *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* have shown that homosexuality and the sexual exploitation of "savage males" were well established and extensive under British colonialism. Unfortunately, such knowledge has done little to challenge the heteronormative mythology which makes enslaved women the sole victims of rape, despite America being a British colony when American chattel slavery was created.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Given the work

of historians and literary scholars, it is now known that Black male rape at the hands of white men and white women during slavery was common place. These discoveries, however, have not led to a reorienting of Black feminist historiography or gender more generally.

Slave narratives like *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1846), and *The Autobiography of James Smith* (1881), as well as historical reflections like Archibald Grimké's "The Sex Question and Segregation" (1913), offer evidence that Black men were victims of rape by both white men and women during slavery and Jim Crow.<sup>xxxiv</sup> These texts show Black men to be just as vulnerable to rape as their enslaved female counterpart. The rape of Black men was public. It was often used as punishment to establish the dominance of the white master over the Black male. Given the historical fact that Black males were raped during slavery, why is there a resistance to acknowledging and studying the sexualized racial violence Black male bodies have been subjected to throughout history?<sup>xxxv</sup> Why is the Black male body excluded from our theories of gender, and why is sexual violence, his sexual vulnerability, not analyzed within discussions of racism?

What does Frederick Douglass ask the reader to understand about enslavement when he confronts Covey, the nigger-breaker, in his narrative? Is his fight with Covey a battle of recognition, or is it Douglass's refusal to be physically and sexually subjugated as a slave? The rush of Covey to strip Douglass naked, his tiger-like fierceness of tearing his clothes, Covey's wearing out of his switches on Douglass's body, the eagerness that Covey shows in this *first whipping* after telling Douglass to strip naked—what does this mean to our imagination, our thinking turned to the sexual violence of an enslaved man?<sup>xxxvi</sup> For years, thinkers have pointed to the sexual implications and homoeroticism present within the conditions of slavery.<sup>xxxvii</sup> In reality, the rape of enslaved men, just as the rape of enslaved women, was used as a routinely present technology of racial domination.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Over the last several years, a multitude of scholars have sought to characterize the violence of slavery as persisting beyond the legal epochs of racial change throughout America's history. These scholars, collectively referred to as Afro-pessimists in the literature, argue that slavery continues to modernize itself as a condition coextensive with Blackness.<sup>xxxix</sup> One of the central features of "wretchedness," and the libidinal vulnerability of Blackness is the sexual violence of rape married to the condition of enslavement.

In Saidiya Hartmann's *Scenes of Subjection*, however, the ubiquity of rape during slavery is narrowed to a prerequisite body—that of the Black female. Hartman argues that the brutality, the libidinal economy of slavery, is at its apex, or more accurately, at its most extreme degree, exercised upon the female slave body because of rape.<sup>xl</sup> Jared Sexton's "People of Color Blindness: Notes on Aftermath of Slavery,"<sup>xli</sup> is an attempt to correct Achille Mbembe's (mis)reading of Hartmann in "Necropolitics."<sup>xlii</sup> According to Sexton, "Mbembe abandons too quickly this meditation on the peculiar institution in pursuit of the proper focus of his theoretical project: the formation of colonial sovereignty."<sup>xliii</sup> For Sexton, Mbembe overlooks the historical rise of "colonial rule" already established in the legal and political structure of slavery. Specifically, "the legal and political status of the captive female that is paradigmatic for the (re)production of enslavement," in which "the normativity of sexual violence... establishes an inextricable link between racial formation and sexual subjection."<sup>xliv</sup> Sexton then offers a normative analysis of the Black female slave which explains "why for Hartman resistance is figured through the [B]lack female's sexual self-defense."<sup>xlv</sup> Thus, in Sexton's reading of Hartmann the absoluteness of power, or Mbembe's concern for the terror formation of colonial rule, is most accurately expressed by the gendered dimensions of slavery, where gender is a "designation of the absoluteness of power."<sup>xlvi</sup>

While Hartmann's work is innovative in its offering of analysis which guards against trivializing slavery in spectacle, her work as well as Sexton's reading of her work reifies the idea that rape and sexual assault is the province of enslaved womanhood, and uniquely tied to gender. She says:

Gender, if at all appropriate in this scenario, must be understood as indissociable from violence, the vicious refiguration of rape as mutual and shared desire, the wanton exploitation of the captive body tacitly sanctioned as a legitimate use of property, the disavowal of injury, and the absolute possession of the body and its "issue." In short, black and female difference is registered by virtue of the extremity of power operating on captive bodies and licensed within the scope of the humane and the tolerable.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Here Hartmann asks too much of the gender claim: she insists upon the historical coherence of the category, despite its fracturing under the weight of racism, so that it may yield *her* subject. Blackness extended forward, or enslavement in this epoch, was/is the condition of any myriad of violence(s) that remain without boundaries and only limited by the force applied onto the body. In many cases, even the death of the slave did not arrest the horrors inflicted upon the Black corpse. While Hartmann is fruitful in pointing out the routine violence in enslavement—the living of death, so to speak, she persuades us, by the allure of an ahistorical claim about rape, which is affirmed by our contemporary bourgeois sensibilities to morally assert the recognition of gender, as a means by which we problematize allegedly over-determined racial histories. This sexuality, the heteronormative thrust, is not imaginative. It exists as a re-collective analogy that casts the terror and immorality of our present day thinking about rape backward upon the Black female body, the status *we* endow her with, and the violations of the enslaved *we* make possible from the values *we* privilege in this revision.

Historically, rape during slavery was not bound by sex designations. While Hartmann insists that "sexuality formed the nexus in which [B]lack, female, and chattel were inextricably bound and acted to intensify the constraints of slave status by subjecting the body to another order of violations and whims,"<sup>xlviii</sup> history shows that Black maleness was also sexually abused, and the body of these men and boys sodomized throughout the diaspora. In *Recreating Africa*, James Sweet presents an account of an enslaved men submitting to rape for fear of death throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For example, he offers the story of "a Mina slave named Luís da Costa, [who] confessed that one day while he and his master were out in the woods, his master forced him to submit to anal sex."<sup>xlix</sup> His master, Manuel Alvares Cabral, was known to have sodomized six of his former male slaves in 1739.<sup>1</sup> Sweet also notes that:

Perhaps the most violent sexual assaults of slaves occurred in Pará in the late 1750s and early 1760s. Francisco Serrão de Castro, heir to a large sugar engenho, was denounced for sodomy and rape by no less than nineteen male slaves, all Africans. Among those who were assaulted were teenage boys and married men. As a result of these sexual attacks, a number of the victims suffered from "swelling and . . . bleeding from their anuses." Francisco Serrão de Castro apparently infected his slaves with a venereal disease that eventually took more than a quarter of his victims to their graves.<sup>li</sup>

Whereas Hartmann correctly points out that "the nonexistence of rape as a category of injury pointed not to the violence of the law but to the enslaved woman as a guilty accomplice and



seducer,"<sup>lii</sup> she simultaneously ignores that "the violence and coercion that characterized the rape of male slaves were symptoms of a broader pattern of violence aimed at forcing male slaves to submit to their masters' power."<sup>liii</sup> There was no reason or justification put forth to warrant the sexual assault of the Black male slave—his rape was the totality of violence—the natural extremity of the violence of the day. The rape of the Black male slave did not pretend to maintain the moral superiority of the master; it was complete brutality and the animalistic sexual domination of a Black body throughout.<sup>liv</sup>

Thomas Foster's "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery" explodes the categorical determinism (had by the gender category) of the rape act in Hartmann's *Scenes of Subjection*. Foster maintains that "the sexual assault of enslaved black men was a component of slavery and took place in a wide variety of contexts and in a wide range of forms...In addition to the direct physical abuse of men that happened under slavery, this sexual exploitation constituted a type of psychological abuse that was ubiquitous."<sup>lv</sup> Foster offers the reader a violent historical incident of rape. In 1787, an enslaved man in Maryland was forced at gun point by two white men to rape Elizabeth Amwood. While we have an image and moral set of values that easily map onto the violations that offended and lessened the humanity of Amwood, we lack certain ascriptions of moral violation to the enslaved Black man in this scenario. Foster claims this "lack of explanation" is to be expected, as "the rape of Elizabeth Amwood reveals that [B]lack manhood under slavery was also violated in other ways that are less easily spoken of (then and now), namely, the sexual exploitation of enslaved men."<sup>lvi</sup> In alerting us to our "inabilities to speak or think," about the sexual coercion of Black men (making an enslaved man have sex), many depend on the racist predatory assumptions about Black men desiring to rape, or the sexual insatiability of the Black male that always craves and wants sex. Ironically, these racist caricatures are immediately visible for the enslaved Black woman, as our moral sensibilities urge us to not be complicit in believing the Black female slave, as the Black female of today, caused her own rape. Hartmann points this out repeatedly in her analysis of seduction concerning the enslaved Black female, while our viewing of the Black male lacks the same perceptibility. There are simply no conceptual tools available to understand the violence that occurs to enslaved Black men being made to rape for the sexual enjoyment of white men. Can one be so secure in their beliefs about his desires, his wants, and his enjoyment to exclude him from being a victim of rape and coercion as well?

During slavery, the sexual coercion of Black men and boys was culturally conditioned by white desirability for Black bodies, and white repulsion towards Blackness itself. Nowhere is this as poignant as in the case of white women raping enslaved Black men. The call to undertake the serious study of white women's brutality against enslaved Blacks has been previously ushered by Sabine Broeck in "Property: White Gender and Slavery," but few have pursued this line of questioning.<sup>lvii</sup> Foster argues that "the traditional denial of white women's sexual agency has contributed to our obscured view of those white women who sexually assaulted and exploited enslaved men."<sup>lviii</sup> The dominant narrative of slavery makes white men the culprits of sexual assault, to date there is little to no literature which considers the rape of enslaved men and boys by white women. While much of the previous research focuses on the planter class white woman and her coercion, Foster notes that "all white women could coerce enslaved [B]lack men given the legal and social setting in which they lived."<sup>lix</sup> The rape of enslaved Black men was not about physical strength, "women who may have been physically smaller and weaker than their victims [still] wielded a powerful threat."<sup>lx</sup>

Wives and daughters of planters who formed these sexual relationships were simply taking advantage of their position within the slave system. Having sex with their white counterparts in the insular world of the white planter class, if exposed, would certainly have risked opprobrium, and even gossip about their public actions might have marred their reputations. Daughters of planters could use enslaved men in domestic settings, however, and retain their virtue and maintain the appearance of passionlessness and virginity while seeking sexual experimentation. In other words, one of the ways that some southern women may have protected their public virtue was by clandestine relations with black men.<sup>lxi</sup>

How does the history of white women raping Black men and boys reconfigure and destabilize the history of rape, the category of gender that makes such analysis possible, and the arrangement of knowledge that one claims reveals, as Sexton and Hartmann maintain, our subject of post-colonial resistance—the Black female? Are white women not capable of being sexual assaulters, and if we admit this sexual power of the white woman how would it complicate, not only the homoeroticism of white men raping Black male bodies under slavery, but the heteronormative myths that currently make seeing the white woman as a rapist of Black men and boys an impossibility?

Some authors have argued that gender itself—the category of gender as being synonymous to the woman is the problem. In Greg Thomas's *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire*, he argues that gender is an obstacle to understanding the full reach and extent of rape as a dominating act of enslavement. He argues:

It is almost impossible to locate a text of slavery which does not construe rape as the bottom line factor that differentiates the experience of slavery along lines of sex, or gender. Allegedly, the female can be violated, and the male cannot. This assumption is unacceptable, if not absurd, because it perversely requires heterosexuality to recognize exploitation and abuse. Not only is sexual violence reduced to whatever qualifies as rape, narrowly construed, but rape is also to penile penetrations of female bodies, perhaps not even those unless they result in pregnancy and offspring.<sup>lxii</sup>

Why then does Hartman choose the Black female slave body as the sign of rape? One may not configure sexual violence upon the “enslaved male,” or recognize the Black male slave as gendered, but this recognition does not dispute the historical facts that sexual violence and rape did occur. According to Foster, “the rape of slave men has also gone unacknowledged because of the current and historical tendency to define rape along gendered lines, making both victims and perpetrators reluctant to discuss male rape. The sexual assault of men dangerously points out cracks in the marble base of patriarchy that asserts men as penetrators in opposition to the penetrable, whether homosexuals, children, or adult women.”<sup>lxiii</sup> To say that we do not see, or recognize the violence occurring to this body lacking “gender,” is not to say that sexual violence or rape did not actually occur, it is to simply recognize alongside the historical record that the category of gender, as deployed by Hartmann obstructs rather than clarifies the actual relations of sexual violence and males bodies through asserting an ahistorical claim as axiomatic rather than actual.



### Wynter's "No Human's Involved" and the Problem of "Thought" When the Nigger Is Written About, but Their Deaths Avoided

Over two decades ago in an article entitled "No Humans Involved," Sylvia Wynter (1992) exposed the complacency of the academic enterprise in the social reification, rather than the refutation of the onto-anthropological nomenclature, of Western biologism taken to "be" MAN. Wynter specifically concerns herself with the violence this exclusionary anthropology has on the Black man in America. Wynter begins her analysis of anti-Black male violence with the Rodney King verdict. The force of Wynter's analysis surrounding the violence against Rodney King is not an infusion of social (non-ideal) context, or horror into the vacuous and sterile albatross of knowledge, or an attempt to remind us to think more critically about what we claim to "know" or define what we claim to possess in "knowing" as "knowledge." Instead Wynter demands that academics reject the biologized and bourgeois ideal of humanity we claim to be rational and civilized, and recognize how our apotheosis of disciplinary/conceptual/theoretical knowledge which depend on this notion of Western man reproduce the logics of colonial history which defines Black people as the Non-Human. To say as Wynter does that Black men are Non-Human, Not Human, or what I have called the Man-Not, is not to concern oneself with the problem of racial slurs. Wynter is not engaging stereotypes about Black men in the sense that these ideas about Black males can be rationally engaged. Wynter is attempting to allow the reader to understand that Black men's engagement with the L.A.P.D in the case of Rodney King, or the police state more generally, is the consequence of Black maleness which is a dehumanized state always susceptible to violence. This is an ontological problem. For Wynter, the term *No Humans Involved* holds into focus the dehumanizing intent of police engagement with Black men, since "these young men had to be first classified and thereby treated differently from all other North Americans."<sup>lxiv</sup>

Rejecting such ontology is not simply the work of discussions over or writings about the degraded anthropos of Blackness within modernity. This is not a dialogic resolution of "death" symbolically, where dead Black bodies become textualized/re-cast(e) in academic literature. Black death is the silencing of the lives which show America as a white supremacist republic parading the mask of democracy but requiring the deaths of Black men and boys for social order and political subservience. For Black men, the denial of their humanity, the impossibility of Black maleness to be human, is of grave consequence. Because the Black male is epidermalized as "the Nigger" his existence is catalytic—it brings with it the desire for Black death.

Here the Black academic points to political progress, mutual dialogue, and class mobility (economic distance from Black poverty and death) as a justification for their racial diagnosis. In this view, Black death/physical death/murder is external to, not endemic of, a "normative/civilized/educated" Black existence. Death, poverty, and deviance is a phenomena that appears amongst "problem people," not educated Blacks. Wynter urges the reader to consider the relationship between the paradigms of dehumanization that resulted in the genocide of Armenians by Turkish pan-nationalists, the holocaust inflicted upon Jews by the Germans, and the taxonomy used to describe Black men as a species deserving death. To classify the deaths of Black men as "No Humans Involved" is to reify the sociogenic principle behind anti-Blackness; or as Wynter says "for the social effects of this acronym (N.H.I.), while not overtly genocidal, are clearly serving to achieve parallel results: the incarceration and elimination of young Black males by ostensibly normal and everyday means."<sup>lxv</sup> Wynter's analysis of anti-



Black death makes the Black male the conceptual paradigm of inquiry. He is the lens through which this kind of death is best viewed, and the body that should be grasped by the imagination to fully comprehend the ontology and consequence of the violence that perpetuates this anti-Black horror. Destroying the Black male body, murdering the Black life that demanded to be more than the petrified phantasm of the white imagination, extinguishes the idea of the Black human the white supremacist world demands cannot exist. Killing Black men who dare to speak against and live beyond their place erases them from the world, making them an example, and leaving only their dead melaninated corpse as a deterrent against future revolts against white knowledge.

The Black man is not a normative subject; there is no “should” that does not imply his death. He is not capable of being captured by thought nor is he able to be seen in society. Huey P. Newton’s “Fear and Doubt” points out the ontological problem posed to the thinker aiming to describe and animate the Black man as a political subject capable of political life and social participation. Newton maintains that “society responds to [the lower socioeconomic Black man] as a thing, a beast, a nonentity, something to be ignored or stepped on. He is asked to respect laws that do not respect him. He is asked to digest a code of ethics that acts upon him but not for him.”<sup>lxvi</sup> The consequence of this “non-being,” is dire, as there are no historical patterns of rationality, ethicality, or futurity which projects Black male existence into the future—that normative plane of academic thought. What would a world of living Black male subjects look like? Can this white supremacist society support the existence of such a thought experiment? Would not the existence of thinking Black men, freed to act without death as the consequence of their freedom, not mean the end of the thought experiment? Would the entities that constitute “our thought” cease to exist in the reality of living, free Black men?

This normative mode of Black subjectivity, or rather the lack of a normative mode of poor Black male subjectivity, is a problem of empathy just as much as it is a problem of conceptualization. The Black intellectual cannot “feel” much less see the Black male as a subject thrust into, or upon, futurity. He cannot be thought as acting—an actional man, or a transformative thinking human—much less one who lives, or expects life. In *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity, and Intellectuals* (1989), Zygmunt Bauman expresses a similar concern regarding the conceptually othered/new poor, which result from the rise of the global capitalist structure that supports and enables the institutional validation of the knowledge produced by universities as useful and the products/students as labor. . Bauman clearly perceives that “today’s intellectuals, while they feel and express their pity, refrain from proposing to marry their thought with this particular variety of human suffering,”<sup>lxvii</sup> Bauman interestingly describes this as a consequence of rationality and the cemented dispositions of subjectivity. Bauman continues:

All in all, pity takes the place of compassion: the new poor need help on humane grounds; they are unfit for grooming as the future remakers of the world. With historiosophical indifference comes disenchantment with poverty. Being poor once again seems unromantic. It contains no mission, it does not gestate future glory.

Psychologically, if not logically nor historically, it appears residual, marginal, alien.<sup>lxviii</sup>

Bauman’s explanation mirrors the concerns for the poor Black male raised by Newton as a problem of thought, or rather unable to be thought, because being poor, Black, and male, resists conception. Wynter’s call to rewrite knowledge depends on the abandonment of the categories

and institutions that prop up and support the world as we know it and our partiality to maintain the world and the entities in it as they are known. These attachments are the central obstacles to relativizing Western MAN.

Wynter demands a reformulation of our popular academic understandings which account for how we explain discourse as actively cultural. This reformulation is not critical in the traditional sense by which discourse/language/knowledge is legitimated or semiotically relevant in specific social/cultural/historical contexts. It is critical because it brings attention to the fact that language is cultural in that discourse births and gives legitimacy to institutions, and symbiotically regenerates socio-cultural environments reconfirming the problem of white knowledge internalized by the "learned Negro." Like Woodson's *Miseducation of the Negro*, Wynter highlights the danger of asserting power/recognition/knowledge as the capacities of MAN marking him as human in the matrix of white supremacy. In "Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception" (1992), written the same year as "No Humans Involved," Wynter argues:

To be effective systems of power must be discursively legitimated. This is not to say that power is originally a set of institutional structures that are subsequently legitimated. On the contrary, it is to suggest the equiprimordiality of structure and cultural conceptions in the genesis of power. These cultural conceptions, encoded in language and other signifying systems, shape the development of political structures and are also shaped by them. The cultural aspects of power are as original as the structural aspects; each serves as a code for the other's development. It is from these elementary cultural conceptions that complex legitimating discourses are constructed.<sup>lxix</sup>

Bauman reminds us "the line dividing 'intellectuals' and 'non-intellectuals' is drawn and redrawn by decisions to join in a particular mode of activity,"<sup>lxx</sup> so the grammar act—the signifying system deployed, as Wynter suggests above, must remain conceptualized as culturally reifying and compatible with the actual institutions representing the structures housing the tools of study. The Black academic bourgeoisie learns to use these categories to save themselves from death. It is these categories that allow the Black academic to cling to life/recognition/solidarity with imagined beings like the worker, or the woman. It is these categories that breath life into the formerly thingified product of anti-Blackness, which is now anthropologically participating and by consequence beyond, or "seen as more than," the inanimate properties of the Black thing. Later in "No Humans Involved," Wynter concretizes what this relationship between "discursive legitimacy," and "power," means for the unhumanized in what she calls the "historical-racial schema [that] predefines his body as an impurity to be cured, a lack, a defect, to be amended into the 'true' being of whiteness."<sup>lxxi</sup> Our racialized schema which values being recognized as emergent Americans is in fact a distancing from the jobless Black man who is targeted for death. Wynter's analysis reiterates the economic analysis of Brown and the larger ontological point made by Newton's "Fear and Doubt," she says:

it is this category of the jobless young black males who have been made to pay the "sacrificial costs" (in the terminology of Rene Girard's *The Scapegoat*, 1986) for the relatively improved conditions since the 1960s that have impelled many black Americans out of the ghettos and into the suburbs; that made possible therefore the universal acclamation for the Cosby-Huxtable TV family who proved that some black Americans

could aspire to and even be drawn inside the sanctified category of Americanness in its present form.<sup>lxxii</sup>

This ascendancy of specific classes of Black Americans, those Black Americans aspiring to be *seen* as different from those “Not Humans,” “Niggers,” has meant the neglect of Black men and boys dying. It is this necrophobia that is rewarded and marks the difference between the pathologized Black folk and the civilized Black intellectual. There is a problem that emerges in how we assign, describe, and evaluate the conditions of Black people. We constrain them into categories suitable for analysis but continue to ignore the limitations and moralities that are privileged in the study of these sorts of conditions. In short, our blindness, our indifference to their deaths, which seeks the recognition of our intellectual endeavors as evidence of “life,” only fuels the necromantic rage of white supremacy—the sexual racism, the desire of the Black body, and the obsession with its death.

### Towards Conclusions

There is no secret known to the theorist which can undo the problems of knowledge created by Western thought; just as there is no thought that simply fiat the complete dismantlement of Western Man.. The most immediate task before the Black thinker, the Black observers of the world before them, is the construction of new concepts that can support the meanings of the actualities which present themselves as reality. In those instances where our language, the grammar of our world, cannot support the weight of his reality, those structures, and their cultural representations must be dissolved. This is a problem of (Black) study, not a project of substitution (substituting one Black subject for the other). The death of Black men and their sexual assaults are not fanciful, they are not imagined, despite there being no language which conveys their veracity and the force of their meaning. The Black male, be he a man or a boy, is un-thought. He lacks signification in the language of gender, and is erased as a subject/*subject* of interest. Instead of causing concern for what is missed in theory, scholars are told that his erasure is the progression and diversification of thought. Various disciplines now assert that his erasure is a moral result of reason revealing/creating new and more complex subjects. The Black male being un-thought is sold to us as the product of our new ethics, or the result of ethical thought itself. Perhaps in such a world, where Black men and boys dying is not able to be thought as aberrational, is not a world for Blackness at all.

<sup>i</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, “The Failure of the Negro Intellectual,” in *The Death of white Sociology: Essays on Race and Culture* (Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1973), 52-66, 65.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>iii</sup> Frazier is commenting on a propping up of the Black intellectual by a philanthropic white class. He argues:

Sometimes I think that the failure of the American Negro intellectual to grasp the nature and the significance of these experiences is due to the fact that he continues to be an



unconscious victim of these experiences. After an African intellectual met a group of Negro intellectuals, he told me that they were really men who were asleep.

All of this only tends to underline the fact that educated Negroes or Negro intellectuals have failed to achieve any intellectual freedom. In fact, with the few exceptions of literary men, it appears that the Negro intellectual is unconscious of the extent to which his thinking is restricted to sterile repetition of the safe and conventional ideas current in American society.

This is attributable in part, of course, to the conditions under which an educated and intellectual class emerged in the American society. This class emerged as the result of white American philanthropy. Although the situation has changed and the Negro intellectuals are supported through other means, they are still largely dependent upon the white community. There is no basis of economic support for them within the Negro community. And where there is economic support within the Negro community it demands conformity to conservative and conventional ideas (E. Franklin Frazier, "The Failure of the Negro Intellectual," 58-59).

Also see Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010).

<sup>iv</sup> The accepted paradigm of investigating Black (heterosexist) existence and political power has almost exclusively been framed by Michelle Wallace's *The Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Dial Press, 1979), and bell hooks's subsequent analysis of phallocentrism articulated in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992) and her 2004 work *We Reel Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (New York: Routledge). More recently, Athena D. Mutua's edited collection entitled *Progressive Black Masculinities* (New York: Routledge, 2006), has attempted to address the gap in research and attention to the ways that Black men are specifically gendered and hence vulnerable to gendered violence, but as demonstrated throughout the collection, sexism emerges as dominant moral category of analysis set against the other economic and political disadvantages of Black men. In other words, while Black men are oppressed racially, they must make an ethical decision to prioritize other systems of domination above their own oppression by racism, or their specific gendered oppressions. Drawing upon the pivotal term of "progressive," Mutua's essay "Theorizing Progressive Black Masculinities," in *Progressive Black Masculinities* argues that "progressive blackness therefore

is this intervention. It is the ethical and active participation in antiracist struggles from the standpoint of black self-identity and black communities' well-being. . . . Ethical participation in antiracist struggles insists that the struggle not be dependent on or committed to the subordination of others. In addition it requires that participants be conscious of the relationships among identities, class, culture, gender, sexual orientation, region, religion, age, and the like" (8).

Such an ethical stance certainly resonates with the en vogue theories of anti-racist and anti-sexist scholarship, but if the realities of racism and sexual violence are structural, then is it not possible that the matrix of interlocking oppressions obscure some ethical mandates. In other words, can or should Black men disempowered by racism, disenfranchised by incarceration, trust the ideals of equality that bring these ethical mandates into focus. How do Black men that can't vote, that are surrounded by death, and unemployed, act against sexism, or classism, or homophobia, these prejudices that affect and limit the economic and political recognition of white women and educated Black women in the class above him in any meaningful way beyond their psychical endorsement of the belief? And in what relation does the enjoyment of education, economic and political power over this group of Black men, what Michelle Alexander has called under-casted men in her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010), become anti-progressive Blackness that exceeds our mere designation of racism?

<sup>v</sup> See Althea Mutua, "Multidimensionality is to Masculinities what Intersectionality is to Feminism," *Nevada Law Review* 13 (2013): 341-367; Darren Hutchinson, "Identity Crisis: Intersectionality, Multidimensionality, and the Development of an Adequate Theory of Subordination," *Michigan Journal of Race and Law*, 6.2 (2001): 285-318; and Angela Harris, "Gender, Violence, Race, and Criminal Justice," *Stanford Law Review* 52 (2000): 777-807.

<sup>vi</sup> Recently Black male feminist literature demonstrates the problem I am trying to articulate in the study of Black men. Pop culture scholarship like Mark Anthony Neal's *Looking for Leroy: Illegible Black Masculinities* (New York: New York University Press, 2013) makes the Black male body a configuration that performs variety, but is hidden illegible in many regards. The legible stereotypes of Black male bodies like the bad Black man is not oppositionally fixed in Neal's thought, but these performances of Black masculinity are not directed at the concretization of what Black manhood is in the social. Pointing to Hank Willis Thomas's *Strange Fruit*, "if Thomas's work aims to disturb the comfort of the prevailing logics about black male bodies, it is a project that I share by suggesting the radical potential of rendering 'legible' black male bodies—those bodies that are all too real to us—'illegible', while simultaneously

rendering so called illegible black male bodies—those male bodies we can't believe as real—legible" (8). There is a level of perception that is acted upon socially, how, one enforces their stereotypes and fears, but at the level of the conditions and constraints of social existence or death, these institutions remain unnamed in Neal's work. This is not surprising given his work is on popular culture, but this is an example of how the death of Black men, the physical deaths of Black men are not analyzed as they are the cessation of Black male performance—the impossibility of being thought beyond a corpse. Similarly, his previous book, *New Black Man* (New York: Routledge, 2006), situates Black masculinity as an ethical project in need of feminist reformation. These offer little analysis of the concrete obstacles and violence that occur to Black men in the world.

<sup>vii</sup> David Schwartzman, *Black Unemployment: Part of Unskilled Unemployment* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1997).

<sup>viii</sup> Amadu J. Kaba's work on the economic gains of Black women and the economic state of Black America is expansive. See Amadu Jacky Kaba, "Race, Gender and Progress: Are Black American Women the New Model Minority?," *Journal of African American Studies* 12 (2008): 309-335; "Black Females as Geniuses," *Journal of African American Studies* 15 (2011): 120-124; "The Gradual Shift of Wealth and Power from American American Males to African American Females," *Journal of African American Studies* 9.3 (2005): 33-44; and Amadu J. Kaba and Deborah E. Ward, "The Gradual Progress of Black Women in Political Representation," *Review of Black Political Economy* 36 (2009): 29-50.

<sup>ix</sup> James B. Stewart and Joseph W. Scott, "The Institutional Decimation of Black American Males," *Western Journal of Black Studies* (1978):82-92.

<sup>x</sup> Peter Edelman, Harry J. Holzer, and Paul Offner, *Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men* (Washington D.C: Urban Institute Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>xi</sup> Ronald B. Mincy, eds., *Black Males Left Behind* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2006)

<sup>xii</sup> Harry J. Holzer, Steven Raphael, and Michael A. Stoll, "How Do Employer Perceptions of Crime and Incarceration Affect the Employment Prospects of Less-Educated Young Black Men?" in *Black Males Left Behind* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2006), 67-86, 67. Also see Andrew Penner and Aliya Saperstein, "Engendering Racial Perceptions: An Intersectional Analysis of How Social Status Shapes Race," *Gender and Society* 27.3 (2013): 319-344.



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- <sup>xiii</sup> Gregory Acs, "Downward Mobility from the Middle Class: Waking Up from the American Dream," *PEW Report* (September 2011): 1-29.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010), 11.
- <sup>xv</sup> Michelle Alexander, "The Zimmerman Mind-Set: Why Black Men Are the Permanent Underclass," *Time*, July 29, 2013. <we don't inc. access dates; url unnec>
- <sup>xvi</sup> Becky Pettit, *Invisible Men: Mass Incarceration and the Myth of Black Progress* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2012), 3.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Geoffrey Canada, *Reaching Up for Manhood: Transforming the Lives of Boys in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998, xiii).
- <sup>xviii</sup> Aubrey Whelan, "Police Begin Probe of Teenager's Arrest," *Philly.com*, January 18, 2014. <url unnec>
- <sup>xix</sup> Kristen Gwynne, "How 'Stop and Frisk' Is Too Often a Sexual Assault by Cops on Teenagers in Targeted NYC Neighborhoods," *Alternet.org*, January 21, 2013. <url unnec>
- <sup>xx</sup> Joseph Fried, "In Surprise, Witness Says Officer Bragged about Louima Torture," *New York Times*, May 20, 1999; Mike McAlary, "They Saw Louima's Terror," *New York Daily News*, September 5, 1997.
- <sup>xxi</sup> "Man Wins 4 Million in Lawsuit against Chicago Cops," *Daily Herald.com* October 17, 2007, accessed January 20, 2014, [http://abclocal.go.com/wls/story?section=news/national\\_world&id=5711052](http://abclocal.go.com/wls/story?section=news/national_world&id=5711052).
- <sup>xxii</sup> Alex Kane, "Chicago Police Accused of Using Gun to Sodomize Innocent Man," *Alternet.com*, June 24, 2013.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> M.L. Nestel, "Mother whose panicked 911 call led to police shooting death of unarmed former football player after car crash insists he NEVER asked for help," *DailyMail.co.uk*, September 23, 2013, accessed September 11, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2428995/Jon-Ferrell-unarmed-shot-dead-cop-crashing-car-Now-mother-accused-racist-called-911-night-pounded-door-insists-NEVER-asked-help.html>.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> "Rachel Jeantel Tells Piers She and Trayvon Feared Zimmerman Might Be Gay Rapist," YouTube video, posted by Michael Savage Show Updates—Media Alerts, July 16, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loEROU1XA5E>.

xxv "US Teens 'Had Three-Way Sex on Corpses of Men They Lured to Their House, Strangled to Death and Hog-tied,'" *DailyMail.com*, February 26, 2013.

xxvi Adrienne Davis, "The Sexual Economy of American Slavery," in *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work*, ed. Sharon Harley (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 103-127, 107.

xxvii Joy James, "Black Revolutionary Icons and Neo Slave Narratives," *Social Identities* 5.2. (1999):135-159, 137.

xxviii James, "Black Revolutionary Icons," 137.

xxix Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 7.

xxx Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, 7.

xxxi Ibid.

xxxii For a discussion of the anachronism of gender as a category on colonized peoples, see Maria Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia* 25.4 (2010): 742-759. For a similar discussion of Marxism and the designation of the worker, see Frank Wilderson, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) and Jared Sexton, "Racial Profiling and the Societies of Control," in *Warfare in the American Homeland: Policing and Prison in a Penal Democracy*, ed. Joy James (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 197-218.

xxxiii Richard Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 2003), and Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1990).

xxxiv See James L. Smith, *Autobiography of James L. Smith* (Norwich: Press of the Bulletin Company, 1881), and Archibald Grimke, "The Sex Question and Segregation," in *The American Negro Academy Occasional Papers* 1-22 (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 1-37.

xxxv See Laura Stemple and Ilan Meyer, "The Sexual Victimization of Men in America: New Data Challenges Old Assumptions," *American Journal of Public Health* 104.6 (2014):e19-e22.

xxxvi Frederick Douglass, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass," in Henry Louis Gates Jr., ed., *The Classic Slave Narratives* (New York: Mentor Publishing, 1987), 291.

xxxvii Connie A. Miller Sr., *Frederick Douglass American Hero and International Icon of the 19th Century* (Bloomington: Xlibris Publishing, 2008), 43; Thomas Loebel, *The Letter and Spirit of 19th Century Literature: Justice, Politics, and Theology* (Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 202-3; Maurice O. Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men's Literature and Culture, 1775-1995* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002) 86-87.

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xxxix See Frank B. Wilderson III, *Incognegro: A Memoir of Exile and Apartheid* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2008); Jared Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism," *InTensions Journal* 5 (2011): 1-41; Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness: Mysticism in the Flesh," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112.4 (2013): 737-80.

xl Hartmann, *Scenes of Subjection*, 79-112.

xli Jared Sexton, "People of Colorblindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery," *Social Text* 28.2 (2010): 31-56.

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- xlii Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003): 11-40.
- xliii Sexton, "People of Color-Blindness," 32.
- xliv Ibid.
- xlvi Ibid.
- xlvii Hartmann, *Scenes of Subjection*, 86.
- xlviii Ibid.
- xlix Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 74.
- <sup>1</sup> Ibid.
- li Ibid.
- lii Hartmann, *Scenes of Subjection*, 87.
- liii Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 74.
- liv See Frederick Douglass, "Letter to William Lloyd Garrison," *The Liberator*, February 27, 1846, in which Douglass argues: "Slavery has its own standards of morality, humanity, justice, and Christianity. Tried by that standard, it is a system of the greatest kindness to the slave—sanctioned by the purest morality—in perfect agreement with justice—and, of course, not inconsistent with Christianity. But, tried by any other, it is doomed to condemnation. The naked relation of master and slave is one of those monsters of darkness, to whom the light of truth is death!" Throughout this letter he remarks both on his time with Covey and the Christianity of this nigger-breaker. <changes per Selected Letters>
- lv Thomas Foster, "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20.3 (2011):445-464, 464.
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- lxi Ibid., 462.
- lxii Greg Thomas, *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 46.



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lxvi Huey P. Newton, "Fear and Doubt," in *Essays from the Minister of Defense* (Black Panther Party, 1968), 15-18, 17.

lxvii Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity, and Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 179.

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lxix Sylvia Wynter, "Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception," in Henry Buhle and Paul Buhle, eds., *C. L. R. James's Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 65.

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lxxi Sylvia Wynter, "Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, and the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be 'Black,'" in Antonio Gomez-Moriana and Mercedes Duran-Cogan, eds., *National Identities and Sociopolitical Changes in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2001), <need quot page>, 41.

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