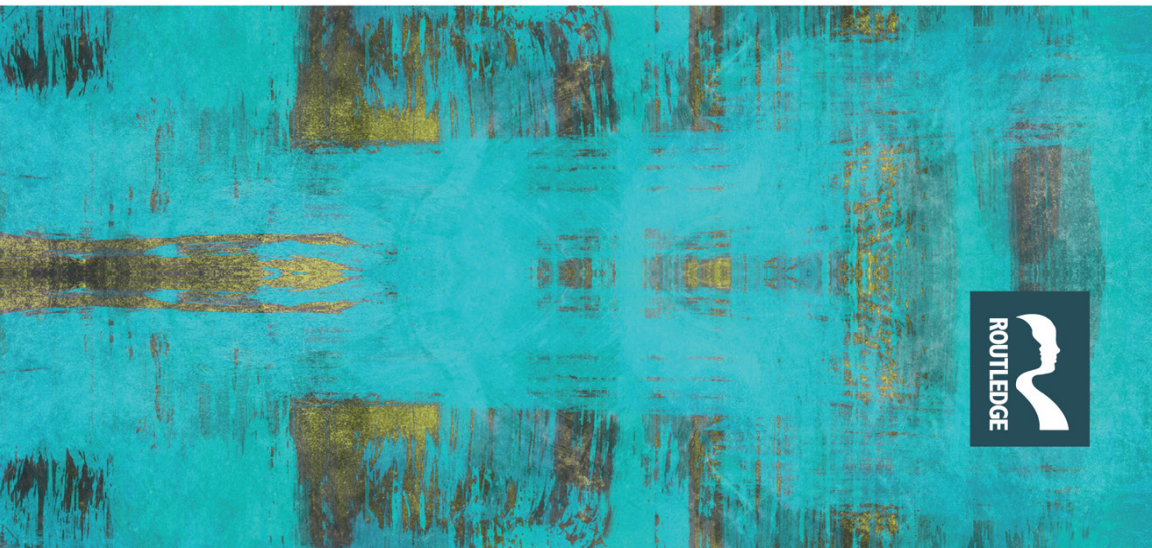
Routledge Studies in African American Literature

PATHOLOGIZING BLACK BODIES

THE LEGACY OF PLANTATION SLAVERY

Constante González Groba,
Ewa Barbara Luczak and
Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis



Pathologizing Black Bodies

Pathologizing Black Bodies reconsiders the black body as a site of cultural and corporeal interchange; one involving violence and oppression, leaving memory and trauma sedimented in cultural conventions, political arrangements, social institutions and, most significantly, materially and symbolically engraved upon the body, with "the self" often deprived of agency and sovereignty. Consisting of three parts, this study focuses on works of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century fiction and cultural narratives by mainly African American authors, aiming to highlight the different ways in which race has been pathologized in America and examine how the legacies of plantation ideology have been metaphorically inscribed on black bodies. The variety of analytical approaches and thematic foci with respect to theories and discourses surrounding race and the body allow us to delve into this thorny territory in the hope of gaining perspectives about how African American lives are still shaped and haunted by the legacies of plantation slavery. Furthermore, this volume offers insights into the politics of eugenic corporeality in an illustrative dialogue with the lasting carceral and agricultural effects of life on a plantation. Tracing the degradation and suppression of the black body, both individual and social, this study includes an analysis of the pseudo-scientific discourse of social Darwinism and eugenics; the practice of mass incarceration and the excessive punishment of black bodies; and food apartheid and USDA practices of depriving black farmers of individual autonomy and collective agency. Based on such an interplay of discourses, methodologies and perspectives, this volume aims to use literature to further examine the problematic relationship between race and the body and stress that black lives do indeed matter in the United States.

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Introduction

Corporeal Afterlives of Plantation Slavery

Constante González Groba, Ewa Barbara Luczak and Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis

Plantation slavery continues to exercise a powerful influence on American culture and literature. The southern plantation cannot be relegated to the shadows of a distant, traumatic past. Rather, it remains a vivid element in literary engagements with the African American experience, not only in terms of what it represents in itself, but also because it served as a prelude to eugenic sterilizations, mass incarceration and other forms of economic/social oppression. Addressing this enduring legacy is rife with difficulties, given the scope of such historical trauma. There is little, if any, comforting sense of historical closure, and thus no catharsis, since chattel slavery left an enduring legacy of racist assumptions, denigrating stereotypes and associated prejudices metaphorically "engraved" on black bodies.

The present book reconsiders the black body as a site of cultural and corporeal interchange, one which involves violence and oppression, memory and trauma sedimented in cultural conventions, political arrangements, social institutions and, most significantly, engraved materially and symbolically on the black body itself, with "the self" often deprived of agency and sovereignty. The studies in this book address responses to the pathologizing of the black body in the American literary imagination and endorse the belief that a disproportionate attention to the black body, especially its criminalization, sexualization and medicalization, has a long tradition stretching back to the times of plantation slavery. Through the following chapters, we will explore a variety of examples of the fictional foregrounding of the supposedly aberrant and deviant nature of black bodies, and consider both the logic and the practical consequences of the practice of pathologizing, be it in the penal system, the medical world or food apartheid. Concurrently, the studies herein will engage with questions of the possibility of change and resistance, whether through rewriting dominant narratives of black corporeality in the past and in the present, or through an examination of modes of active resistance.

Our book shares with Natalie Aikens and others the perception of the longevity of the legacy of plantation slavery. We subscribe to the opinion that "Ideologies of the plantation fundamentally shape history, economics, and ecologies on a planetary scale, and they also fundamentally shape how

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human beings relate to each other and to the natural world" ("South to the Plantationocene"). We believe, along with many fellow scholars, that the plantation is not merely tied to physical space but has a biopolitical function as a mode of exploitive labor, and thus constitutes a source and site of bodily control. With the studies presented here we seek to spark new lines of inquiry, and reopen currently dormant, but potentially still productive, ones, into the legacy of plantation slavery in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which we believe manifests itself in both physical spaces (medical theaters, prisons and farmland) and institutions and practices (medical experiments, food apartheid).

Through the book we trace the legacy of pathologizing black corporeality in the United States, which singles out black bodies as a site of threat, danger, inferiority, criminality and excessive or aberrant sexuality. It seems to be the case that pathology is one of the concepts that accompanied the development of modern medicine and sociology, and as such is deeply imbedded in the modern discourse on health, race and society. Associated with newly discovered pathogens and denoting a serious disease or a medical condition, pathology was perceived at the beginning of the twentieth century as a thoroughly scientific notion, and came to replace the older terms "illness" in medicine and "social problem" in sociology. Indeed, the beginning of the previous century witnessed an unprecedented rise in the popularity of the term "pathology" in the US academy, in part due to a fascination within social sciences for the language of medicine. Pathology framed the discussion of sociological and racial problems in terms of medical eugenics, invoked "absolutistic connotations" (Sutherland 431, qtd. in Best 535) and saw any problem as a form of social disease (Best 534) that needed to be eradicated.

However, after the Second World War the term was a subject to new scrutiny, this probably due to a great extent to its disturbing association with the radical Nazi remedy for what had been said to be social "racial" illnesses. In the American context, the harbinger of change and a marker of a period of transition was Edwin Lemert's 1952 work *Social Pathology* (Best 533). As Best argues, even though the book's title promised the study of social pathology, it in fact examined "social deviation"—the book's purpose was indeed made clear in Lemert's posthumously published essay (Best 534). The move away from the study of social pathology—a field well established in the late 1940s—toward the study of more ethically neutral "deviation" signaled an unavoidable shift away from thinking about social disorganization and other problems in medical terms that hence required far-reaching measures to cure such social diseases.

Whereas the concept of pathology was approached with ambivalence in Lemert's work, the verb "to pathologize" and its related nouns "pathologization" and "pathologizing" continued to circulate in academic idiom throughout the 1960s. Given their association with disease and aberration, on the one hand, and the aura of scientific authority, on the other, they have

become catchphrases to describe in a denigrating way those identified as constituting an alien presence in the fabric of the nation. As such, the terms have testified to the longevity of the tendency to turn "others" into a form of a social malady—a habit well entrenched in a racially divided US society.

As Piotrowski argues, the ruling majority ("those in power") decides, through the process of pathologization, what and who are socially acceptable and/or undesirable. The prevailing political, social and/or cultural authority of these actors gives legitimacy to their claims as to what can be considered social failures or wrongs, since "*social pathology* embraces social problems [… which] are perceived as detrimental and destructive to individuals, groups, or the entire society" (Piotrowski x, italics in original). Since "deviance is the invention of a group that uses its own standards as the *ideal* by which others are to be judged" (Ladner 75, italics in original), social pathology is an arbitrary concept, resting as it does on the values held and cherished by those who define reality. By contrast, those who are different are seen as lacking desirable qualities (that is, they do not share one's own characteristics), and thus they are stigmatized by those who represent the established "norm." As such, the process of pathologization is "normative" and reductive in nature. This assignment of "a mono-role or a uni-dimensional identity" through which people were regarded as "either deviant or normal" (Sawyer 362) served as a means of affirming the superior status of the planter class while legitimizing the need to monitor and punish their human chattel.

Given that "white supremacy is rooted in pathological responses to difference" (hooks 27), the historical origins of the discourse of black pathology themselves go back to the times of slavery, when black bodies within the plantocracy were regarded as deficient and deviant,[1] while white bodies were normalized. The legacy of this ideological position can still be seen in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the ongoing "conscious refusal of whites to accept blacks as equal human beings and their willful, systematic effort to deny blacks equal opportunity" (Gershman 33). As such, racial oppression draws on the process of pathologization, and indeed this is why, according to Clark, "the racial dehumanization Americans permit is a symptom of the deep-seated, systematic and most dangerous social disease of racism" ("The Role of Race," qtd. in Wilson 10).

Modern racial policy in the United States was founded on the widespread belief in black cultural pathology (White 27). Well into the 1940s, at a time when some sociologists, such as Lemert, were expressing their newly awakened ambivalence to the discourse of pathology, others were clinging to the concept. Gunnar Myrdal, for example, in voicing the opinions of many Americans, summarized the racial inferiority of African Americans with these words: "*In practically all its divergences, American Negro culture is not something independent of general American culture. It is a distorted development, or a pathological condition, of the general American culture*" (928, italics in original). Myrdal follows with a list of factors contributing to black social pathology:

> The instability of the Negro family, the inadequacy of educational facilities for Negroes, the emotionalism in the Negro church, the insufficiency and unwholesomeness of Negro recreational activity, the plethora of Negro sociable organizations, the narrowness of interests of the average Negro, the provincialism of his political speculation, the high Negro crime rate, the cultivation of the arts to the neglect of other fields, superstition, personality difficulties, and other characteristic traits are mainly forms of social pathology which, for the most part, are created by the caste pressures. (928–29)

Such a stance (captured in the title of Myrdal's chapter "The Negro Community as a Pathological Form of an American Community") was, paradoxically, seconded by leading black scholars such as E. Franklin Frazier and Kenneth Clark, and also by politicians (e.g., Daniel Patrick Moynihan), as late as the 1950s and 1960s. Referring to Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Family in the United States* (1939), Ibram Kendi points out how, even though well intentioned, the book perpetuated the association of problems in black communities with a form of pathology. Frazier's diagnosis of the ills in the African American community as being "caused by racial discrimination, poverty, cultural pathology, and the introduction of the matriarchal Black family during slavery" was, in Kendi's eyes, deeply harmful to the cultural perception of the black man (*Stamped* 343). As Kendi argues, "Completely 'stripped of his cultural heritage,' the slave became a brute [… and thus] the slave's emergence 'as a human being was facilitated by his assimilation' of his master's culture" (*Stamped* 343).

Frazier's analysis of black pathology inspired Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who in his report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965), written in his capacity as Assistant Secretary for Labor, saw "a tangle of pathology" in black poverty and gender imbalance in black families. Moynihan's report, which influenced the rhetoric of President Lyndon Johnson's commencement address delivered at Howard University, and which was later adopted by the "post-racial" narrative, identified family breakdown as a self-sabotaging factor in the black community. Rather than acknowledging the systemic forces that operated beyond the control of the black community (racism, segregation and discrimination), Moynihan believed that the vicious circle of alleged irresponsibility and a dependency on the welfare estate, as well as unhealthy gender relations in black families, posed a challenge to many black families themselves (Moynihan; Aja).

On similar lines to Moynihan, Kenneth Clark, in his *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (1967), identified the pathology of black life in ghetto communities in female-headed, welfare-dependent households, with high rates of children born out of wedlock, unemployment, delinquency and crime. However, what sets Moynihan and Clark apart is the approach to the object of study: While Moynihan's infamous report blamed the black community for its "self-perpetuating pathology"[2] ("At this point, the

present tangle of pathology is capable of perpetuating itself without assistance from the white world"), Clark's study is written from the perspective of somebody who is trying to understand the prevailing systemic injustice and offers suggestions for alleviating the situation of blacks in America. Assimilationists believed that one such way of breaking the circle of pathology was black integration, which, according to Ibram Kendi, "encourages Black adoption of White cultural traits and/or physical ideals" (*Stamped* 3). Prior to Clark, others had also believed in assimilation as the only choice for blacks; for instance, Gunnar Myrdal claimed that "*it is to the advantage of American Negroes as individuals and as a group to become assimilated into American culture, to acquire the traits held in esteem by the dominant white Americans*" (929, italics in original). However, there were others, like W.E.B. Du Bois, who encouraged scholars and African Americans in general to "regard the truth as more important than the defense of the white race" and that they should not "support a prejudice or buttress a lie" (647–48).

Du Bois's appeal to state the truth, which he had voiced as early as 1935, well illustrates the longevity of the process of pathologization. The lies about black lives that Du Bois mentions will later be referred to by Albert Murray as "fakelore of black pathology."[3] Murray explains that whites build their identity through "a folklore of white supremacy" which is contingent on fakelore, which involves inauthentic, manufactured and degrading assumptions about blacks.[4] Echoing these assumptions, Joyce Ladner provides a counternarrative of black experiences in *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman* (1971).[5] Contrary to the majority of research into the black community, which deems African Americans responsible for the creation and perpetuation of alleged pathology (Ladner 76), Ladner reconceptualizes pathology and shifts the blame from individuals to systemic inequalities and institutional racism: "There has never been an admission that the Black community is a product of American social policy, *not* the cause of it – the structure of the American social system, through its practices of institutional racism, is designated to create the alleged 'pathology' of the community, to perpetuate 'the social disorganization' model of Black life" (77, italics in the original). Her research essentially (re)constructs black identity; thus, in praising black women's adaptation skills, which allow them to survive,[6] Ladner writes:

> they are able to exercise control over their futures, whereas writers have tended to view this low-income Black community as an all-pervasive force which is so devastating as to compel its powerless residents to succumb to its pressures. Their power to cope and adapt to a set of unhealthy conditions – not as stereotyped sick people but as normal ones – is a factor which few people seem to accept or even realize. (76)

While earlier research into black culture tended to identify blacks as deviant and pathological, Ladner shifts the perspective from alleged deviancy and pathology to a survival skill set necessary to face institutional racism.

As such, Ladner's contribution to dismantling black pathology lies in giving blacks the kind of personal agency which institutional racism had attempted to erase.

Race and the Body

Understanding of the mechanism of pathologizing the black body requires an appreciation of the mechanism of the body as it is used and abused in social power politics in general and in US racial power politics in particular. According to Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Keller and Sally Shuttleworth, "The body, whether masculine or feminine, is imbricated in the matrices of power at all levels, and not just, or even primarily, on the level of theory" (2). Throughout history the body has been one of the principal targets of ideology. It is the site where ideological practice occurs, a practice that ultimately consists of assigning bodies a place (Watson 22) and keeping them there. In his essay "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," Ralph Ellison wrote about how crucial the centrality of the black body is in US culture:

> Thus on the moral level I propose that we view the whole of American life as a drama acted out upon the body of a Negro giant, who, lying trussed up like Gulliver, forms the stage and the scene upon which and within which the action unfolds. (85)

More recently, Afro-pessimist Ta-Nehisi Coates, in *Between the World and Me* (2015), claimed that the story of America is the story of the oppression of the black body (131–32).

In "Dark Matters: Race and the Antebellum Logic of Decorporation," Ashley Byock argues that "The biopolitical republic of the United States has long been constituted in both material and discursive terms through and upon unnamed and unnameable black bodies" and that these black bodies "make up a kind of dark matter that has shaped formulations of American identity from the beginning by and through biopolitical negation and negative identification" (47). The antebellum plantation complex depended on an endless supply of enslaved bodies whose forced labor constituted a brutal attack on the flesh. This complex racialized its laborers as alien bodies, and the enslavers treated the enslaved people as nonhuman; consequently, the labor, as well as the violence used to extract it, reduced these bodies to mere usable flesh. Instead of being *incorporated* into the body politic as proper citizens with rights, they were *decorporated*, in the sense that only the laboring body was considered part of the social body, with their personhoods and identities going unacknowledged.

Slavery established the legal and moral paradox that black resistance to white oppression became a criminal offense and, according to Janell Hobson, this made it possible for the white body, which represented legal and moral

authority, to legitimate immoral acts of physical and sexual aggression, whereas "The black body is presumed guilty in relation to the presumed innocence of the white body" (71). It is "the fiction of whiteness," that is, the belief in the natural predominance of being white, that lies at the origins of the prerogative of dominating and excluding black bodies. Black bodies constitute a threat to what George Yancy calls "the harmony and symmetry of white space" (250) and become victims of what this African American philosopher terms "white fear of Black embodied mobility, agency, and self-definition, which constitutes a threat to white power" (250).

Ta-Nehisi Coates is brutally explicit about the physical violence of racism, which he describes as "a visceral experience [that] dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth" (10), and he poses the unanswerable question, "how do I live free in this black body?" (12). The current Black Lives Matter movement is raising awareness of such issues in a country whose narrative of race is largely written on the black body, a body which is cannibalized through slavery and segregation and still disproportionately incarcerated and killed on the streets. As Coates warns his 15-year-old son, Samori, "In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body–*it is heritage*" (103; italics in the original). A constant presence in Coates's *Between the World and Me* is Trayvon Martin, the unarmed 17-year-old African American who was shot dead in Florida on February 20, 2012, because he looked suspicious to a white community watcher. His killer, George Zimmerman, was acquitted on July 13, 2013. The activist Alicia Garza was having a drink in a bar in Oakland, California, when the verdict was announced. She posted a message on Facebook: "Black People. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter." Her friend Patrisse Cullors, another activist, added a hashtag and the Black Lives Matter movement was born (Altman 68).

The case of Trayvon Martin immediately brought back memories of Emmett Till, the 14-year-old black boy from Chicago, brutally murdered in rural Mississippi in the summer of 1955 for allegedly whistling at and flirting with a white woman in a store. Christopher Benson, the University of Illinois professor who coauthored *Death of Innocence: The Story of a Hate Crime that Changed America* with Mamie Till, Emmett Till's mother, said in an interview on August 17, 2015: "Before Trayvon Martin, before Michael Brown, before Tamir Rice, there was Emmett Till. This was the first 'Black Lives Matter' story" (Benson). Harriet Pollack and Christopher Metress open their introduction to *Emmett Till in Literary Memory and Imagination* by relating the murder of Till to that of James Byrd, a forty-nine-year-old black man lynched in Jasper, Texas, in the summer of 1998. The connection between the Till murder and the more recent violent deaths of black people in the United States that spawned the Black Lives Matter movement vindicates Pollack and Metress's assertion that "what happened to Emmett Till is a presence that shapes the way we view and talk about race in America, sometimes wounding us, sometimes urging us to heal" (1).

The *New York Times* editorial "The Truth of 'Black Lives Matter'" of September 3, 2015, sought to relate the present-day movement to the civil rights movement and a long history of oppression:

> Demonstrators who chant the phrase are making the same declaration that voting rights and civil rights activists made a half-century ago. They are not asserting that black lives are more precious than white lives. They are underlining an indisputable fact–that the lives of black citizens in this country historically have not mattered, and have been discounted and devalued. ("The Truth")

Black Lives Matter has revealed that black bodies are still subject to racist violence, and demands respect for these bodies because of what they have suffered historically. The movement has been most instrumental in drawing attention to the racism and devaluation of black lives and bodies inherited from slavery. Slavery was based on the dehumanization of blacks, a notion which today still leads some Americans to see African American men as larger and more fearsome than they are. The depiction of blacks as closer to apes than to the humans, an idea promoted by slave traders, historians and practitioners of "scientific" racism, made its way onto the silver screen in the (in)famous film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). The film, directed by the Kentuckian David W. Griffith and based mainly on Thomas Dixon's play *The Clansman* (1905), attempted to control and delimit the memory of Reconstruction and poisoned American popular culture well into the twentieth century.

The culture of segregation codified in the South at the end of the nineteenth century, and with roots stretching back to centuries of slavery, was based on the binary opposition of the elevated white body and the abject black one, a self-defeating and hysterical separation of black and white bodies. The body of the white woman, mainly that of the white lady, was supposed to be far removed from sexuality and at the same time severely endangered by it, particularly by black sexuality. It was a culture in which social control was tantamount to the control of the black body, a body that was often and brutally reduced to fragments as a means of containing its purported sexual terrors.

As Robyn Wiegman notes, in the anatomical study of black sexuality that obsessed so many in the nineteenth century, "developmental proportions were akin to inferiority, and it was here that the African body took on one of its most monstrous representations, being scripted as simultaneously corporeally and libidinally excessive" (58). And thus castration was a typical part of the lynching ritual, which constituted an illusory return to the total mastery of slavery and became a crucial mechanism for signaling and reinforcing the power of white supremacy after emancipation. Wiegman writes of the confluence of lynching and castration "functioning as both a refusal and a negation of the possibility of extending the

privileges of patriarchy to the black man" (90). Cornel West is one of many to have analyzed whites' absorption with black sexuality, which engenders in them so much fear yet also fascinates them greatly. This fear constitutes "a basic ingredient of white racism. And for whites to admit this deep fear even as they try to instill and sustain fear in blacks is to acknowledge a weakness—a weakness that goes down to the bone" (86). Wiegman also relates the excessive sexualization that simultaneously erases and debases the black male to the contradictions in which the white male is enmeshed: "in reducing the black male to the body and further to the penis itself, white masculinity betrays a simultaneous desire for and disavowal of the black male's phallic inscription" (98).

The patriarchal white South was obsessed with inflexible definitions of the pure and the polluted, a binary distinction that constituted one of the pillars of a system in which, as Diane Roberts notes, "the body, sexuality and race were the enmeshed elements which the white South fought to define and contain with the object of keeping all taint, all 'pollution,' even the smallest 'drop of ink' from the pristine whiteness it equated with goodness and order" (156). The southern white liberal Lilian Smith, in her book *Killers of the Dream* (1949, revised 1961), made notable contributions to the study of southern society, one of the most valuable being her insightful analysis of the connections between racial and sexual oppression through her coupling of a fierce denunciation of the culture of segregation with the rejection of the role of the southern lady.

The Legacy of Slavery

The crisis of race that divides US society cannot be understood without the recognition of slavery's importance to the development of the economy, politics and culture. In his *New York Times* article "Overcome by Slavery" (July 13, 2001), Ira Berlin remarked on the then-current interest in slavery, an interest which has become ever more pressing in the following years: "There is a recognition that American racism was founded in slavery, and a general, if inchoate, understanding that any attempt to address race in the present must also address slavery in the past." Berlin concluded with a prophetic warning: "In turning to the past to understand the present, it has become evident that Americans will not be, in Lincoln's words, forever free until they have mastered slavery as slavery once mastered them." Understanding slavery and its legacy of the burden of race is the indispensable starting point for understanding the essence of the country as well as what it may become. Today nobody disputes the fact that the enslavement of Africans cast a long shadow over its subsequent history, that ending slavery did not end the racism on which it was based and that whereas the slave South lost the war, many white Americans never quite lost their belief in white supremacy. The enduring stain of slavery, still far from removed, infiltrates every aspect of American life, and some, like Ibram Kendi, demand a Third

Reconstruction, in that the work of the second one, the civil rights laws of the 1960s, is far from complete ("Progress" 436).

In her groundbreaking 1997 study *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman describes emancipation as a "nonevent [...] insinuated by the perpetuation of the plantation system and the refiguration of subjection" (116). In *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007), she further theorizes the "afterlife of slavery," which is characterized by the imprint of slavery on all sectors of society and the enduring presence of the racialized violence of slavery: "This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment" (6).

Rinaldo Walcott is also indebted to Saidiya Hartman in his book *The Long Emancipation* (2021). The titular concept characterizes black life everywhere: Across the world, blacks are emancipated but not free in the sense of being granted full bodily autonomy. His main argument is that "What emancipation does not do is to make a sharp and necessary break with the social relations that underpin slavery. That this break has not happened is why we are still in the period of emancipation" (3). Walcott singles out social regulations about black dress and movement as a continuation of the Black Codes, vagrancy laws and stereotypical notions of black idleness: "Black people's volition and will to attain some measure of control over our bodies are an affront to a deeply ingrained logic in which Black people are not supposed to own our own bodies" (108).

It is Hartman's concept here that informs the groundbreaking 1619 Project of the *New York Times*, although in fact she is referenced only once, in a footnote, in the powerful anthology *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, a book-length expansion of the project's essays published in November 2021. The project makes the challenging claim that it was the arrival of the *White Lion*, the first ship carrying slaves to arrive in the colonies, and not Independence declared in 1776, that marked the true birth date of the country. In her preface to the book, Nikole Hannah-Jones writes: "The 1619 Project is not the only origin story of this country—there must be many—but it is one that helps us fundamentally understand the nation's persistent inequalities in ways the more familiar origin story cannot" ("Preface" xxxii). The special issue of the *New York Times Magazine* that she originally proposed in 2019

> would bring slavery and the contributions of Black Americans from the margins of the American story to the center, where they belong, by arguing that slavery and its legacy have profoundly shaped modern American life, even as that influence had been shrouded or discounted. ("Preface" xxii)

In an article within the project, "Democracy," Hannah-Jones credits her father with an awareness of what it would take her years to understand: "That the year 1619 is as important to the American story as 1776. That

Black Americans, as much as those men cast in alabaster in the nation's capital, are this nation's true founding fathers" (11). The project makes the central assertion that the arrival of the *White Lion* in Virginia in 1619 gives us an alternative origin story to the arrival of the *Mayflower* in 1620, and that slavery provides an explanation for so many characteristics of contemporary US society, including the policing of black bodies that springs from white fears of black freedom, the plague of mass incarceration that can be traced back to the Thirteenth Amendment and the persistent voter suppression of blacks. The continuing legacy of slavery determines the treatment you will receive according to whether you are white or black: The quality of the neighborhood where you live, of the education and the health care that you get, the treatment you are met with in hospitals and in the courts.

The sardonic observation that racism is like a Cadillac, in that they bring out a new model every year, has been attributed to Malcolm X (qtd. in Seamster and Ray 315). At a meeting of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in Cleveland in 1964, and speaking about the Civil Rights Act that would be passed the following year, he remarked: "You haven't even made progress, if what's being given to you, you should have had already. That's not progress" (qtd. in Kendy, "Progress" 436). The rejection of the comfortable narrative of continuous racial progress by those who insist that the dark past of slavery continues to cast its shadow and weigh heavily on our lives in so many ways has a long history, one that can be traced back to Frederick Douglass's 1869 address to the annual meeting of the American Antislavery Society.[7]

Kendi is one of a number of black intellectuals who openly voice their distrust of what he calls "This mantra of steady incremental change [that] has long been part of the American creed" ("Progress" 422). After the 2016 election, Kendi soon became convinced that President Trump represented a racist past that many innocently believed the country had left behind, and that his victory was "a reversal of the gradual racial progress they had been told was the American story" ("Progress" 422). For Kendi, the racial history of the United States is

> a *dual* racial history of two opposing forces: historical steps toward equity and justice and historical steps toward inequity and injustice. But foregrounded in the telling are the steps toward equity and justice as part of a grand American narrative march of liberty and equality for all. ("Progress" 425; italics in the original)

There are black thinkers who are even more pessimistic with respect to racial progress than Kendi, who at least tames his pessimism with his belief in the efficacy of demanding and fighting for antiracist policies. Calvin Warren, in his essay "Black Nihilism and the Politics of Hope," remarks on the futility of the political hope that has characterized antiracist movements and argues that "the logic of the Political—linear temporality, biopolitical futurity,

perfection, betterment, and redress—sustains black suffering." He goes on to state that "Progress and perfection are worked through the pained black body and any recourse to the Political and its discourse of hope will ultimately reproduce the very metaphysical structures of violence that pulverize black being" (218). For Warren, the objective of the political is to keep blacks "in an unending pursuit" of freedom, justice and progress that are forever beyond reach (221).

Slavery and American Capitalism

As Matthew Desmond remarks, contemporary historians searching for reasons why the US economy is so severe and unbridled "have pointed persuasively to the gnatty fields of Georgia and Alabama, to the cotton houses and action blocks, as an early example of America's low-road approach to capitalism" (167). Plantation slavery was indeed the first big business in the United States, and, as Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman note, "By virtue of our nation's history, American slavery is necessarily imprinted on the DNA of American capitalism" (3). David Brion Davis observes that "the value of Southern slaves in 1860 equaled 80 percent of the gross national product, or what today would be the equivalent to $9.75 trillion," which was one of the "good reasons why, in 1860, two-thirds of the richest Americans lived in the slaveholding South" (xvi). The fact that America has evolved into one of the world's most inequitable societies is inseparable from the fact that its economy was initially based on slavery. Desmond describes this system as "a racist capitalism that ignores the fact that slavery didn't just deny Black freedom but built white fortunes, originating the Black-white wealth gap that annually grows wider" (185).

In his article "The Impact of Slavery on 20th- and 21st-Century Black Progress," Ronald Walters argues in favor of the payment of monetary reparation to the descendants of slaves, and reminds Americans that, while slavery for most African Americans was extended well into the twentieth century through sharecropping, peonage, convict labor and other practices of exploitative labor, "whites enjoyed a monumental head start as slaveholders and the creators of a society built on the wealth the enslaved workers produced. Thus, whites were the arbiters of African Americans' entrance into that society" (112). He convincingly debunks the myth "that African Americans have been 'free' from the condition of slavery for over a century and a half, and therefore should be able to fend for themselves, just like whites and immigrants," noting that this misconception is "based on the historical disconnect between current poverty rates in the African American community and their roots in the practice of racial slavery and Jim Crow segregation" (122). Walters's argument is that slavery and its extension into the twentieth century was an injustice that benefited people, families and eventually corporations, whose wealth was created by the forced labor of African Americans. At the same time,

> the enslaved workers transferred the legacy of poverty and oppression to their descendants because their status did not allow the acquisition of wealth. Moreover, the ability to share equitably in the nation's wealth was stifled by laws that disavowed the historical reality that the status of the 'enslaved workers' affected the status of their descendants. (127–28)

Along with casting its dark shadow over America's political institutions, laws and financial culture, slavery also helped to mold and perfect modern management techniques. Desmond in fact notes that "management techniques used by nineteenth-century corporations were very similar to those implemented during the previous century by plantation owners" (178). Historians like Edward Baptist have recently documented how methods of torture became more brutal and sophisticated during the years of slavery, with the aim of turning enslaved bodies into commodities with which the financial history of the western world would be transformed (xxviii). The legacy of slavery also played a major role in preventing a potent welfare state and weakening the labor movement. The country has been unable to implement the kind of welfare programs that are commonly seen in so many other countries in the world, and this is widely attributed to a long history of racism that has so often poisoned the debate about government benefits. Economists Alberto Alesina, Edward Glaeser and Bruce Sacerdote convincingly argue that "Racial fragmentation in the US and the disproportionate representation of minorities among the poor has clearly played a major role in stopping rich-poor redistribution within the US," and that the history of redistribution "makes it quite clear that hostility to welfare comes in part from the fact that welfare spending in the US goes disproportionately to minorities" (Alesina et al. 39).

Criminality and Incarceration

The legacy of slavery is central to understanding the mass incarceration and excessive punishment of which blacks are disproportionally victims. In a talk given at America's Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on August 25, 2000, Toni Morrison hinted at similarities between the mass incarceration of blacks and the ethnic cleansing practiced by the Nazis. She stressed the project's power

> of making us aware of the ever flexible, always adaptable, persistently slippery forms of modern racism in which the slavebody is reconstructed and reenters the blackbody as an American form of ethnic cleansing in which a monstrously large number of black men and women are carefully swept into prisons, where they become once again free labor; once again corralled for profit. ("The Slavebody" 77)

The toxic, racist dehumanization of blacks (who were often characterized as animalistic and closer to apes than to whites) that was used to justify

slavery, segregation and lynching, has maintained a dangerous grip on the American imagination and continues to influence the criminal justice system, in which African Americans are still often treated as subhuman. Leslie and Michelle Alexander argue that "The specific forms of repression and control may have changed over time, but the underlying pattern established during slavery has remained the same," and that "Nothing has proved more threatening to our democracy, or more devastating to Black communities, than white fear of Black freedom dreams" (102). They contend that the reflexive impulse of white supremacists to respond to black privilege with extreme punitiveness can be traced back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when white supremacists desperately tried to control the unfree blacks who resisted enslavement. They relate white people's fear of losing dominance and of rebellious black people to massive investments in the prison-industrial complex rather than in social services that might have mitigated the harm caused by centuries of racial subjugation:

> For more than four decades, our nation has declared wars on drugs and crime, invested billions of dollars in highly militarized police forces, and embarked on a race to incarcerate in Black communities, while slashing funding from education, drug treatment, public housing, and welfare. (119–20)

Instead of addressing the root causes of crime and violence and the social structures that create and prolong inequality, politicians of both parties embraced the narrative of enslavers and of segregationists: "namely, that Black people were lazy, had to be forced to work, were inherently or culturally criminal, and thus must be made subject to perpetual control" (120).

In their article "Capital Punishment and the Legacies of Slavery and Lynching in the United States," David Rigby and Charles Seguin argue that capital punishment in the United States is racialized: Those convicted of the murder of whites are far more likely to receive the death penalty than those convicted for the murder of blacks. Capital punishment is more frequently practiced in places where lynching of blacks occurred more frequently and in states in which slavery was legal as of 1860. Accordingly, scholars have debated whether capital punishment reflects a legacy of lynching or a legacy of slavery. Their analysis shows "that lynching on its own is a significant predictor of contemporary executions, but that once slavery is accounted for, slavery predicts executions, while lynching does not," and they argue that "slavery's state-level institutional legacy is central to contemporary capital punishment" (205).

Medicine and Health

As Linda Villarosa has observed, "For centuries, white physicians and scientists went to great lengths to prove that Black bodies were biologically and physiologically different from white bodies" (318). It goes without saying that

in a racist context "different" means inferior. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many physicians and scientists produced theories to show that Africans were biologically inferior and thus fit for slavery. As Vanessa Gamble writes, "Slaves found themselves as subjects of medical experiments because physicians needed bodies and because the state considered them property and denied them the legal right to refuse to participate" (1774). Gamble singles out two famous cases, one being that of the Georgia physician Thomas Hamilton, who conducted brutal experiments on a slave to test remedies for resisting heat and avoiding heatstroke, and the other being Dr. Marion Sims, who experimented on three slave women from Alabama to develop an operation to repair vesicovaginal fistulas. He mercilessly put each of them through the agony of up to 30 operations with no anesthetic (Gamble 1774).

The depredation and suppression of the black body continued long after the abolition of slavery, inscribed in the long legacy of the scientific objectification and dehumanization of black bodies. One of the most infamous examples is the experiment with black men in Tuskegee, Alabama: An infamous clinical study was conducted between 1932 and 1972 by the US Public Health Service to gauge the natural progression of untreated syphilis in African American men; 399 poor black sharecroppers were given the disease without being told, and were not administered the penicillin that could have cured them; another 201 black men served as controls. All these men believed they were being treated for "bad blood" (J. Jones 5). Many people saw this experiment, conducted by a government agency, as reminiscent of Nazi Germany and equated it to a form of genocide (J. Jones 12). The legacy of this experiment is still manifested in today's pervasive black distrust of the medical profession and of public-health authorities, as seen in the persistent complaints of black patients about racial inequities in the treatment of certain diseases and of being disrespected and receiving inferior treatment in doctors' offices and emergency rooms. As Vanessa Gamble has noted, "the [Tuskegee] study predisposed many African Americans to distrust medical and public health authorities and has led to critically low Black participation in clinical trials and organ donation" (1773).

Another manifestation of the dehumanization and objectification of the black body was that of the eugenic sterilizations performed on poor men and women from the 1920s to the 1970s. Racialized and racist sterilizations were rationalized and justified through the so-called science of eugenics, which shaped the medical discourse on the black body from the end of the nineteenth century until its slow demise in the late 1960s. Conceived in England at the end of the nineteenth century as a science of racial improvement, and then finding its horrifying apotheosis in Nazi Germany, eugenics in the American context took on a decisively racial and racist turn. Endorsed by lawyers (Madison Grant), historians (Lothrop Stoddard), biologists (Frederik Osborn), politicians (Woodrow Wilson) and presidents of leading American universities (David Starr Jordan), eugenics perpetuated older myths of the inferiority of the black body, perceiving it as prone to disease, violence and aberrant sexuality. Eugenics was ultimately responsible not

only for forced sterilizations of African Americans in the South, but also for providing justification for Jim Crow anti-miscegenation statutes and bolstering the discourse of the deviant black body.

As Villarosa observes, over time, and into the post–Second World War period, the theories of white doctors and scientists who propagated theories about biological differences of black bodies "became incorporated into and normalized in medical practice, and this racializing of medicine did not end after slavery" (318). The dubious scientific practice of obsessing with supposed innate racial differences persists to this day, as can be seen in the amount of current research into genomics and genetic difference, to the detriment of studies of the social determinants of health.

Blacks and COVID-19

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the United States, with a disproportionate number of deaths among people of color (the percentage of black fatalities from COVID-19 has been 2.4 times that of whites), has again exposed racial inequalities in health care and brought to the fore the question of a racial biological difference, leading some to ask what may be innate to black people that explains their poorer health and higher mortality rates than non-blacks, whether it is in their biology or in their culture, instead of taking into account a long history of disparities in their social environment. As Dorothy Roberts explains,

> It is implausible that one race of people evolved to have a genetic predisposition to heart failure, hypertension, infant mortality, diabetes, and asthma. There is no evolutionary theory that can explain why African ancestry would be genetically prone to practically every major common illness. (15)

The pandemic has led to black intellectuals and historians denouncing once again a long history of indifference to black life and the treatment of blacks as dispensable. They have returned to the argument that the legacy of slavery influences the health and health care of African Americans, and that it was a slave system, depriving blacks of everything but the most basic needs, that set in motion persistently diminished standards of access to healthy foods, good working conditions and adequate medical treatment. In an article specifically addressing COVID-19, black sociologist Rashawn Ray stresses the fact that African Americans are overrepresented as essential workers, and have thus been exposed to the virus more often and in greater numbers, noting that structural conditions that give rise to preexisting medical conditions and health disparities are the main reason why the pandemic has taken such a heavy toll on black communities (Ray).

Ibram Kendi has called attention to the fact that there is rampant racism underlying the kind of racial disparities that nobody denies, and that Americans continue to blame and pathologize black people:

> To explain the disparities in the mortality rate, too many politicians and commentators are noting that black people have more underlying medical conditions but, crucially, they're *not explaining why*. Or they blame the choices made by black people, or poverty, or obesity – but not racism. ("Stop;" italics in the original)

Kendi is one of those race theorists who insist that the vulnerabilities of the blacks are structural, rather than congenital. He argues that the belief of white Americans in blacks as naturally more prone to crime and disease is a legacy of an older "extinction thesis." The author of this thesis, the German-born statistician Frederick L. Hoffman, in his *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, published in 1896, portrayed blacks as physically and morally diseased and thus prone to extinction (Kendi, "American Nightmare").

Kelly Bezio relates quarantine regulations during the pandemic, which allow the privileged to stay at home and force "essential" and poor workers to move about and work, to the conditions of slavery, which denied the right of slaves to choose to move about or to stay in place:

> Rather, if we are someone who can choose to obey a stay-at-home order, we enjoy a kind of freedom enslaved individuals fought to obtain, and if we are someone deemed an "essential" laborer or someone living paycheck-to-paycheck who must go to work, our condition represents a new iteration of a centuries-old privation. (699)

As Bezio observes, we cannot escape the fact that those who deliver food, serve at cash registers, stock supermarket shelves and so on "are disproportionately of color, blue collar, undocumented, or otherwise the inheritors of racialized legacies of disenfranchisement" (703).

Food, Race and Geography

When a system of power (racial capitalism) intersects with food politics, people of color are more likely to be affected by health inequalities and economic crises than white people (Nittle). Food insecurity, which for many decades has plagued communities of color disproportionately, has intensified and come into greater focus during the pandemic. The disfranchised and marginalized BIPOC[8] communities

> face higher vulnerability to COVID-19 due to factors like shared housing, lack of access to health care, environmental racism, job layoffs, immigration status, employment in the wage economy without worker protections, and more. This pandemic is exacerbating existing challenges and lays bare the cracks in the system that prevent many of us from having anything canned up for this metaphorical winter. (Penniman, "To Free Ourselves")

Denying access to healthy food is another way of oppressing and marginalizing the racial Other, one which runs alongside the creation of racialized and racist prison complexes and medical abuses of the black body. Through pathologizing access to (that is, availability of) equitable and sustainable food systems, those in power engage in racial and socioeconomic subordination. Hence, food and health disparities can be seen to illustrate the pervasive reach of white domination, which is systemic, not just individual: "Food oppression is structural because it is not the product of individual acts of discrimination, but stems rather from the institutionalized practices and policies of government and the fast food industry" (Freeman, "Fast Food" 2222). Even if governmental actions here are in principle neutral, there seems to be a coincidental topographical overlapping of minority communities with food swamps[9] accomplished through the cooperation between municipalities and fast-food conglomerates (Small). Food oppression, to which black communities are habitually subjected, not only pathologizes their access to healthy food but, in conjunction with other types of oppression such as health, education and housing inequity, weakens and destabilizes these already vulnerable communities. Such "institutionalized, food-related policies and practices," notes Freeman, "undermine the physical strength and survival of socially marginalized groups" ("The Unbearable Whiteness of Milk" 1254).

While prisons and ghettos served to showcase the criminalization and demonization of the racial Other (pathologization of difference), food swamps immobilize black people in a more metaphorical way. The governing bodies engage in contemporary plantation politics—controlling ghetto dwellers through poor nutrition, much like planters who used food as a tool of control and punishment of their human chattel. This kind of "food power" manifests itself through the food system which "appears 'broken,' when in fact it is operating exactly as it was intended. It is through our food that a central element of our expressive and non-expressive Black identity is called into question and even contested" (Williams-Forson 10). The pathologization of food occurs by means of creating structural barriers to people's food sovereignty (limiting access to adequate and affordable food and at the same time peddling fast food), and as such "its pronounced and extreme effect on low-income people of color represents a form of structural oppression" (Freeman, "Fast Food" 2222).

Yet, even though many African Americans do not have access to the appropriate systemic resources to fight such adverse conditions, many have learned lessons from COVID-19 and "go beyond a resilient food system to create a sovereign one" (Ammons). Interestingly enough, what Ammons calls "the new normal"—that is, communal efforts to construct systems of food security in neighborhoods laid siege by the virus (for example, urban gardens, CSAs and free meals for those most in need)—actually "feels more like a glitch in the matrix—a memory of a previous existence—or nothing new at all" (Ammons). It all harks back to Fannie Lou Hamer's advocacy for

food sovereignty through cooperative economics (Ammons). In demonstrating this argument, Jasmine Jefferson, founder of Black Girls With Gardens, claims that "We are resisting systematic racist policies and procedures […] when we make the space to grow our own food" (qtd. in Ané). More specifically, Katell Ané observes that African Americans find resistance in home vegetable gardening, which has become progressively more common since the outbreak of the pandemic, in that it provides not only physical sustenance but also improves emotional wellbeing.

Racism, which "is sapping the strength of the whole society by wasting human resources" (Jones, "How Racism"), also manifests itself through the complications of land ownership. "Recognize that land and food have been used as a weapon to keep black people oppressed," urges Curtis Hayes Muhammad, a veteran civil rights activist (in Penniman, "Radical Farmers"). Muhammad's observation alludes to the fact that African Americans' relationship with land and agriculture has been pathologized through "colonial genocide, land grabbing, Department of Agriculture (USDA) discrimination, state-level nativism, lynching, and expulsion," as Leah Penniman explains, and "over 98% of the farmland in this county is owned by white Americans today" ("To Free Ourselves"). After the abolition of chattel slavery, sharecropping and land dispossession were used with the aim of "re-enslaving" black people. Despite quite successful attempts to deter black communities from farming, African Americans have indeed reclaimed land (through community-supported agriculture or community gardens) and "find joy in working on the land and view it as a way to reconnect with ancestors and cultural traditions and to heal from historical trauma" (Gilbert & Williams 2).

We believe that in light of a growing awareness of the persistence of racism across the globe, and the rise of the opposition to it manifested in movements such as Black Lives Matter, the topic of the "pathologizing of the black body" is both timely and demands further exploration within an academic context. In what follows we address the positioning of black corporeality within the legacies of plantation slavery as manifested in twentieth- and twenty-first-century American literature through the vantage point of the complementary methodologies of eugenics, trauma and food studies. Looking at the issue of black corporeality from the combined theoretical perspectives of eugenic studies, trauma studies, medical humanities and food studies results in a new dialogue, one that can help us to understand the pathologizing of the black body in fresh and stimulating ways.

The current book comprises three sections, each of which reflects an important area of the legacy of pathologizing black corporeality that reaches back to the times of plantation slavery: "Pathologizing Blood," "Pathologizing the Body" and "De-Pathologizing Access to Food and Land."

In **the first chapter**, "'There's pow'r in the blood': Blood Transfusions and Racial Serology in Wallace Thurman's 'Grist in the Mill,'" Ewa Luczak analyzes the uses of blood in service of the rhetoric of white purity in Wallace

Thurman's short story "Grist in the Mill" (1926). Written almost 30 years before Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and masterfully exploring a paint metaphor, Thurman's story challenges the mythology of blood purity by playing with the physical properties of blood—blood mixing was conducted literally through transfusions, with the practice providing a new dimension to debates about blood and race. Transfusions were performed regularly in the 1920s and posed a new set of questions about the relations between the races, the physical properties of blood and the consequences of blood mixing for racially different donors. Transfusions also offered a chance to rethink blood symbolism and to free blood from its enmeshment in the iconography of racism. However, the medical world was frequently trapped in, struggled with or indeed actively supported, the rhetoric of blood purity, allowing it to affect the shape of blood technologies and research in the new pseudo-field of "racial serology." Thurman's seemingly slight story points toward the longevity of blood as a metaphor of whiteness not only in American culture, as would be the case in Ellison's novel, but also in science. The interpretation of this short story, then, sheds new light on the power of the mythology of blood purity in the United States in the 1920s, how it was enmeshed within the science of serology and the resistance in both the lay and medical worlds to treating various blood samples as equal regardless of the donor's racial profile.

The **second chapter**, "Eugenic Sterilization in Toni Morrison's *Home*: Perpetrators and the Ethics of Engaged Witnessing," focuses on Morrison's *Home* (2012). In her novel, the Nobel Prize laureate draws attention to the presence of the science of eugenics in US medical practice in the 1950s. One of the main female characters is rendered sterile due to a gynecological experiment performed on her by a white medical doctor. Inspired by Dr. J. Marion Sims, the father of modern gynecology, who performed experiments on enslaved women, Madison Grant, the proponent of racial eugenics, and also drawing on the ideology of Nordicism, the doctor in Morrison's novel endorses a eugenic belief in his right to control a female black body and in the need to engineer the reproduction of those deemed racially inferior. Eugenics, having been discredited in Europe as pseudoscience due to its associations with Nazi policies and inhumane medical experiments, continued to attract the attention of some US gynecologists after the Second World War, who, in compliance with the decisions of the Eugenic Medical Boards, performed eugenic sterilizations well into the 1970s. The conviction that eugenics disappeared from American culture after the war is thus depicted as a historical fallacy and is debunked in *Home*. Morrison not only challenges the dominant narrative of the progress of US medical history but also draws attention to the possibility of overcoming the awful legacy of the systematic abuse of the black female body. She focuses on the role of the witness and invites the reader to take this issue up, portraying characters who take an active ethical stand and support the victim. In this way, Morrison actively counters the logic of victimization and points to the power of transhuman solidarity in shaping the future.

Luczak's insights into pathologizing race through the discourse of eugenics are related to the subject of the second section, "Pathologizing the Body," which focuses on pathologizing black bodies through criminalization and imprisonment on the one hand, and through the attribution of biological and cultural inferiority, on the other. In **Chapter 3**, "From the Prison of Slavery to the Slavery of Prison: Incarcerated Black Bodies in Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*," Constante González Groba surveys the history of the racist association of the black body with criminality. He draws on George Yancy's claim that "From the perspective of whiteness, the Black body *is* criminality itself" (xxx; emphasis in the original) and analyzes two recent novels that directly confront the US prison system and its effective reinstituting of slavery by another name. Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017), partly inspired by the historian David Oshinsky's *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice*, looks back to the history of Parchman Farm, the Mississippi prison that for many years functioned as a slave plantation and was an extension of the plantation slave economy. In this narrative, Ward communicates the unspeakable past of this prison plantation through the ghost of a former black inmate who initiates the present-day teenage protagonist into the tragic history of his family and race. Another attempt to combat historical amnesia is Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys* (2019), which gives fictional voice to the black inmates of one of the "pain factories," a reform school in Florida, closed in 2011, that had been racially segregated until 1968. The "kind of Nickel deadness" in the eyes of the student prisoners reads as an obvious nod to Orlando Patterson's "social death," which was characteristic of plantation slavery. Also described is convict labor, a practice characteristic of the US prison system, for which the boys received no compensation. In effect, these boys are slaves of the state in an institution which, with its fields and workshops and in the implementation of all kinds of torture, including solitary confinement, seems like a prison plantation, as in the cases of Parchman in Mississippi and Angola in Louisiana.

In **Chapter 4**, "Pathologizing Race, Pathologizing Metastatic Racism: From Lillian Smith to Ibram Kendi," González Groba deals with the threat of disease as a political tool used to exclude African Americans from the social body, with the long tradition of pathology in the United States in which self-proclaimed scientists identified racial mixing with "social suicide" and recalcitrant racists insisted that diseases of blacks were due to racial traits rather than environmental conditions. In the 1940s and 1950s, Lillian Smith turned the racist argument around, arguing that it is racism that constitutes a disease that threatens the whole social body and diagnosing the segregated South as a pathological society. As a sufferer of cancer, Smith compared racial segregation to cancer as a destructive force in the social body, a malignant growth that would metastasize rapidly and implacably unless radical measures were taken, as was the case with the radical mastectomy that she underwent. Her fight with gradualists coincided with

a similar clash between two approaches to cancer research in the United States: The slow approach of Vannevar Bush and the urgent war on cancer fought by Mary Lasker and Sidney Faber. In our own times, Ibram Kendi also makes use of the so-called organism metaphor that draws an analogy between the social and the physical body, connecting his own metastatic cancer and the racism that has spread to every part of the body politic. He urges the same impatient radicalism that Lillian Smith advocated in her day: To combat metastatic racism we must act radically and resolutely rather than taking refuge in the false neutrality of being "not racist." Like Smith, Kendi says that he cannot separate his metastatic cancer from metastatic racism, and also calls for treating racism in the way we treat cancer: "Saturate the body politic with the chemotherapy or immunotherapy of antiracist policies that shrink the tumors of racial inequity, that kill undetectable cancer cells. Remove any remaining racist policies, the way surgeons remove the tumors" (*How* 237–38).

The third and final section of the book expands on González Groba's preoccupation with pathology and the racialized body from a food-studies perspective. Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis explores how race is inscribed on the body through its position on the foodscape and in its relation to foodways. In **Chapter 5**, "'Healthy Is the New Gangsta': Food Apartheid and Black Culinary Culture in Southern Hip-Hop," Niewiadomska-Flis further opens up the spectrum of dis-ease vis-à-vis black bodies as represented in hip-hop lyrics. Since the end of the twentieth century, hip-hop has engaged in social and political issues such as discrimination, exclusion, oppression, structural inequalities and the health disparities that affect African American communities. Hip-hop songs depict the daily politics of African American consumption, which is primarily dominated by two food-related factors: Food swamps and soul food. Hip-hop lyrics often reveal the detrimental impact of these factors on the diets of African Americans born at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum. While hip-hop as a form of cultural production has been examined in academia through the prism of various critical cultural theories, the rhetoric of healthy eating and lifestyle as expressed in hip-hop songs has been virtually absent from scholarly debate. Addressing this lacuna, this chapter points out how some hip-hop groups, especially Dead Prez and Goodie Mob, challenge the culinary heritage of their community (soul food), expose the deleterious underbelly of junk food and illustrate a shift toward a more health-conscious form of eating at the turn of the twenty-first century.

The **final chapter**, "Black Land Matters: Geographies of Race and Politics of Land in Natalie Baszile's *Queen Sugar*," provides an in-depth analysis of the legacies of the southern plantation in the form of black farming. Niewiadomska-Flis examines white privilege and its impact on rural black lives, drawing particular attention to the sociological genesis of black land ownership and the current politics of land. She demonstrates that African Americans' relation to land and agriculture has been complicated by

centuries of chattel slavery, sharecropping and dispossession. Even though racial capitalism has almost managed to alienate the black community in the rural South from farming and has rendered an African American desire for land abnormal, if not pathological, a considerable increase of interest in agrarian space underlies black resistance to the plantation legacy of economic exploitation. The book, then, closes with her analysis of this very legacy and the enduring effects of racial capitalism in the novel *Queen Sugar* (2014). The chapter sets out to explore not only the ongoing legacy of broken promises, dispossession and systemic racism, but also African American farmers' confrontations with the racist history of Jim Crow and the systemic injustice that affect their land ownership. Foucault's concept of heterotopia and Sara Ahmed's "affective economies" allow Niewiadomska-Flis to analyze how African American farmers recover their identities and reconnect with their roots in rural geographies of the contemporary American South.

As we have described above, a variety of analytical approaches and thematic foci with respect to theories and discourses surrounding race and the body allow us to trespass into the thorny territory of the legacy of planation slavery, this in the hope of achieving useful and productive new perspectives on how African American lives continue to be shaped, and indeed haunted, by the past. In *Pathologizing Black Bodies*, we offer insights into the politics of eugenic corporeality in a productive dialogue with the penitentiary and agricultural legacies of the plantation. We trace the depredation and suppression of the black body, both individual and social, beginning with the pseudoscientific discourse of social Darwinism and eugenics, the practice of mass incarceration and excessive punishment of black bodies, food apartheid and the USDA practices depriving black farmers of individual autonomy and collective agency. Our aim in adopting such a rich interplay of discourses, methodologies and perspectives is to further problematize relations between race and the body and to emphasize that black lives do indeed matter, in the United States and far and wide.

Notes

1 Ethel Sawyer argues that "Black populations […] are a priori deviant when viewed through white middle-class eyes – be they Black middle class, a warring gang or the Black lower class" (367).
2 The phrase "self-perpetuating pathology" was actually coined by Clark (27).
3 Chapter: "White Norms for Black Deviation."
4 Murray explains that "It seems altogether likely that white people in the United States will continue to reassure themselves with black images derived from the folklore of white supremacy and the fakelore of black pathology so long as segregation enables them to ignore the actualities" (chapter "Paleface Fables, Brownskin People").
5 Another sociologist who contested dominant assumptions about black existence, mentioned by Ibram Kendi, is Andrew Billingsley, who, in his seminal study *Black Families in White America*, "broke the ground on antiracist Black family studies in 1968. He refused to analyze Black families from the criteria of

White families" (*Stamped* 403). Kendi continues by observing that instead of this, Billingsley "viewed the Black family as an 'absorbing, adaptive, and amazingly resilient mechanism for the socialization of its children.' Billingsley made the same case about African American culture. 'To say that a people have no culture is to say that they have no common history which has shaped and taught them,' Billingsley argued. 'And to deny the history of a people is to deny their humanity'" (*Stamped* 403).

6 Although Wilson does not mention Ladner by name, her research clearly represents "[a]rguments extolling the strengths and virtues of black families [which] replaced those that described the breakup of black families. In fact, aspects of ghetto behavior described as pathological in the studies of the mid-1960s were reinterpreted or redefined as functional because, it was argued, blacks were demonstrating their ability to survive an even flourish in an economically depressed and racist environment" (Wilson, *Truly Disadvantaged* 8–9).

7 In his 1869 address to the annual meeting of the American Antislavery Society, which was celebrating the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, Frederick Douglass delivered a warning that continues to be pertinent today: "But slavery is not honestly dead, to-night. It did not die honestly. Had its death come of moral conviction instead of political and military necessity; had it come in obedience to the enlightenment of the American people; had it come at the call of the humanity and the morality and the enlightenment of the slave-holder, as well as of the rest of our fellow-citizens, slavery might be looked upon as honestly dead. But there is no such thing conceivable, as a practical result, as the immediate, unconditional abolition of slavery" (250–51).

8 BIPOC stands for black, indigenous, and people of color.

9 Food swamps are areas in which the availability of high-calorie fast food, junk food and other unhealthy options is far greater than that of healthier food options.

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Part I

Pathologizing “Blood”

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1 "There's Pow'r in the Blood"

Blood Transfusions and Racial Serology in Wallace Thurman's "Grist in the Mill"

Ewa Barbara Luczak

In an iconic scene in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, a foreman instructs the protagonist on how to obtain the ideal Optic White color at the Liberty Paints factory (Ellison 275). While opening a container of "dead black" paint, the foreman explains: "The idea is to open each bucket and put in ten drops of this stuff" (278). The protagonist is flabbergasted; it seems absurd to add black drops to the white paint in order to produce what the factory advertises by that name. Yet, while doing his job and watching "black drops falling so slowly into the bucket yet reacting so swiftly" (278), he receives a lesson in the discourse of blood and racial purity in the United States of the 1950s and its constructivist nature. Black blood may be mixed with white in the national cauldron, yet this fact is conveniently ignored in the optics of raciology. To those endorsing anti-miscegenation rhetoric and embracing the South's one-drop rule of white supremacy, blood mixing is uncomfortable news. The consequences of revealing that their Optic White label is produced by mixing white with black ingredients could bankrupt the factory, which prides itself on the purest white paint in the country. Similarly, realizing that the white race is not strictly white and its blood, despite prohibitions firmly imposed by law, contains black drops, could have devastating consequences on racial absolutism and blood purity in the national discourse.

Ellison's masterful exploration of the paint metaphor, in commenting on uses of blood in the service of the rhetorics of white purity, has a precedent in Wallace Thurman's "Grist in the Mill" (1926). The short story, written nearly 30 years before Ellison's magnum opus, challenged the blood-purity mythology by toying with the physical properties of blood. In Thurman's work, however, the mixing is executed literally through a blood transfusion, a practice that was then providing a new dimension to debates about conceptions of blood and race.

Blood transfusions, still rare at the start of the twentieth century, were being performed more regularly in the 1920s (Schneider 2003) and were provoking questions, for the medical profession and across the nation, about relations between physical properties of blood and race, blood inheritance and the consequences of blood being mixed from donors of different

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races. Transfusions were also providing a chance to rethink blood's symbolism and to free attitudes about it from enmeshments in the iconography of racism. Frequently, however, the medical world was trapped in, struggling with or in active support of the rhetoric of blood purity, permitting it to affect and shape blood technologies and research.

Thurman's seemingly slight short story appeared in *The Messenger*, a progressive black periodical, and in fact pointed toward blood's longevity as a metaphor of whiteness in science, as well as in society and culture, the latter of which would be the case with Ellison's novel. The interpretation of "Grist in the Mill" can throw light on the power of blood-purity mythology in the United States in the 1920s, on its entrenchment in the science of serology and on resistance in both medical and lay worlds to treating various blood samples equally, whatever racial profile was accorded to a donor.

This chapter will look into Thurman's interrogation of the racialization of blood-transfusion practices and ways in which those practices were perpetuating existing blood iconographies that propped up white supremacy. "Grist in the Mill" will be set against the tradition of conjoining blood and race, the rise of new technologies and politics of blood transfusions early in the twentieth century. Also shown will be how serology, the developing new blood science, became implicated in racial anthropology and, rather than repudiating racialized and racist ways of thinking about the human body, then perpetuated established myths and cultural iconography. The chapter will then turn to Thurman's story and examine the writer's ways of challenging racialized serology and old blood iconography while he pointed toward an alternative consistent with his race-free cosmopolitanism.

Racializations of Blood Transfusions

Serology's beginnings in the first years of the twentieth century, followed by systematic blood transfusions, present the narrative of a thwarted chance for medical science to break with prevalent race paradigms, which must be seen as another victory for racial biopolitics. At the start of the century, the Austrian doctor Karl Landsteiner conducted a systematic analysis of blood (Schneider 1983, 547). Landsteiner was concerned with deaths in a Vienna clinic caused by blood coagulation during transfusions. On the basis of lab cross-testing, he divided human blood into three groups, which he labeled A and B and in 1911; when Emil von Dungern and Ludwik Hirszfeld confirmed Landsteiner's discovery, the third group was renamed AB (Schneider 1983, 547).[1] A year later, De Castello and Sturi identified the fourth, rarest group, later referred to as O (Wiener 370). Landsteiner's groundbreaking findings, published in a monograph in 1901 in the medical journal *Wiener Klinische Wochenshrift*, were confirmed in separate research by Czech physician Jan Jansky in 1907, and in 1910 by William Moss, an American (Schneider 1983, 548; Boaz 17). Both Jansky and Moss labeled the different blood groups I, II, III and IV; it was not till 1928 that a consensus was

reached on blood classification, with the medical establishment recommending Landsteiner's nomenclature (Schneider 1983, 549).

The discovery of four blood groups created an opportunity to replace patient classifications by race with divisions by blood group and thus to step away from racial paradigms. Discovery of the groups, however, was soon being interpreted along lines of scientific racism: Rather than questioning the validity of racial notions, it was used to uphold them. Interestingly, this was done at the time of the rise of cultural anthropology, with the publication of Franz Boas's *Anthropology and Modern Life* in 1928. The 1920s were also the period when eugenics reigned, taking the scientific and medical worlds by storm and leaving dissidents, including Boas, in an academic minority. Eugenics, with the ambition of engineering a model future society and flaunting scientific credentials, strengthened the notion of race and racial absolutism. Endorsing a hierarchy of races, it upheld racialism in sciences and imposed interpretations on scientific findings. It is small wonder that an object of concern for eugenics became the research in serology, centered as that new science was on the bodily fluid that was then functioning as such a crucial social metaphor.

From the inception of the eugenics movement, blood was a staple of the movement's iconography. When David Starr Jordan, Stanford University's founding president and a pioneering eugenicist, introduced the proclaimed science of eugenics to the US audience in 1906, he titled his work *The Blood of the Nation: A Study of the Decay of Races through Survival of the Unfit*. This anticipated the tenor of his argument, in which the fear of foreigners and of the "unfit" was enclosed in the metaphor of blood purity. Though Jordan displayed awareness of blood's physical characteristics and demythologized blood transfusions, calling the procedures "no more than the transposition of food" (90), he also utilized the blood metaphor with unsurpassed energy and brio.

A similar affinity for blood metaphors was shown by the hardliners Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard. Grant, in *The Passing of the Great Race: Or, the Racial Basis of European History*, a book Hitler had while imprisoned after the failed Bavarian putsch, wrote of "every generation of human beings carry[ing] the blood of thousands of ancestors" (35), thus turning it into a magical fluid transporting genes and even ancestral memory. The appeal of blood to scientists who were eugenically minded was so powerful that references to it even entered progressive biology handbooks. Blood imagery was freely dispensed in *New Civic Biology*, the second edition of the manual used to challenge Tennessee's statewide ban on teaching evolution in the Scopes Trial in 1925. In its section alerting students to the power of heredity in human society, the book discussed the Wedgwoods and Darwins as families in which special inherited abilities ran. These speculations conclude with a potent motto: "blood does tell" (401).

Given its significance in the eugenic-scientific register and the metaphor's ability to wield the meaning of racial purity and aptitude, the racial turn

in serological research over the first three decades of the new century was but a matter of time. When Ludwik Hirszfeld along with his wife, Hanna, tested human blood in 1918–19, their investigation led them to connect its characteristics with race and make blood science part of racial anthropology.[2] The couple were Jewish Polish doctors with the Serbian forces in the First World War (Schneider 1983, 56). Confined with those forces on the Salonika or Macedonian front alongside Allied forces, the Hirszfelds used their exposure to ethnic diversity among the troops and the local population to test the blood of 8,000 soldiers. In their article published after the war, the Hirszfelds connected blood groups with races, arguing that blood is a reliable marker of racial origins (Hirszfeld, Schneider 1983, 556; Okroi and J. McCarthy). Since they observed that type A blood was much more common in those coming from Northern and Central Europe and type B blood occurred in those from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and India, the Hirszfelds concluded that there are two basic serological racial types "standing for two primeval races, one in India and one in north and central Europe" (Schneider 1983, 558; Boaz 41). Thus the Hirszfelds connected serological racial analysis to two different human origins—one in Europe and another in Asia. Initially ignored by the international community, their findings received more attention after the reprinting of his *Lancet* article in 1919 and then in the French periodical *Anthropologie*. Soon a new branch of anthropology, seroanthropology, was introduced and the International European Congress of Anthropologists in 1928 in Amsterdam established a new section for blood groups (Okroi 246). As Schneider points out, "[b]y the early 1930s, 1,000 articles were published on over half a million individual tests" (Schneider 1983, 558), driven by a desire to advance the field of racially oriented seroanthropology.

Discussions around racial serology were initially devoid of political agenda. As Boaz argues, numerous European researchers hoped that a new blood science "might contribute to *their* understanding of race," the notion of which formed the basis of modern science (Boaz 9). Seroanthropology, however, nearly from its outset, exacerbated existing racial prejudices and played into chauvinist rhetoric of the postwar period. Various nations took the opportunity in the 1920s to use blood to describe racial differences and to aid their states in organizing the nation along racial lines. Blood testing appeared to be a more reliable means of assigning racial groups when physical markers—facial features, hair and skin pigmentation, the now-infamous cephalic index so popular among racial anthropologists—seemed to fail (Boaz 9). In Germany in 1926, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Blutgruppenforshung (German Society for Blood-Group Research) was founded to develop research in racial anthropology (Boaz 79), the main purpose of which was "a large-scale survey of 'the native peoples' of Germany and Austria" (Boaz 80) and over time to prove "an association between type B blood and racial and eugenic inferiority" (Boaz 89). Hopes coalesced so strongly around blood as an indicator of race that even doubts

about its usefulness raised within the eugenics camp did not prove decisive (Grove).

Surprisingly, racial serology then managed to survive the Second World War. It seemed unimpeded by German blood experiments in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camps and to the rhetoric of a blood border dividing Central Europe into two distinct groups depending on blood characteristics, with the "racially superior" A group centered in Germany and the B group identified with Slavs and Jews (Boaz 89, Heiker). During the war, Hirszfeld had been moved to the ghetto in Warsaw, where he was chairman of the health council and taught illegal courses in medicine while continuing to teach about blood and race (Hilberg 154). After the war, the *British Medical Journal* in a 1951 issue took a note of "a special meeting" of the Royal Anthropological Society, where "serologists and geneticists read papers on blood groups in anthropology, and joined in discussing plans for a reference center which should help to make blood-group data available to anthropologists." The article "Anthropology and Serology" expressed expectations of furthering anthropological studies of race and blood. Racial serology was slow in dying, indeed.

Having been accepted as scientifically valid and politically neutral by a considerable contingent of the medical establishment, racial serology had been affecting ways of thinking about blood transfusions in the period before the Second World War, especially in the United States. New transfusion technologies, which had been developed largely to meet demands during the First World War, were then introduced into general practice and adapted to peacetime needs after that war (Schneider 2003, 191).

From the outset, however, they had to adjust to the racial and racist atmosphere of the medical world. When Thurman was at work on "Grist in the Mill," blacks were frequently excluded from donating blood; if accepted, their blood was segregated. Before blood banks, when donors were preregistered then called on as needed by hospital staff, segregation procedures and the shortage of black donors posed problems for black patients in need of transfusions (Woo 7). Early US blood banks established in 1937 had separate "white" and "black" plasma containers. The prejudice against mixing blood from different racial donors, when such mixing was viewed as a step toward "racial mongrelization," was hard to overcome throughout the 1940s. In John Rankin's address to Congress in 1942, the senator from Mississippi warned against mongrelizing whiteness by way of integrated blood transfusions (Woo 8).

During the war, despite the urgent need of blood for the military, Congress urged the Red Cross to exclude blacks from the national blood donation program. When the Red Cross did accept black donors, largely due to pressure from African American activists, their blood was segregated (and labeled AA "inobtrusively, preferably after the donor had gone") (qtd. in Woo 9) until the Korean War (Woo 5). Medical services were slow to catch up with the state of medical knowledge about blood. After the

implementation in the 1920s of systematic transfusions, it would take the medical community in the United States three decades to officially acknowledge that blood was red and identically valuable regardless of its donor's skin color.

Wallace Thurman and the Medical Profession

Medical controversies about blood transfusions would have struck familiar chords with Wallace Thurman. He had been a premed student at the University of Utah in the spring semester of 1920 (van Notten 85),[3] when serological findings were well known in the academic community and blood transfusions were becoming systematic. Though Thurman did not take a medical degree, opting for a career as a journalist and writer instead (van Notten 6), he continued cultivating interests in the medical field. This was also due to his precarious health as a young man (Thurman, "Autobiographical Statement" 92) and during his nine-year stay in Harlem (van Notten 95) as well as due to having been hospitalized for tuberculosis, contracted early in his life (van Notten 86). Thurman's observations on workings in a hospital and his comments on the value system of the medical field can be found in *The Interne*, the novel he coauthored with A. L. Furman in 1932. *The Interne* examines the field's indifference and callousness as well as its tacit preference for eugenics, with doctors required to keep "idiots, hopeless cripples, and diseased misfits alive only to prolong their suffering" (210). The novel traces the career of a New York hospital intern, whose lofty ideals give way to intellectual arrogance and disappointment, and to an indifference to human suffering.

Thurman's interest in medicine led him to examine the discourse of eugenics, the new self-proclaimed science that was of primary significance in the rise of racial serology. In the novel *Infants of the Spring* (1932), the young writer addressed the vicissitudes of eugenic discourse about degeneracy. Focusing on the friendship of a white European and a black New Yorker, he exposed the power and contagious nature of the eugenic belief in racial essentialism (Luczak, 2021). In the film script Thurman cowrote for Warner Bros., he exposed the taboo problem of eugenic sterilizations in California (Luczak, 2021). The resulting film, *Tomorrow's Children*, turned out to be the only Hollywood production in the 1930s that questioned the sterilization program's validity on eugenic grounds. It is worth repeating that the California sterilizations were being implemented with full force and that the program served as an inspiration for the sterilization of German mental-institution patients under the Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases of 1933.

The realization of Thurman's prolonged interest in the medical field and especially its enmeshment in eugenic discourse casts a different light on "Grist in the Mill," which revolves around blood-transfusion practices. It enables us to see the story as a narrative diagnosing the prevalent blood

politics of the day and providing a satirical commentary on racism's power in influencing new transfusion technologies. Set in a little Louisiana town in the 1920s, the story takes the fear of racial contamination to an absurd level, depicting the dissolution of a white protagonist's psyche due to supposed racial pollution his body has experienced after a transfusion.

Revolting against the Intruder: "Grist in the Mill" as Mock-Gothic Fiction

Thurman published "Grist in the Mill" in *The Messenger*, a periodical with an ambition to provide a forum for cutting-edge intellectual and artistic debates. The editor, George Schuyler, was known for his intellectual independence and for an uncompromising rejection of race absolutism, eugenics and racial determinism in the arts and sciences (though with a ferocity that proved controversial). Thurman filled in briefly for Schuyler as editor in the late autumn of 1925, though he had just turned 24, while Schuyler toured the South for the *Pittsburgh Courier* (van Notten, 103). He used the opportunity to promote his own writing, publishing editorials, essays and "Grist in the Mill." The story did not attract much attention and later fell into the annals of neglected literary history, even with Thurman authoring the superb novels *The Blacker the Berry* and *Infants of the Spring*.

On the surface, the story is yet another narrative by a black author on the theme of the Jim Crow South's obsessive craving for racial purity and its paranoid fear of miscegenation. The protagonist, Colonel Charles Summers, a local plantation owner who "retained all the traditional characteristics of his patrician papa" (294), suffers serious consequences of a sun stroke, and is taken to the hospital in a Louisiana town, in need of a transfusion. When his wife, "an unemotional ninny" and "one of those backwoods belles from whom the fates failed to attend properly at birth" (295), voices no concern about the choice of donor, the doctors use the person available (with a twist).

A couple of months later, Zacharia Davis, a black migrant worker and gambler being held in a local jail, asks to see the colonel. "Pitifully panic stricken" (298), Zacharia awaits execution by hanging, sentenced to death for purportedly murdering a sheriff's deputy. The court trial, described as a farce, was "conducted rather leisurely" (298): it will find a culprit for the killing of the deputy sheriff, the latter having "died from a knife wound inflicted by some infuriated black" (298) during a raid on a black gambling den orchestrated by the police and a chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. Zacharia, unlike other blacks benefiting from the fact that "the plantation owners were not willing to part with any of their hired help" (298), has no patron to protect him. Significantly, he's not from the South and is hardly attuned to either local whites or local blacks. Framed, he is found guilty of murder. His last despairing request is thus granted, and he meets with Colonel Summers.

The colonel, due to propitious circumstances and driven by curiosity, visits Zacharia in his cell, and the secret behind the latter's last request and the former's transfusion is revealed. Counting on an exchange of services, Zacharia confesses that his blood was transfused into the colonel at the hospital months before. Rather than gratitude, Zacharia faces terror and indifference to his lot. "Incoherent with rage, and sick, both in body and mind," the colonel totters away from jail; after the hospital confirms Zacharia's statement, still utterly indifferent to the latter's mortal plea, he is "taken home, babbling, unconscious, and pitiful." Several days later, awakened at night, the colonel imagines his body "writh[ing] and wriggl[ing] on the floor" in an attempt "to revolt against this dusky intruder" (301). With his "reason now completely gone" the colonel collapses on the floor. The story ends enigmatically, its narrator reporting that when "someone opened the door [and] turned on the light [he] screamed" (301).

The development of the plot, the tone of secrecy and the vivid description of Colonel Summers's bodily struggles, set against the backdrop of a stormy night full of "terrifying darkness" (300), align "Grist in the Mill" with the gothic-fiction genre. The image of a black crow overseeing the colonel's emotional turmoil in the night bolsters the narrative's link with Edgar Allan Poe's strand of gothicism. "Stranded, befuddled by the storm," the crow is "seek[ing] refuge upon the window ledge," highly evocative of the raven in that writer's canonical poem. Gothic fiction, with roots reaching back to Poe's poetry and his *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, was among the leading narrative genres developed in the South, and thus Thurman's choice of the form was fitting for a story set in Louisiana. The gothic, as a genre with the role of voicing anxieties about the existing social order, serving as the nation's cultural unconscious while subverting established social norms or even denying their validity, could be utilized both by apologists of bygone plantation ways and by their critics. So while the end of the nineteenth century saw works published with gothic themes and characters "as part of [the] campaign to restore white supremacy" (Crow 2017, 145)—including those by Thomas Nelson Page and by Grace King—other genre works mercilessly criticized plantation myths—see George Washington Cable—and they all solidified the gothic literary tradition in the South.

Another reason for Thurman's narrative choice could have been gothic fiction's ties with the theme of racial othering. As Toni Morrison has argued convincingly, throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, gothic fiction proved a fitting vehicle for conveying the white South's paranoid fear of its black population, with one example being Faulkner's oeuvre. In Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, she reinforced and enriched Leslie Fiedler's Freudian assessment of American literature being driven by "certain special guilts [that] awaited projection in the gothic form" (Fiedler 143). Moreover, Morrison argued that through the nineteenth century and into the first half of the twentieth century an "abiding" Africanist persona in the gothic literature

of writers such as Poe, Faulkner and Willa Cather served to assuage the nation's fear of the unknown and of the loss of whites' freedom to wield power. In our day, publications by Teresa Goddu, Kari Winter and Justin Edwards on connections between the gothic genre's rise and slavery have facilitated our understanding of historical literary anxieties as the young republic developed about solidifying radical racial othering of its enslaved population. Thurman's choice of the genre for his story, seen through the prism of such contemporary research, draws him into the orbit of literary discussions around "the specter of Otherness that haunts the house of national narrative" (Savoy 13–14) and may link him to the tradition of an African American gothic "capable of expressing the precarious position of being black in America" (Wester 5).

Yet "Grist in the Mill" is no pure representative of the genre. Its ironic tone, with the narrator using sarcasm, bends the story into a mock-gothic fiction. The first paragraph sets the tone of comic distance. The narrator warns the reader that an accidental event may serve "to make this universe of ours a sometimes comic spectacle" and may "push all unexpected cosmic experience just over the deviating border line that divides the comic and the tragic" (294). Introducing the light, even ironic, tone affects the reading of the story. Rather than merely bemoaning southern racism and uncovering its psychological underpinnings through gothic devices and tropes, "Grist in the Mill" uses sarcastic laughter in exposing racism's irrational and absurd nature. Thurman's story, in following the logic of an introduction in which the border between the tragic and the comic is porous, then turns a chain of tragic events into a black (*sic*) comedy on rabid racism's workings and on southern biopolitics. The power of the belief that a single drop of "racially alien" blood consigns people to another race is ridiculed; a conviction that new transfusion procedures should be racially segregated is derided. Most of all, consequences are exposed of racialized blood essentialism in both cultural and medical settings.

Cultural Meanings of Blood

"Grist in the Mill," in its task of laying bare and ridiculing blood's potency as a symbol of racial absolutism and white hegemony, fleshes out and mocks various southern cultural meanings clustered around blood. These can be divided into four groupings discussed by Dorothy Nelkin in another context: Blood as an essentialist substance, a symbol of danger, an emblem of the community and a mark of purity. Blood iconography, having a long tradition reaching back to the period of slavery, connected with religious and social beliefs and given renewed impetus by eugenic science, affected the way blood was approached in the practice of transfusions being administered through the 1920s, most rampantly in the South.

Blood's social meaning as the essence of personhood and an inviolable substance extends back to earlier transfusion practices when it was believed

that new blood could affect a patient's behavior and even their physiognomy. In *Juice of Life*, the anthropologist Piero Camporesi described blood as "the seat of the soul"; in the Middle Ages, it was believed that witches drank the blood of the young to remain forever youthful (Nelkin 276). In the seventeenth century, Robert Boyle, a British chemist, examined if "a dog transfused with sheep's blood would grow horns or wool" and "whether marital discord could be treated by reciprocal transfusions of husband and wife" (Boaz 14).

In Thurman's story, the easiest belief to identify is probably that of blood being the carrier of a human essence, though with its setting in the South in the 1920s, this assumes a distinctly racial and racist tenor. The colonel, after finding out that a black man was the donor of his transfused blood, is convinced that his identity is doomed to change and that he would turn into a black man. Woken at night, he peers into the mirror in search of physical changes in his color and physiognomy: "'Still white, still white,' he muttered and then more loudly, 'still white, still white, still white,' the voice became horse again, 'still white, thank God, A'hm still white'" (300). By the end of this fateful night, however, the colonel feels "an inky blackness enveloping him" while "his whole form seemed to be seared with some indigo stain that burned and burned like an avid acid" (301).

Colonel Summers's conviction that blood carries essential race qualities is so strong that his mind conjures up stereotypical African visual and sound imagery. He imagines that "the tree tops, glistening and swaying with the wind, assumed shapes of savage men, rhythmically moving to the tune of a tom-tom, rhythmically tossing to the intermittent thud of the reverberating thunder" (300). A similar way of conceiving consequences of transfusions for racial identification had been fictionalized by the psychiatrist and writer Oskar Panizza in *The Operated Jew*, first published in German in 1893. The Jew, wanting to acquire a new German identity, undergoes a series of procedures to modify his outward appearance. Yet the blood he receives from a peasant woman gets him closest to developing a "German soul" (Boaz 11–12). Panizza's satire, published three decades before Thurman's story, across the Atlantic at a stage when "modern blood science was still in its infancy" (Boaz 12), testifies to images already being present of transfusing racial characteristics through the transfusion of blood.

This conviction that blood carries one's personal and racial essence, cherished by Colonel Summers in "Grist in the Mill," while widespread in Europe by the late nineteenth century, had undoubtedly been strengthened across the South by the 1920s through blood's unique position in evangelical liturgies of the Bible Belt (a primarily southern region of ardent fundamentalism). As Larson points out, the Deep South accorded blood a special place due to the region's immersion in the symbolism of evangelical Christianity. Blood, synonymous with Christ's sacrifice and standing in for divine love and saving grace, held a key position in popular hymns sung during liturgies (23). Lyrics conveyed images of Christ's "blood-banner"

(Coleman 8), celebrated that "All Thy people are forgiven, Through the virtue of Thy blood" (Coleman 9) and pounded home the message that "There's pow'r in the blood" with a forcefulness that makes the latter an apt title for this chapter (Coleman 295). Sacrilization through religious ceremonies strengthened a conviction in blood's metaphysical significance while imbuing it with an essentialist nature. Blood was no longer a bodily fluid and discharge, instead taking on its uniquely religious meaning confirmed in the liturgy through belief in transubstantiation: The transformation of bread and wine into Christ's flesh and blood.

Given this special religious position on blood in the South, the colonel's association of tainted blood with spiritual danger and evil characteristics—another of its common social meanings—seems logical. Christ's redeeming blood was frequently juxtaposed with "evil" blood. In these regional contexts, this invokes "the late medieval preoccupation with sin, suffering, and contagion" (Linke, *Blood and Nation* 157) and is associated with the staying power of the fear of contagion through contacts with inherently sinful "others" that dates back to the Puritans. And thus the colonel, having received news from Zacharia about his transfusion (and having confirmed it), feels threatened by this new, evil blood rushing through his veins. Compared to a sinister "intruder," it is an aggressor assailing the life of its recipient. His house is pounded by torrential rain "urged by a rising wind" and standing for this blood's dangerous power, poised at any moment to spiritually and physically annihilate the colonel: "on the outside was […] the black night plus the cachinnating [loudly laughing] rain drops, and the playful wind. He shrank back in abject terror only to be confronted with the same terrifying darkness behind him" (300). The sense of danger, initially unspecified, quickly shades into fear of blacks, with the colonel murmuring "Darkies" and instinctively trying "to draw from the window" (301) in a self-protective reaction.

With blood's meaning so deeply entrenched in the South as a symbol of evil and danger and as an essential substance—all exacerbated by religious symbolism—its third social meaning explored in Thurman's story extended beyond regional mythologies and held a positive connotation. This added meaning engaged the communal identity in which blood "represented the community spirit, altruism and social cohesion" (Nelkin 279). The meaning of blood as a sign of communitarian identity, a metaphor for the spirit of brotherhood, has remained popular across cultures and epochs and has been firmly encoded in language. Within the context of the community, therefore, the metaphor of blood has been utilized to endorse meaningfulness in shared ancestry and to "extend relationships of blood beyond the bonds of kinship" (Nelkin, 279), serving in the latter case as a metaphor for the communal spirit of interhuman solidarity. In the former case, sayings such as "blood is thicker than water" sum up the philosophy of community through kinship. Phrases including "blood brothers," on the other hand, strengthen the belief in people's affinities on the basis of shared experience,

loyalty and friendship. Thus a blood metaphor can be a fitting trope in promoting closed, tribal communities and exacerbating nativist fears of newcomers, or in doing just the opposite—it can just as readily encapsulate the philosophy of an open society, accepting outsiders unconnected by shared ancestry.

The South of the 1920s consistently promoted the symbolism of blood as a marker of social cohesion based on kinship, filiation, biology and common racial ancestry. Whites continued building on plantation slavery's legacy, which had drawn an inflexible line between the enslaved and slaveholders, and on Jim Crow–era laws such as *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court ruling in 1896 that upheld segregation in the post-Reconstruction era. For Thurman's times, the symbolic turning point was the New Virginia Law to Preserve Racial Integrity (aka the Racial Integrity Act), passed by the state two years prior to the publication of "Grist in the Mill." The act required citizens to register according to their "racial composition" to determine if they are "Caucasian, Negro, Mongolian, American Indian, Asiatic Indian, Malay, or any mixture thereof" (3). Since registration was a prerequisite in order to obtain a marriage license, the act effectively excluded whites from marriage with such Others, ensuring racial absolutism and the white hegemony euphemistically termed "racial integrity." Blood symbolism was codified in this important legal document with which the state regulated the domestic sphere, reproduction and racial interaction. As one paragraph states:

> It shall therefore be unlawful for any white person in this State to marry any save a white person, or a person with no other admixture of blood than white and American Indian. For the purpose of this act, the term "white person" shall apply only to the person who has no trace whatsoever of any blood other than Caucasian; but persons who have one-sixteenth or less of the blood of the American Indian and have no other non-Caucasian blood shall be deemed to be white persons. (4)

The act defined whiteness on the basis of an arbitrary blood quantum: If the white person did not have any black blood—a shortcut for their ancestry—yet had one-sixteenth or less American Indian blood, they still passed for white. State legislators ignored this arbitrariness in legislation that imposed measuring a citizen's provenance by a quantum of "racial" blood. The act was not grounded in medical findings or ensuring social justice: It protected and sanctified Jim Crow philosophy. White and black communities were to maintain segregated lives; blood quantum was to decide one's belonging to or being excluded from the racial community.

Thurman's story, by taking this logic to its ultimate conclusion, challenges the belief that such a quantum can be a marker of communal identity. During the transfusion the colonel's blood is replaced by that of Zacharia; in light of the Law to Preserve Racial Integrity, if this happened in Virginia,

it would legally make the colonel a black man. It would sever his links with whites he'd lived his life among and assign him to the African American community. And this is just what happens in the story, deep in the stormy night: By its end, in the colonel's delusions, he envisions other blacks enticing him to join them. One is Zacharia, his blood donor and soon to be executed. This becomes the colonel's most powerful vision:

> His insane eyes set in a bearded skull conjured up strange figures when the lightning flashed. Each tree assumed a definite personality. That broken limb dangling from the tree just beyond the fence was Zacharia, and as it gyrated wildly in the mad night, it seemed to whisper to the wind, "He is my brother, my brother, my brother," while the wind broadcasted the whisper through the night. And then that tallest tree so close to the house was himself, a black reproduction of himself with savage sap surging though its veins. It too reveled in the wildness of the night; it too exulted in being pelted by the wind-driven rain drops and in responding to the rough rhythm of the thunder-god's tom-tom. (301)

The vision depicts results of the transformation he was experiencing. Zacharia, who donated blood to save him, is no longer an anonymous black man to be killed out of racial vengeance but becomes the colonel's "blood brother." This realization of the possibility of brotherhood with him leads the colonel to envision himself as a black man as well. He then experiences an epiphanic moment of insight into black men's existential dread as Jim Crow grew more dominant after the First World War, along with a possibility of solidarity with the plight of African Americans in the South.

However, Colonel Summers's experience does not really lead to an awakening of his humanitarian spirit in solidarity with the man about to be murdered due to the calculating whims of the law. He does nothing to save that unjustly convicted man, indifferent to the fact that Zacharia's blood had restored his own health. Neither does a newly awakened sense of affinity with African Americans lead the colonel to redefine his basis for communal belonging. Rather than challenging the Jim Crow notion of a racial community in favor of solidarity with racial others, after which the grounds for a new postracial identification might be accepted, he simply believes that he must exchange one racial community for another against his will. The description of his body "responding to the rhythm of the thunder-god's tom-tom" is the affirmation of his imagining being plunged into that community due to his blood-related ancestry, perceived in a highly stereotypical, exoticized way. The fact that Zacharia's act of donating the blood the colonel needed was after all an act of altruism and humanitarianism—even if he was paid for it, which was hospital practice throughout the 1920s (George 81)—could set the stage for a new type of culture of brotherhood does not enter the racist colonel's mind. And thus the possibility of transfusions becoming emblematic of new communities grounded in solidarity and

friendship remains just a possibility. The chance has been ruined by decades of the discourse of white supremacy and the brainwashing it instills. It is killed along with Zacharia, who, despite his low station in life, proves much better equipped to redefine his communal identity.

These two men, apparently totally different at the surface and in their depths, had been brought together by hospital staff, who had questioned Zacharia about donating blood for their urgent needs. The staff's decision to ask Zacharia, however, was neither neutral nor happenstance. It was grounded in a desire for a sort of mocking vengeance. "Placed in an embarrassing dilemma, for there was no professional blood donor available, and no volunteers, forthcoming either from the village center or the outlying plantations," the staff "remembered that the Colonel had most insultingly refrained from ever donating to their building or upkeep fund" (165) and decided to play an irreversible, medically harmless prank on the cranky old man. They know the transfusion into the colonel of the blood of Zacharia, poor and black, breaches the former's staunchest principles of social and racial purity. Could any vengeance be sweeter than seeing the white man saved by someone he considers his enemy? The laughter at the colonel's expense is absolute. He didn't even need to be let in on the joke.

Noting the precision and implications of the vengeance exacted on the colonel, however, the question about the staff's attitude about transfusions between races looms large in the short story, yet is never answered and thus continues unsettling the reader. Were the doctors neutral about transfusions between white patients and black donors? What was the actual nature of this hospital prank? Was it played just on the colonel because he was known to navigate by the compass of racial purity and racial supremacy, or was it related to superstitious beliefs about transfusions among the staff, as well? In other words, were the staff's beliefs and prejudices part of the prank as well? "Grist in the Mill" invites us to look deeper into attitudes about mixing blood that the medical profession shared in the South in the 1920s and its resistance to interracial blood transfusions.

Zacharia v. Colonel Summers: Two Ways of Thinking about Blood and Race

The differing positions of Zacharia and the colonel on possibilities of recasting communal belonging on the basis of brotherhood and solidarity, rather than along "bloodlines," are grounded in their disparate perspectives on purity. If the colonel is immersed in the discourse of purity, Zacharia, despite being the unfortunate recipient of its practical manifestations in Louisiana, is indifferent toward it. The former's fear of social contamination is grounded in the patrician tradition of blood purity preached by the southern aristocracy, and it translates into his contempt for those deemed his social inferiors: "black men, poor whites and those that are proponents

of a new, modern South." "An anachronistic relic from pre-civil war days," the colonel takes pride in that fact that "[e]ven his aristocratic blood had escaped being diluted by poor white corpuscles making him indeed a phenomenal person among the decadent first families of the decadent south" (294). Arrogant about his pure-blood origins, he "shrank from contact with the modern world" and "could not abide the poor white or mongrel aristocrats who were his neighbors" (295). Avoiding social and biological contamination that could come about through interactions with poor whites as well as blacks becomes the colonel's obsession and life goal. His compass operates between the tacit, class-proclaimed poles of social and biological purity.

Zacharia's aspirations are much more practical and have nothing to do with the colonel's moral compass: He must hustle up the cash to get out of a little Louisiana town. "Born and schooled in Illinois," he has experienced a five-year stay in Mexico, avoiding the draft for the First World War, and has arrived in Louisiana on his way to cosmopolitan "Chicago's south side belt" (296). Born in the North, having traveled outside the United States, Zacharia is a man of the world, a working-class cosmopolitan used to diversity and difference. As the story notes, he is an outsider to southern ways and may not know some of its social codes. In the town, he mixes with both white and black communities, not belonging to either. "His fellow black men were somewhat suspicious of this smooth talking 'furriner,'" while with whites he has to play the game of "quiescent respect," adopting "a protective cloak of meekness" (296). Treating his stay as a stop on the way to Chicago, an outsider to local ways of racial purity, Zacharia has no problems with donating blood for the colonel's needs when approached on a Saturday morning as he washes the hospital's windows. If for the patient blood is a fundamental marker of identity grounded in obsessive fear of social contamination, for Zacharia it's just a bodily fluid lacking any abiding cultural significance.

Thus Zacharia, despite his station in life, is the face of modernity in "Grist in the Mill." His outlook on blood procedures is rational and ahead of the times, especially in the South. Though in the period and region the story presents, his rationally indifferent outlook on transfusion procedures was in conflict with the newly implemented science of racial serology, from a contemporary point of view Zacharia was responding with a directness that can be appreciated as fully scientific. Through him, Thurman's story offers an alternative to obsessions on the part of the colonel, and possibly the hospital staff, with racial blood purity.

Yet "Grist in the Mill" is ironic, if not pessimistic, about the realistic durability of such an alternative. As with gothic narratives written by former enslaved people and by women such as Frances Harper and Harriet Jacobs to "fight against subjugation" (Winter 141), Thurman's mocking narrative lays out a triumph that is "only partial and transient" (141). In the story, Zacharia will be hanged for a crime he did not commit and in

spite of his humanitarian deed in donating blood to save the colonel, a self-proclaimed adversary. His humanitarianism, powerless against the juggernaut of racial supremacy, is a gesture that fails to have any impact on the Louisiana town he happens to stop over in, heading north for a less rigid social realm.

The colonel, meanwhile, loses his grip on sanity, incapable of accepting the fact that he owes his restored health to blood donated by someone who happens to be black, remaining fixated instead on his and his milieu's racism and their adherence to a makeshift biological purity. The little Louisiana town, even given Zacharia's hanging and the colonel's descent into madness, not to mention the ill-resolved killing of its deputy sheriff, seems untouched by events. Its community, or its communities in their enforced separation, can persist in a willful logic of racial purity, essentialism and racial supremacy along with the trust that blood is "thicker than water."

To desegregate blood, minds had to be desegregated first. And during Wallace Thurman's lifetime, the committed majority of those minds still clung to cruel, profitable systemics and were not yet ready. Thurman would die of tuberculosis in 1934, two decades before blood-bank desegregation in the United States.

Notes

1 In 1930, Landsteiner was awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine for the discovery of blood groups as well as for his pioneering work in immunochemistry.
2 Ludwik Hirszfeld's work on blood and on Mendel's law of inheritance were of fundamental significance in the medical community in the period before the Second World War and were acknowledged as such by Landsteiner when he received the Nobel Prize in Medicine. In Ludwik and Hanna Hirszfeld's research, as with other serological scientists of Jewish lineage, including Felix Bernstein and Landsteiner, the motivation seems to have been a desire to move science forward, not racial prejudice (Boaz, 131–132). Yet interpretations of their findings laid the groundwork for racialized serology. Boaz, in *In Search of "Aryan Blood,"* points out that "From a modern perspective, it would certainly seem ironic that a racially unbiased physician [such as Hirszfeld], and particularly one who would have been sensitive to the realities of racial anti-Semitism, would be so eager to introduce a more effective means of racial identification" (142).
3 Van Notten argues that when in Thurman's "Autobiographical Statement" he reported two years as a premed student at the University of Utah (92), it was "no doubt composed with a future readership in mind" and not strictly true (87).

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2 Eugenic Sterilization in Toni Morrison's *Home*

Perpetrators and the Ethics of Engaged Witnessing

Ewa Barbara Luczak

During the scandal and outrage that broke out in 2011 over eugenic-based sterilizations performed on African American women in North Carolina till 1974, Elaine Riddick, one of the women, attempted to describe the procedure. In an interview, Riddick recalled:

> I went to the hospital to have my son and the next thing I knew I woke up and I had bandages on my stomach. Nobody ever told me what it was and up until maybe 2007 when I realized I had a cesarean and when they went into me they sterilized me at the same time.

She did not have much recollection of the hospital staff who performed the procedure. Hidden behind their generic labels of doctors and assistants, they merged into an imposing, depersonalized force far larger than a poor, black, terrified 14-year-old girl. Godlike and anonymous, they were wiped from Riddick's recollection, which captures what limited interaction she had with the staff as well as their probable indifference to her.

While thus minimizing their presence, Riddick also expressed a desire to erase them from her life though she could never forget the permanent damage to her body and the trauma related to it. She was seeking justice but had moved on with her life, and while she termed herself a victim, her position was hardly that of a beaten-down woman. A self-sufficient mother of the son born immediately before the sterilization, "an advocate for black women's reproductive rights" (Threadcraft, ix), articulate and proud, Elaine Riddick sought justice for herself and others, but not attention on the perpetrators.

Toni Morrison's novel *Home*, published in 2012, just two years after Riddick's testimony, embraces a woman's reversing the roles in the drama of medical abuse. Rather than focusing on the perpetrator, it turns into what Allen (building on Chandra's work) calls a "medicine narrative" and foregrounds the road to healing for Cee, its female protagonist. This dynamics was in accord with Morrison's writerly ethics in which she opposed the tendency to elevate evil along with "its theatricality, its costume, its blood

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spray [and] the emotional satisfaction that comes with its investigation" ("Goodness" 15), while "making sure acts of goodness […] produced language" ("Goodness" 18).

Yet the novel cannot resist the temptation to peer into the mind of the doctor who sterilized Ycindra (Cee's given name) and thus to reconstruct what Wilson, while analyzing eugenic sterilizations in Canada, called "the eugenic mind," i.e., "the nature of eugenic thinking, past and present" (Wilson 24). Moreover, it challenges us to look into the eugenic environment and examine those who, as bystanders to atrocities, made eugenic sterilizations possible. Morrison, by doing this, forces us to reflect on the nature of eugenic evil, with its implications to racism and its enmeshment in ideologies of utilitarianism, patricianism and white supremacy. Most significantly, though, we are challenged to consider if opposing the medical eugenic mind was feasible then, and are brought face to face with the ethics of engaged witnessing.

The plot of *Home* revolves around two African American siblings at the moment of their return home in the South in the 1950s. A decade earlier, the orphaned brother and sister, having grown up in the racist and emotionally as well as socially constricting environment of a small Georgia town, had explored possible avenues of escape. Frank ran away to the army, whereas Ycidra, or Cee, having been abandoned by her cunning lover, took a live-in assistant position with a white gynecologist in an Atlanta suburb. Both their escapes, however, led to disaster. Frank returns with his psyche ravished, haunted by memories of friends killed in the Korean War. Cee is made victim of the doctor's experiments—it is only thanks to her brother's timely return that her life is saved. Due to the doctor's gynecological experiments, which the novel never reveals the full nature of, Cee is rendered sterile, invoking the fates of uncounted young women in the United States, poor and black, sterilized by white doctors on eugenic grounds in the postwar period—years after eugenics had been discredited in Europe as a Nazi German science.

As Allen and Gerald have demonstrated in their penetrating readings of *Home*, the novel's historiographic ambition is explicit: It encourages the reader to reconsider medical abuses of African American females extending back to the era of slavery. Moreover, it insists on linking biopolitics of white supremacy, objectification of the enslaved black female body and eugenic postwar sterilizations of black women especially in the South. Dr. Beau, driven in the novel by the desire to experiment and to "see farther and farther into" the womb (113), invokes both Dr. J. Marion Sims (1813–83), the man behind the rise of modern American gynecology through the period of plantation slavery, and physicians in 1950s America keen to sterilize black women they considered genetically inferior (or "feebleminded") and a threat to the nation's genetic pool. While *Home* addresses the question of such gynecologists' roles in victimizing black bodies in the postwar years, it also sets its inquiry within a palimpsestic framework where narratives of

the recent past are superimposed on others with roots reaching to the times of plantation slavery.

The story of eugenic gynecological abuse from the postwar period, passed along orally in black communities and manifesting their suspicion of mainstream icons of the (largely) white reproductive-justice movement such as Margaret Sanger, became official and distressing news in 2010—the time Morrison was writing *Home*. That year, the University of North Carolina made public digitized records of some 7,600 sterilizations performed in the state between 1933 and 1973.[1] A huge number of the victims, especially after the 1950s, were African American women sterilized against their wills by state institutions after being diagnosed as "sexually indiscriminate and as bad mothers who were constrained by biology to give birth to defective children" (Washington 191).

Such thinking about poor blacks who bore children at an early age was in line with eugenic discourse. That discourse equated intelligence and morality with sexual abstinence and interpreted Mendelian laws of inheritance simplistically. Young mothers in impoverished communities who had children out of wedlock were believed to be of poor intelligence, incapable of ethical behavior and likely to produce undesirable offspring with low intelligence and base morality. Sterilization was taken to be an act of mercy for women incapable of controlling themselves or of fending for their children, as well as a sign of maturity on the doctors' part, who were taking responsibility for the nation's well-being upon themselves. Sterilization was also regarded as "an option for reducing welfare expenditure" (Threadcraft viii) with such advocates of eugenic sterilizations as Harry Laughlin and Paul Popenoe going out of their way to establish links between reproduction among the "unfit" and "feebleminded" and social welfare. This rhetoric gained momentum in the 1960s, positing a connection between sterilizing African Americans and social welfare, as a response to increasing welfare assistance for African Americans particularly in the southern states, with its advocates holding the economic factor to be decisive in sterilization decisions. They argued that legislation such as the Social Security Act of 1935 exacerbated the need "to control the quality of life which is to be made [through welfare] secure" (qtd. Schoen 91) and persisted in arguing "for intervention in order to prevent the West from being overrun by teeming hordes of welfare dependents" (Hansen 238).

The public was galvanized by testimonies of victims including Elaine Riddick, who had been sterilized unknowingly on the orders of the North Carolina Eugenics Board and after social workers coerced her grandmother to sign those orders, having threatened to stop her welfare benefits (Threadcraft vii–ix). The media frenzy along with legal action eventually resulted in $50,000 compensation payments by North Carolina to the women in 2012, the year *Home* was published.

Morrison's book was timely, given the media exposure and the climate of the public debate, but she was not the first African American writer to

have addressed the eugenic-sterilization issue. As early as the mid-1930s, Wallace Thurman coauthored the script for the feature film *Tomorrow's Children* (1934) (Luczak 2021). Thurman was a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance, inspired in the 1920s and 1930s by the journalist H. L. Mencken's rhetoric of Nietzschean individualism and the flowering of African American literary culture to project his voice in the midst of debates about the meanings of race and science. Thurman, building on expertise from his premed studies at the University of Utah and opposing the eugenics science being manifested by black intellectuals including George Schuyler, had a marked distrust for the science of better breeding. *Tomorrow's Children* challenges the practice of eugenic sterilization, arguing that errors are possible when deciding who should submit to the procedure. *Tomorrow's Children* does not question the sterilization premise on purely humanitarian grounds—that no one should ever objectify the life of another person—and does not argue that social engineering is ethically dubious, however "scientific" its basis purports to be. But it was the only film production of the period to protest against a practice that had grown so widespread in California that it helped spur German doctors and lawmakers working on the infamous 1933 Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Disease (Kuhl 37, Whitman 8–9).

Thurman's filmscript was prompted by a desire to oppose the practice of eugenic sterilization practice in his day. Morrison's novel, written decades later after unethical medical practices, is executed with a different purpose. *Home* can be read as a response to headlines about gynecological professionals' abuse of African American women, from an impulse to popularize knowledge and sustain memory of events that might easily have remained suppressed or been forgotten. Driven by the aspiration to rewrite the mainstream narrative of US medical science, opposing its tendency of entextualization by which medical progress is dehistoricized, *Home* also performs a significant intervention into medical history and into the mythology behind it. The novel is thus part of what Morrison termed the "different history" of black women (Threadcraft 6). Different history, identified by Threadcraft as "the forms of the use and control to which the black female body had been subject" (Threadcraft 6), again found articulation in Morrison's fiction. In addition, *Home* reiterates what black feminist activists were noting as early as the 1970s: That there is "a direct connection between sterilization abuse and coerced reproduction and enforced child neglect in the period of enslavement" (Threadcraft 5).

However, while *Home* participates in the campaign against historical erasure through rewriting US history and calling for restorative justice, the novel also addresses another problem bound up in compositional choices Morrison had to make. Specifically: How can that revisionist project be carried out in such a way that the historical narrative's flow is directed away from the perpetrators and toward the victims? How to unearth silenced stories and simultaneously give voice to the survivors? And furthermore, when

structuring the novel along the lines of resistance, how to inject the presence of a perpetrator into the story, making historical reality experiential and vivid yet not allowing evil to commandeer the story?

In *The Eugenic Mind*, Robert A. Wilson proposed the prism of standpoint eugenics to address abuses rendered by eugenics from the viewpoint of its victims. Wilson believed that by applying the standpoint theory, stressing the optical and epistemological perspective of those who were abused or marginalized, a new type of historical perspective emerges. The stories of those who were victimized should provide the framework for our reflections on eugenics' history. Standpoint eugenics "shifts discursive authority to those who have been targeted by eugenic logic and edged out of sites of knowledge production" (Wilson 226), thus acting as a corrective to the drama from the past, even if only on the epistemological and narrative levels.

Home seems to align with standpoint eugenics, employing epistemological perspectives of eugenic victims and giving their voice greater weight in unearthing the medical profession's abusive practices. As critics, including Allen, Gerald and Visser, point out, by focusing on Cee's healing, emphasizing the community's role and the ethics of care while shifting from biomedication toward biosocialization, the novel creates a powerful, empowering alternative to a narrative woven around a victim's helplessness. In this way Morrison extends a broader narrative of distrusting professional medical care and favoring traditional healing notable in her earlier books, including *The Bluest Eye, Beloved* and *Paradise* and taken up by African American and ethnic female women writing through the 1970s and the 1980 including Toni Cade Bambara, Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor and Leslie Marmon Silko (Stanford).

Yet while exploring historical abuses of the bodies of victims it is very hard to skirt the question of the perpetrator. Despite Wilson's insistence on the value of standpoint eugenics, the philosopher also raises the issues of perpetrators and of bystanders. After all, victims of eugenic sterilizations were abused by concrete individuals; inquiry into the workings of those individuals' minds may provide a cautionary tale with the potential to help in correcting the present and in preventing similar atrocities from recurring. Indeed, abusive systems have always had faces of concrete people, though to the victims it may seem that they were traumatized by a dehumanized, anonymous machine, as in Kafka's *The Trial*. The victims' experience is doubly embodied: In their bodies and through the bodies of perpetrators. And thus, in Wilson's attempt to understand how eugenic sterilizations were possible on such a costly scale and for such a long period, he draws attention to the necessity of looking at the triad of victim, perpetrator and bystander.

Home, in a similar, though limited, manner, and never losing sight of the victim's survival being at the heart of the story, draws attention to eugenics' perpetrators and to bystanders as well. Brushing in broad strokes with reticence and resentment, the novel creates a silhouette of the doctor,

who, instead of serving his patient, abuses the woman and renders her sterile. In addition, it introduces three characters who initially are bystanders. These women have the potential to bear witness to the doctor's shameless experiments, and stand in for the problem of bystanders whose positions, when activated, might be decisive in the drama and might influence the aftermaths of gynecological abuses and eugenics-based sterilizations. Morrison, in her tenth novel, proposes the ethics of engaged female witnessing as a buffer and a counter to the discourse of white, male scientific expertise that has claimed authority and absolute control over bodies of black women.

From Doctor to Perpetrator

In *Home*, the doctor responsible for Cee's sterilization maintains his practice in an affluent, whites-only Atlanta suburb. Approaching his house, hobbling along on her "new white high-heeled shoes," "her feet chafing" without stockings she could not afford, Cee is deeply impressed by "this beautiful, quiet neighborhood" (59). Reaching her destination, she sees "a large two-story house rising above a church-neat lawn. A sign with a name, part of which she could not pronounce, identified her future employer" (58). Associating the lawn with church along with Cee's inability to read the doctor's full name captures her awe at the majesty and unknowability of the place she is now in. She appears to be entering a church of the modern age where metaphysical beliefs and ethics have been replaced by rules developed by a new science: Eugenics. Lurking in this scene of Cee's arrival at the house of Dr. Beauregard (or Beau) Scott are both the proclamation that eugenics should become a new religion, as asserted by Francis Galton, its founding father (Galton 68–70), and the conviction that it had its own decalogue, evident in the title of one of its key treatises by Albert Edward Wiggam, *The New Decalogue of Science*.

It turns out that Cee is not the first assistant to Dr. Beau (as everyone refers to him, clipping the effect of his pompous, unpronounceable name). As the cook and maid Sarah informs her, others have worked for him, with one assistant fired after "they argued about something and Dr. Beau said he wouldn't have fellow travellers in his house" (62). When Sarah, who is also black, hastens to add that Dr. Beau, who tolerates no opposition to his views, "is a heavyweight Confederate" (62), the reader gets a glimpse of a despotic Rebel clinging to the obsolete ways of white plantation supremacy.

The girl's room confirms the reader's premonition about her host, the type of the house she has entered, and her future in it:

> Downstairs was just a few feet below from the front porch—more of a shallow extension of the house rather than a proper basement. Down a hall not far from the doctor's office was Cee's room, spotless, narrow,

> and without windows. Beyond it was a locked door leading to what Sarah said was a bomb shelter, fully stocked. She had placed Cee's shopping bag on the floor. Two nicely starched uniforms saluted from the hangers on the wall.
>
> "Wait till tomorrow to put one on," said Sarah, adjusting the pristine collar on her handiwork. (62–63)

Cee's spotless, windowless room is more of a cage, and its oppressive quality sets the tone for this modern-nightmare version of the Hansel and Gretel fairytale, a motif explored in Visser's essay with connection to Morrison's novel. Starched uniforms saluting from hangers signify both the sterility of the place and its combative nature, thus setting an additional framework for Cee's coming forced sterilization, executed in the name of medicine and as the duty of preserving white supremacy.

> Cee's first encounter with Dr. Beau is brief, impersonal:
>
> The next morning, standing before her employer, Cee found him formal but welcoming. A small man with lots of silver hair, Dr. Beau sat stiffly behind a wide, neat desk. The first question he put to her was whether she had children or had been with a man. Cee told him she had been married for a spell, but had not gotten pregnant. He seemed pleased to hear that. Her duties, he said, were primarily cleaning instruments and equipment, tidying and keeping a schedule of patients' names, time of appointments and so on. He did his own billing in his office, which was separate from the examination/laboratory room.
>
> "Be here promptly at ten in the morning," he said, "and be prepared to work late if the situation calls for it. Also, be prepared for the reality of medicine: sometimes blood, sometimes pain. You will have to be steady and calm. Always. If you can you'll do just fine. Can you do that?" (63–64)

The conversation is as sterile and cold as the basement to which Cee has been assigned. In his interactions with her, Dr. Beau has nothing of the legendary southern hospitality or kindness; he is direct and rude, asking Cee without ado questions about her intimate life. Ordering her about, he reduces her to an automaton, faithfully following his orders, blindly accepting his decrees. Cee's immersion in the modern-day shrine of eugenic science is complete, with Dr. Beau in the role of its priest.

That he is involved in eugenics we learn from titles of books set on his office shelves. Of three authentic titles the narrator mentions, *The Passing of the Great Race* by Madison Grant is one example of eugenics dogma as developed early in the twentieth century. Grant, by surveying the distribution and historical migration patterns of what were believed to be various races across the globe, argued that the Nordic race was

threatened by expansions among other, primitive races. This tendency, he conceded, was visible in new migration to the United States, with "dwarfed" Jews (Grant 47) populating New York City and in racial mixing that threatened the nation, all the result of naively applied theories of *liberté* and *fraternité*.

The other two books, *Heredity, Race and Society*, coauthored by L. C. Dunn and the Russian-American geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky, and *Out of the Night* by Henry Muller, represent a move away from the eugenics dogma of white racial supremacy and the rise of modern genetics in which race was perceived as fact. The titles testify to the scientific and ideological ferment within the genetics camp, in large part as a reaction to the new state of genetic knowledge and in opposition to "advocates of race and class prejudice, defenders of vested interests of church and state, Fascists, Hitlerites and reactionaries generally" (Muller 11). Dobzhansky, in fact, was unable to resolve tensions around race in his own work (Gannet) but would sign "The Race Question," a 1950 UNESCO document prepared in order to address the issue of race after the implementation in Nazi Germany of eugenic racial-purity laws, which later influenced the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Muller, on the other hand, was among those who drew up "The Geneticists' Manifesto" in 1939, which defended human genetic rights.

The presence of their books in Dr. Beau's office indicates his familiarity with leading developments in the field of genetics, and of stubborn persistence in the southern ways of white supremacy fueled by early eugenics, already soundly discredited in Europe. His reaction to unexpected appearance of Frank, coming to his house to claim his unconscious sister, depicts the scale of Dr. Beau's prejudice and racist stereotyping:

> The doctor raised the gun and pointed at what in his fear ought to have been flaring nostrils, foaming lips, and red-rimmed eyes of a savage. Instead he saw the quiet, even serene, face of a man not to be fooled with. (111)

The portrait of the gynecologist that emerges from the narrative is both disturbing and evocative of the canon of southern supremacist literature. It is that of a throwback Confederate zealot, lobotomized by eugenics and blinded by racism; a monster capable of carrying out experiments on innocent girls and lacking any self- awareness of the monstrous ramifications of his actions. His surprise and shock at Frank coming to claim his sister, nearly dead, and the lack of remorse and a feeling of relief that there has been "No theft. No violence. No harm. Just the kidnapping of an employee he could easily replace" (135), only confirm a portrait the conventionality of which may exacerbate his assessment's chilling effect.

This portrait, though amplified by imagery associated with his house and Cee's lodgings, is incongruous with Cee's view of the man, however. The

discrepancy between the narrator's grim knowledge and Cee's gullibility is sufficiently significant and intriguing to quote it at length:

> Her admiration for the doctor grew even more when she noticed how many more poor people—women and girls, especially—he helped. Far more than the well-to-do ones from the neighborhood or from Atlanta proper. He was extremely careful with his patients, finicky about observing their privacy, except when he invited another doctor to join him working on a patient. When all of this dedicated help didn't help and a patient got much worse he sent her to a charity hospital in the city. When one or two died in spite of his care, he donated money for funeral expenses. Cee loved her work: the beautiful house, the kind doctor, and the wages—never skipped. (64–65)

The innocent-eye technique that Morrison deploys underlies a chasm between the doctor's public image, his medical ethics and his real pseudoscientific self. Cee trusts Dr. Beau, convinced that he follows the Hippocratic Oath and serves patients knowing their lives and health are at stake. Thus all portents of him violating medical-ethics codes are, in her eyes, manifestations of Dr. Beau's dedication to his patients. What Cee takes as genuine in fact indicates the risky quality of his medical services: That only poor patients come to see him could suggest that those with money do not trust him, while the emphasis on patients who are girls may imply his poor reputation among women and a potentially illicit interest in maturing anatomy. Referencing girls required to seek care in a charity hospital or even dying after his procedures explicitly communicates that the doctor's practice is not that of healing.

Cee's interior monologue demonstrates that despite all the signals to the contrary she cannot see Dr. Beau for who he is. Her trust in the medical profession and admiration for the doctor's knowledge and expertise remain unassailable. Browsing in his eugenics books and not understanding their language, she wonders, "How small, how useless was her schooling" (64) and "promis[es] herself she would find time to read about and understand 'eugenics'" (65). This is one of the most ironic moments in the narrative and speaks to the power that scientific positivism can hold over our minds and perceptions. Cee naively believes that scholarly and scientific knowledge is inherently ethical, and she is not prepared to question a doctor's intentions or actions.

The question overshadowing Cee's story is how it is possible for a doctor to engage in unethical acts and even cruelty. How can a man living a peaceful life in the Atlanta suburbs, with his loving wife and the experience of tragedy in his own family (their two daughters live institutionalized with encephalitis), experiment on girls and abuse their trust and innocence? Frank's rhetorical questions—"Who would do that to a young girl? And a doctor? What the hell for?" (130)—loom large in the narrative.

A possible clue may be derived from the studies of the mindset of Nazi perpetrators, including Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. While watching Eichmann's trial, Arendt was disturbed by how ordinary the high-ranking functionary was in his speech and behavior, which led her to the well-known formulation of the "banality of evil." However, Arendt took note of something else as well. Eichmann was not a nihilist but a man of principles who called himself an idealist. His idealism led him to issue murder decrees in cold blood while admiring Jewish leaders as they negotiated to try and save some of their people (40).[2]

To Eichmann, "idealism" is conceived in a twofold manner. On one hand, it is a blind, unthinking adherence to authority, accepted in the belief that group rights override the rights of an individual. Hence Eichmann's unsettling confession that he would sacrifice his own father if ordered to do so. On the other hand, idealism to Eichmann denotes wholehearted adherence to eugenic principles of utilitarianism and social Darwinism. An individual is just a carrier of racial genetic material, and his or her life is significant insofar as that material is preserved. If the material is found to be faulty, one's life loses its justification and can be easily sacrificed in the name of an ideal of a perfect nation.

And there is another aspect of Eichmann's idealism discerned by Arendt. This is his intellectual laziness, rigidity and an inability or a lack of initiative to think independently and critically. According to Arendt, a philosopher who most valued critical thinking, Eichmann's speech revealed his intellectual banality. Arendt notes that "as long as he was capable of finding, either in his memory or on the spur of the moment, an elating stock phrase to go with them, he was quite content, without ever becoming aware of anything like 'inconsistencies'" (53). Cliché and a big vocabulary were Eichmann's last refuge in times of trying ethical choices. They served as fog that occluded the real nature of his deeds. Armed with them, he just didn't see well.

Even though we do not hear Dr. Beau say much, we can still suggest the thesis that his ill-conceived idealism, much like Eichmann's, had turned him into a monster. The same trust in the value of the construction of a biologically improved, pure race seems to propel the doctor. His mental rigidity is suggested by his dislike of laughter. His maid Sarah hushes Cee when she breaks into happy laughter at having been accepted as Dr. Beau's assistant. "Don't laugh so loud," Sarah urges. "It's frowned upon here" (63). Laughter can distance us from our environment, ourselves and the ideas we cherish (Morreall 112–124) and therefore train us in critical thinking. As such it is dangerous, as it can overturn rigid, frequently inhuman mental structures.

Attempting to understand the eugenics mindset of Dr. Beau, one could also take another tack. The man could have also lost himself in the misconceived ideal of the researcher, and his love for research might have taken over and become an aim in itself, shorn of any ethical objective. This is suggested by Dr. Beau's wife, who, in conversation with Cee, admits: "I

don't really understand my husband's work—or care to. He is more than a doctor; he is a scientist and conducts very important experiments. His inventions help people. He's no Dr. Frankenstein" (60). Dr. Beau's research is opaque to those in his environment, and a suspicious aura of mystery hovers around it. The locked door to what is believed to be a bomb shelter stacked with food, an extension of Cee's little windowless bedroom, suggests that something sinister may be happening behind closed doors. It may be an operating room for supposedly scientific experiments whose nature no one knows or may want to know.

Dr. Beau's ambition to be a scientist and researcher regardless, rather than "just" a gynecologist, necessarily evokes Dr. Marion J. Sims and his gynecological experiments in the mid-nineteenth century, mentioned above. The connection is suggested by the narrator's remark that Dr. Beau "got so interested in wombs in general, constructing instruments to see farther and farther into them" (113). The explicit allusion is to Dr. Sims's invention of the speculum, a crucial instrument for gynecological examination, which Sims was perfecting throughout his career.

Sims entered medical history as a pioneer of modern gynecology. Working as a gynecologist in Alabama from 1845 to 1849, he performed medical experiments on enslaved women in an attempt to find a "reliable procedure for the cure of vesico-vaginal fistula, a communication between bladder and vagina which permitted the uncontrolable escape of urine from the former into the latter rather than into the urethra" (Savitt, 295, Owens 38-40). In the direction Sims took while developing the new medical procedure as well as in his medical work ethics, he built on experiments by John Peter Mettauer, a physician in Prince Edward County, Virginia. Mettauer had performed a similar operation in the 1830s, and one especially brutal case was that of a 20-year-old woman who was a bondswoman. As Savitt points out, "[t]he woman suffered through at least ten unsuccessful surgical attempts by Mettauer to correct her condition" (297). Sims, like Mettauer before him, would practice on numerous enslaved women over the four-year period before he established his procedure. In his 1884 autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, he reports without shame or regret that he performed 30 surgeries on one slave woman, Anarcha. Only 18 when first brought to Sims, Anarcha had to endure this constant chain of painful surgeries.

Sims, while detailing what he believed was the story of his success resulting in the final closure of the fistula with a silver suture, bypasses (with but a single exception) the degree of suffering he inflicted on enslaved women utilized as the subjects of his experiments:

> Besides these three cases, I got three or four more to experiment on, and there was never a time that I could not, at any day, have had a subject for operation. This went on, not for one year, but for two and three, and even four years. I kept all these negroes at my own expense all the time. As a matter of course this was an enormous tax for a

> young doctor in country practice. When I began the experiments, the other doctors in the city were all willing to help me, and all seemed anxious to witness the operations. But, at last, two or three years of constant failures, and fruitless effort rather made my friends tired, and it was with difficulty that I could get any doctor to help me. But, notwithstanding the repeated failures, I had succeeded in inspiring my patients with confidence that they would be cured eventually. They would not have felt that confidence if I had not felt confident too; and at least I performed operations only with the assistance of patients themselves. (15)

Sims, oblivious to ethical issues at work in face of such prolonged experiments when a slave's "agony was extreme" (13), and performing surgeries without anesthesia, most likely using opium to dull the women's minds and leave them accommodating (43),[3] ends his account of the four years of experimentation with self-congratulatory phrasing filled with hyperbolic vocabulary and clichéd language: "I had made, perhaps, one of the most important discoveries of the age for the relief of the suffering humanity" (18).

And indeed, Sims has come to be known as the father of modern gynecology, with honors showered on him both during his lifetime and long after his death. In his obituary in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1883, Sims was mourned as the man who "by his genius and devotion to medical science and art [...] advanced it [gynecology] in its resources to relieve human suffering as much, if not more, than any man who has lived within this century" (41, qtd. Scully). When the artist Robert Thom was approached to paint his series *Great Moments in Medicine* after the Second World War, Sims was one of the physician he chose. The image of Sims, in the operating theater, leaning over the enslaved woman Betsey, was popularized nationwide in calendars, popular magazines and "educational" brochures. In 1934, a sculpture of Sims was set on a Central Park pedestal in New York City—among the most iconic of public spaces.

When controversy over Sims's practice broke out in the late 1970s, it was hushed with the adage that he "was the product of his times: insensitive and ingenious, difficult and dedicated, a physician whose medical accomplishments have borne up well in the test of time" (47, qtd. Scully). The fact that Sims through his experiments paved the way for the development of modern gynecological surgery absolved him in the eyes of many professionals, allowed for the generous dismissal of his experiments' cruelty, deeming that to be justified by his times.

It was not till the 2010s, at the time of Morrison's work on *Home*, that a different assessment came to prevail of Sims's role in the drama of surgical experimentation and abuse of the female-slave body. According to the timeline published by the East Harlem Preservation website, awareness

of Sims's criminal practices became widespread in 2010. From that time, residents of New York City embarked on a seven-year campaign to have Sims's statue removed from Central Park. Protestors, building on groundbreaking research by historians including Harriet A. Washington (her *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* was published in 2007), brought Sims's abuses to public attention. Had it not been for those protests, however, few would have known the human cost that led to Sims's speculum and to the success of the man widely celebrated by the medical profession. His statue was removed from Central Park, though the decision was criticized by some in the gynecological establishment. Three of his defenders, arguing in 2018 that they'd come to disinter "J. Marion Sims, not to praise him; not with emotion, but with facts," thus suggesting that the controversy around Sims was based on emotions and ignorance (as if quoting Shakespeare is indispensable to one's ethical clarity of vision), and decided to defend "Sims' stellar reputation […] brushed and airbrushed from its rightful place in medical history, not by examination of the facts, but by using the racist slur for apparent political gain" (Petros).

If Sims has helped orient us toward mid-nineteenth-century norms of objectifying the black female body, those same ideas continued surfacing in the early twentieth century around issues of sterilizations. Then the language used was that of misconceived eugenic idealism. A good exemplification of this ongoing tendency is a speech by Dr. Theodore Russell Robie, "Selective Sterilization for Race Culture," to the Third International Congress of Eugenics, held in 1932 at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, some five decades after Sims published his autobiography. Robie was a top psychiatrist at the Essex County Mental Hygiene Clinic and fervently supported eugenic sterilizations in New Jersey. In his speech, Robie provided assurances of the urgent need for them, using the argument of the hereditary nature of feeblemindedness and expressing concern for the condition of the American family. Having remarked that "the need for selectively sterilizing the entire group of hereditary mental defectives will be readily conceded by all students of race culture," Robie conceded that "it would also be conducive to racial improvement to sterilize even these feeble minded who do not necessarily fall into the hereditarian group." This was in keeping with his conviction that

> able parenthood is the most important profession on earth, requiring a store of knowledge which is possessed by few parents of even average intelligence, and certainly we can never expect feeble minded persons to acquire sufficient knowledge to carry out child rearing properly. (202)

Robie was another zealot to the core; his ideological musings could provide a backdrop to Dr. Beau in *Home* carrying out his "work." Cee's sterilization

could be readily justified by Robie's logic: Uneducated, poor, shy and inarticulate, the girl could simply have been diagnosed as feebleminded. After all, reliance on IQ tests, on the basis of which feeblemindedness was pronounced, had been called into question by Judge Sylvain J. Lazarus, presiding over the 1936 eugenic-sterilization case of Ann Cooper Hewitt. Having taken the IQ test and scoring at the level of a fourth grader, Judge Lazarus then called the test "too silly words" (qtd. Luczak 2021, 124.)

Though *Home* makes it difficult to reconstruct the full portrait of the medical perpetrator due to the author's insistence on prioritizing the victims, it sets the reader on the path to the uncomfortable discovery of the legacy of American gynecology and reproductive policies. The history of biopolitics and reproductive rights is charted by the likes of Dr. Sims and Dr. Robie, who claimed the right to objectify and decide the fate of the black female body in the name of humanity and of the American family's well-being. As Dr. Sims and Dr. Robie had been, in the novel Dr. Beau is confident in his patricianism and scientific expertise and, undeterred, plays out his dark imaginings. Callous, indifferent and cruel, while hidden behind a stern facade of politeness and respectability, he in fact does turn into Dr. Frankenstein, experimenting on an innocent, trusting girl trapped in the windowless basement of his imagination. His control over Cee is complete. Morrison does not shield us from having to realizing this fully, and we see Cee unconscious, bleeding profusely then saved at the last moment by her brother.

Yet Cee survives, in a gesture evocative of Morrison's other novels, which never strand a reader at the brink of despair but provide avenues of hope. Her survival would have been impossible without helpers, as her abuse would be unimaginable without the quiet acquiescence of bystanders. Morrison, aware of the triad of perpetrator, victim and those who remain only bystanders, encourages the reader to reflect on the bystander's position, one of the most challenging roles in the drama of biomedical abuse of the black body.

Bystanders: Letting Go of Innocence

The bystander, according to the *Cambridge Online Dictionary*, "is a person who is standing near and watching something that is happening but is not taking part in it." A bystander occupies a peculiar position: Of the one caught up in tragic events and supposedly not involved in them, thus apparently preserving her innocence (Barnett 10). In a far more fraught context, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in its online entry on the topic discusses subcategories of passive and of indifferent bystanding. For Wilson, who draws on Herman's study of trauma, bystanders can become instrumental in overcoming the effects of trauma from eugenic sterilizations. When catapulted later into the midst of a victim's story of atrocity, as with someone with proximity to that abuse at the time of its occurrence, a bystander who is then made witness to the victim's story cannot remain in neutral territory.

As Wilson quotes after Herman: "when the traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides" (Wilson 178).

Morrison's novel, building on standpoint eugenics, is far more generous in its portraits of bystanders than with that of the perpetrator. Those who are or become aware of Dr. Beau's gynecological experiments in his house and, possibly, of the practice of sterilization of his patients, as with those who later bear witness to Cee's story, are all older women. They function as bystanders—even displaying indifference to Cee's lot—and in roles of more active engagement witnesses. They are Mrs. Scott, the doctor's wife; her maid, Sarah; and Ethel Fordham, an older black woman who will later nurse Cee back to health. Frank, Cee's brother acts as her savior but is excluded from hearing the full account of Cee's story over the course of the novel and thus does not become a witness to her mental trauma.

Morrison, by choosing to prioritize women cast as bystanders or in the position of witnessing, injects a gender dynamic into her narrative about the medical world and seems to subscribe to the thesis developed by Scully in *Men Who Control Women's Health*. Scully drew attention to what to her mind became a dangerous turn toward male control of "female medicine" in the nineteenth century, a thesis that is evident in her book's title. Morrison, by prioritizing women in their roles in relation to Cee, also addresses the question of solidarity and mutual support among them under distressing circumstances; at critical moments, two of these women cannot just remain passive bystanders and have to decide to act or not. Mrs. Scott's decision not to intervene, however, is tantamount to being in league with the male perpetrator against the female body.

Mrs. Scott, the wife of Dr. Beau (or Beauregard Scott), is surely the most disturbing bystander in the novel. She had been the first to interview Cee for her job, with her approval seemingly a condition for Cee to meet Dr. Beau. Her tone and form in the interview are very much that of her husband: Brief, impersonal and rude. Cee receives no chance to answer any of her questions or enter into meaningful dialogue. The fact that the (white) woman has immediately objectivized the (black) girl might come as no surprise given her husband's rigid, quasi-Confederate ways. Her reference to her husband's work is even more problematic. Acknowledging that "I don't understand my husband's work—or care to" rings a note of disingenuousness and dishonesty. After all, his practice is situated in the basement of their house. She then adds that "He's no Dr. Frankenstein" (60), strongly intimating that she has some inkling of his medical experiments.

As Cee notes, Mrs. Scott's living room "seemed to her more beautiful than a movie theater. Cool air, plum-colored velvet furniture, filtered light through heavy lace curtains" (59). With Mrs. Scott presiding over the room like "the queen of something who belonged in the movies," with her "dress […] a kind of gown—floor length white silk with wide sleeves" (60), a

parallel is invoked with *The Great Gatsby*'s iconic scene in which the first image of Daisy, reclining on a sofa against white curtains, suggests wealth, theatricality and deceptive virtue. Like Daisy before her, Mrs. Scott (is the association with F. Scott Fitzgerald's middle name accidental?) maintains presumptive innocence in order to benefit her husband's stature. The appeal of financial security is so strong that she abandons any pretense of a sense of agency or ethics. If she has doubts as to the "work" her husband is conducting, she hides them from others and from herself, yet she pays dearly for this deception. Cee notices that she is a virtual recluse, never leaving the house, has "a tiny laudanum craving" (65) and spends days "painting flowers in watercolor and watching television shows" (65). Though she is reduced to the role of obedient wife by the man performing illicit experiments on poor blacks, she never questions the value system he subscribes to. She remains a staunch racist, her racism making her squeamish even about shows she watches; if she "flirted with *I Love Lucy*," she "hated Ricky Ricardo too much to watch" (65), likely due to his Cuban heritage.

Sarah, who takes care of the Scott household, comes across initially as the bystander who camouflages uncomfortable knowledge behind a facade of innocence. The description of her and of her surroundings, which metonymically portray the type of life she lives, sheds light on reasons behind her supposed naivete. Mrs. Scott's pretended, calculating innocence and her refusal to speak up, which make her the accomplice of her husband, are juxtaposed against Sarah's position. And Sarah is a dynamic character who grows over the novel's course. Narrative close-ups facilitate constructing a trajectory of Sarah's journey from passivity to involvement, from being a bystander to committing as a witness.

Upon Cee's arrival, in contrast to Mr. and Mrs. Scott, Sarah is all warmth and scintillating laughter. When Cee asks if she can take her high heels off her tortured feet, Sarah responds with a joke and suggests "a cold root beer" (58). Opening her kitchen and her social space in no time to the girl, the woman becomes Cee's "family, her friend, and her confidante" and "they shared every meal and sometimes the cooking" (65). As a passive bystander, she duly performs her servant and cook duties, keeping the household functioning. This apparent innocence about the doctor's experiments could read as aggravating: Though Sarah informs Cee that "Dr. Beau is a heavyweight Confederate," with a grandfather who remains "a certified hero who was killed in some famous battle up North" (62), she has not inquired into reasons that previous assistants quit, including the one who disagreed with the doctor on a matter of principles. Sarah has accepted the narrative of Dr. Beau's being "very gentlemanly" (61) and "inventing things" due to his desire "to help other folks" (63) out of his grief over his two sick, institutionalized daughters.

That Sarah might have had some premonition about Dr. Beau's experiments is signaled through the metaphor of cutting a melon. Interpreted by Allen as a metonymic foreshadowing of Dr. Beau's surgically "cutting" Cee,

the scene might also communicate Sarah's refusal to date to see what is happening in the basement:

> In the kitchen, Sarah removed three melons from a peck basket. She caressed one slowly, then another. "Males," she snorted.
>
> Cee lifted the third one […]. "Female," she laughed. "This one's a female." […]
>
> Sarah slid a long, sharp knife from a drawer and, with intense anticipation of pleasure to come, cut the girl into two. (67)

Sarah's initial blindness to what she is involved in, early in the novel, might be explained by her symbiosis with the Scott family. Working for them since she was 15, the woman now finds it hard to believe that the Scott couple hide horrifying secrets. Just like her biblical namesake, Sarah is the woman who doubts what she sees; unlike the case of Abraham's wife, her doubting then extends to the possibility of evil in her surroundings. Sarah's process of losing this supposed innocence, moving from the position of passive bystander to Cee's helper, is framed as the woman's struggle with mounting feelings of guilt and her imperative to take responsibility for the girl's life:

> Sarah stood for a moment watching the pair [Frank with Cee] disappear down the walkway. "Thank the Lord," she whispered, thinking that one more day would have surely been too late. She blamed herself almost as much as she blamed Dr. Beau. She knew he gave shots, had his patients drink medicine he made up himself, and occasionally performed abortions on society ladies. None of that bothered or alarmed her. What she didn't know was when he got so interested in wombs in general, constructing instruments to see farther and farther into them […]. But when she noticed Cee's loss of weight, her fatigue, and how long her periods were lasting, she became frightened enough to write the only relative Cee had an address for. Days passed. Sarah didn't know if her scary note had been received and was steeling herself to tell the doctor he had to call an ambulance when the brother knocked on the kitchen door. (113)

Sarah's possibly ambivalent position with respect to the doctor's abuse of earlier patients must invoke the case of Eunice Rivers, the nurse who assisted doctors by coordinating the infamous Tuskegee syphilis experiments (1932–72). The longest nontherapeutic experiment in the history of modern medicine examined the effects of syphilis on men who had contracted it, while withholding available treatments from them (first with Salvarsan and then with penicillin from 1943). Rivers was black, came from the Deep South and knew how to interact with African American men from rural areas. The nurse was the only person involved continuously over the decades of the experimental study. As investigators into the Tuskegee case including Jones speculate, it is plausible that without the support and trust that Nurse

Rivers had built in the Macon County community, where the experiment was conducted, a large number of black "subjects" may have pulled out of the study. Nurse Rivers, confident that the study served higher purpose, including to prove that black men suffer the same debilitating effects of syphilis as whites and thus race does not matter in medicine, and doubting if "the syphilitic subjects could have been helped by the treatment that was available when the study began" (Jones 7), didn't see the study as criminal or racist even after it had been exposed and was provoking irrevocable scandal. When interviewed by James Jones, author of the first systematic study of the Tuskegee case, Rivers "refused to believe that it had harmed her men" (Jones 219).

Rivers's ethical ambivalence fueled David Feldshuh's stage play with its telling title: *Miss Evers' Boys*. In an attempt to understand Rivers (on whom he based Miss Evers) knowing of and participating in the experiments long after it became obvious that penicillin could help the men and spare them the prolonged suffering of syphilis, Feldshuh focuses on the phenomenon of moral slippage. The nurse is depicted as moving down the slippery slope of pseudoscientific rationalizations and the logic of lesser evils. Miss Evers, initially a caring person driven by a wish to bring relief to sick men, over time becomes first a powerless rebel against therapeutic practice turning into nontherapeutic experimentation, and next its passive observer. Gradually, she turns into the doctors' helper, deluding herself about still bringing relief to the patients and refusing to see the study's enmeshment in racism. The soft logic of imperceptible moral slippage from passive bystander to accomplice is summed up in a self-revelatory monologue addressed to a black doctor, also involved in the experiment:

> That's when someone says, "See that hill right up there. You just got to walk to that hill." When you get to that hill, they say, "I didn't mean this one, I meant that one up there, farther along" […]. And then the next one and the next until you figure you've come so far, you might just as well go the rest of the way. (75)

Unlike Miss Evers from Feldshuh's play, Sarah balks at the hill she is asked to cross. Despite her initial noninvolvement, she takes a stand and turns into a whistleblower who "bring[s] these underground practices to light" (Allen 147). Having overcome false innocence and the fear of losing her job—the only one she has had since she was 15—Sarah sends Cee's brother the note urging him to come right away. Once she crosses the line separating self-delusions of innocence from knowledge, passivity from action, bystanding from helping, Sarah does not turn back. Upon Frank's appearance at the house, Dr. Beau wants to call the police. But "Sarah's hand remained pressed down on the telephone until the doctor descended the stairs to his office" (112). The last image of Sarah that Frank gets with his sister in his arms is

that of the maid "standing in the door, shadowed by the dogwood blossoms. She waved. Good-bye—to him and Cee or perhaps her job" (112).

Sarah is a good helper, who manages to reinstate some balance in Dr. Beau's household. She rewrites the story of female abuse, and, by changing from a bystander to a help-giver, she allows the reader to nurture a belief that evil is not, and never has been, absolute. After all, *Home* is the title of Morrison's novel, and the narrative seems driven by the writer's desire to restore balance in the American home rather than destroying it in a nihilistic or cynical display.

The restorative and didactic impulse behind Morrison's narrative is further strengthened through introducing the other bystander-turned-helper, Ethel Fordham. Ethel is a family woman who has seen a great deal and as a result has lost faith in the ways of whites—but not in God or in religious ethics. When Frank brings Cee to her house back in Lotus, Georgia, Ethel immediately takes care of the girl, restoring her to life. Upon hearing Cee's story, Ethel, along with other black women of Lotus called upon to heal the girl, vents her anger at the perpetrator—but does not provide Cee with the simplistic understanding that the girl might expect. The women of Lotus, trained by life experience to "love mean" due to their pervasive encounters with racism, so distrustful of white doctors that "nothing made them change their minds about the medical industry" (122), do not want to remain passive bystanders in Cee's story. They turn into spiritual and social guides teaching her how to get on with her life in the world of white medicine. By giving Cee lodgings, food, support and advice that has been denied her from childhood, they also inculcate her into the values of kindness and self-respect.

Teaching Cee that "you a person too," Ethel takes up the role of her "aunt" and redefines for her the meaning of family again, as Sarah had before. Rather than as the meaning is understood in biological terms, Cee's new family consists of women of good who provide love and support. Like exemplary mothers, Ethel and the others challenge her to reappraise her self-esteem, urge her to examine the road to victimization, show her how to gain self-respect and freedom:

> Don't let Lenore [her relative] or some trifling boyfriend and certainly no devil doctor decide who you are. That's slavery. Somewhere inside you is that free person I'm talking about. Locate her and let her do some good in the world. (126)

By creating the safe, caring circle of intimacy, where Cee can both heal and grow, Ethel becomes her family. Her caring and support displace the memory of the cruel step-grandmother Lenore, who had held the dark color of Cee's skin against the child, as well as her parents' low station in life. Morrison, once again in her fiction, redefines the notion of the black family, emphasizing the value of female structures in shaping a stable, reliable

environment in lieu of a dependable biological family. As she has done in *Sula, Song of Solomon, Beloved* and *Paradise*, the novelist foregrounds the role of powerful sturdy women and female ancestors whose roles in one's life she articulated so well in her essay "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation."

On from the End

Morrison instills matriarchy with the power to bring order and stability to the African American home, traumatized by racism, as well as to provide nourishing patterns of intimacy and social functioning. Cee emerges stronger than ever before and ready to move on with her life, as Elaine Riddick was. Frank undergoes transformation as well: Thankful for the care given to his sister by Ethel and other women of Lotus, and empowered by their support and strength, he manages to heal his psyche from the ravishments of the Korean War.

Morrison's positive appraisal of matriarchy and extended family is in sharp contrast with tendencies to pathologize the African American matriarchal family, blaming it for what is perceived as inherent poverty and crime. The Moynihan report of 1965 was drawn up for the Department of Labor with the intent of bringing federal support to African American communities, and functioned for many years as the bible of contemporary welfare programs addressing those communities. In fact, the report provided a highly reductive explanation of economic problems within the communities and perpetuated negative stereotypes of the African American family. Assistant Secretary of Labor Moynihan (later a US senator) insisted that the matriarchal system that had developed from the times of slavery acted as a negative constricting force in the postwar world. To his thinking, there was no doubt that "matriarchal structure […] because it is so out of line with the rest of American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole" (29).[4]

It is no great stretch to find affinities between Moynihan's argument and that made by advocates of eugenic sterilizations. In both, African American women were largely responsible for the "pathology" in their families; thus, their power should be contained along with "matriarchal structure." Though Moynihan would balk over social Darwinism with its belief in biological inferiority of the black race, and while he pressed for more steps in President Johnson's antipoverty campaign, his report did perpetuate the trope of a pathological black family, which had been a staple in eugenic treatises as well. Different ideological premises of the "pathologizing" argument called for different actions: If eugenicists urged the biological control of reproduction to curtail what they deemed irresponsible growth among "pathological" black families, Moynihan forwarded a social and cultural intervention within the structures of the black family. Despite differing ideological justification and differing methods of "healing," the two parties agreed on one

thing, in their respective eras: Black women responsible for "pathological" patterns of black intimacy needed to be controlled, saved by the benevolent interventions of white men. The narrative of Robinson Crusoe saving a female Friday from herself had to be reenacted again.[5]

Morrison challenges this belief in an inherent pathology of the black family, endorsing family structures based on filiation and also on affiliation, and opposing patriarchal norms and strictures, which has interesting ramifications in discussions about witnessing and trauma. It turns out that those who were bystanders to trauma and then take an active position as victims' helpers can form connections with a victim the strength of which resembles family bonds. Support provided to the victim at the time of her abuse, as Sarah provides in *Home*, or afterward at the time of the trauma's narration and healing, as is the case with Ethel in the novel, leads to the formation of empowering ties that can act as a corrective to older, faulty family patterns. If trauma renders it impossible to make a meaningful connection with the present (van Kolk 80–83), the process of survivors and witnesses working jointly through the formers' traumas can enable those survivors to form new affective connections with the present. In this new dynamics the witness becomes a nurturer, a confidante and a loyal supporter: All roles ideally developed in a family.

And thus witnessing in Morrison's novel is more than an encounter between victim and accidental passerby. It is a moment charged with gravity in which moral choices can bring a survivor into urgently needed relations of proximity. When the bystander is wrested from her neutrality into caring and action, she joins a larger communal family of witnesses in solidarity with the downtrodden they meet on their way. Morrison's novel speaks of the ethics of engaged witnessing in which everyone, in our positions as potential witnesses, should be prepared to take a stand. No one is spared the choice between turning one's back on a victim and extending a helping hand.

Morrison's ethics of engaged witnessing spill over the narrative structure, shaping the process of literary witnessing as well. Frank's account of his traumatic childhood in Lotus, his loss of close friends in the Korean War and his shameful secret of shooting a Korean child sex worker propositioning him are framed as part of an interview. Interspersed with more traditional third-person accounts of Cee's story, of her step-grandmother and of Frank's partner, these report-like vignettes preserve the oral quality of a journalistic inquiry. Sketchy, fragmented, replete with comments to the interviewer ("You can't imagine it because you were not there" (93), "Describe that if you know how" (41), "Don't paint me as some enthusiastic hero" [84]), these suggest a powerful witnessing presence for Frank and Cee's story. Though invisible, the witness is there and without her presence and sympathetic ear, the story would have never reached the light of day, and Frank would have never traversed a route from PTSD to moral salvation. The witness to Frank's trauma seems to be both the writer and the reader; Morrison draws us into the circle of engaged witnessing, where one

cannot remain indifferent or neutral. She brings home what we may rather forget: Trauma and abuse are all around, and we must open ourselves up to others, pursuing the ethics of engaged witnessing.

Home, as is becoming for a narrative that foregrounds the bystander's moral role in the triad of perpetrator, victim and potential witness, concludes with a scene that is also driven by the logic of witnessing. Frank takes Cee to the old burned-out shed where years earlier, hidden in the grass, they witnessed a black corpse being surreptitiously buried in an improvised grave. The siblings, then small children, were drawn to the shed by their admiration for beautiful horses grazing nearby and had no awareness of what they watched and yet were shocked by "the black foot with its creamy pink and mud-streaked sole being whacked into the grave" (4). They did not know that the man was killed by his son in a duel staged by racists, who to entertain themselves had kidnapped the men to pit one against the other. After Cee has healed, Frank manages to identify the buried man and decides to give him a proper burial. Evocative of Pilate burying her father's bones in *Song of Solomon*, this scene conjoins softness with beauty and fragility, none of which is easily associated with burial practices (145).

Inscribed on a crude board, the words "Here Stands a Man" will pay tribute to the deceased's dignity, that victim of white supremacy. The siblings fulfill their role of witnesses and bury the man with care, love and respect that had been denied him in the last moments of his life. However, though it is Frank who is behind the siblings' tribute and the words on the board speak of black manhood, the last words belong to Cee. "Come on, brother. Let's go home," (146) says the young woman saved from the evil doctor's clutches. And she moves on to testify with her life to the power of female solidaritarian witnessing.

Notes

1 A detailed analysis of the North Carolina's sterilization program can be found in Hansen, *Sterlized by the State*, 240–258.
2 As Arendt noted, in Eichmann's mind ,"An 'idealist' was a man who *lived* for his idea—hence he could not become a businessman—and who was prepared to sacrifice for this idea everything, and especially everybody. […] The perfect 'idealist,' like everybody else had of course his personal feelings and emotions, but he would never permit them to interfere with his actions if they came into conflict with his 'idea.' The greatest 'idealist' Eichmann ever encountered among the Jews was Dr. Rudolf Kastner, with whom he negotiated during the Jewish deportations from Hungary and with whom he came to an agreement that he, Eichmann, would permit the 'illegal' departure of a few thousand Jews to Palestine […] in exchange for 'quiet and order' in the camps from which hundreds of thousands were shipped to Auschwitz. The few thousand saved by an agreement, prominent Jews and members of the Zionist youth organizations, were, in Eichmann's words, 'the best biological material'" (40).
3 In the sociologist Diana Scully's book on the history of modern gynecology, which opened the field of inquiry in the early 1980s, she argued that Sims experi-

mented in his practice with opium while performing surgery (Diana Scully, *Men Who Control Women's Health: The Miseducation of Obstetrician Gynecologists*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980).

4 In the report's fourth chapter, with its revealing title "The Tangle of Pathology," Moynihan passionately argued: "There is no one Negro community. There is no one Negro problem. There is no one solution. Nonetheless, at the center of the tangle of pathology is the weakness of the family structure. Once or twice removed, it will be found to be the principle source of most of the aberrant, inadequate, or antisocial behavior that did not establish, but now serves to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and deprivation" (70) (Moynihan Report: *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Prepared for the Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor). While Moynihan claimed credentials to investigate African American families ("I grew up in Hell's Kitchen [in Manhattan]. My father was drunk. I know what this life is like"; qtd. in Daniel Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report and Its Legacy*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015, 13), his report provided a highly reductive explanation of economic problems within their communities.

5 In Morrison's discussion of the nomination to the Supreme Court of Clarence Thomas, a nomination rendered controversial in light of Anita Hill's charges against the nominee, she brought to light the longevity of a mytheme of the saving influence of a white man developed in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (Morrison 1992, xxiii–xxix).

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3 From the Prison of Slavery to the Slavery of Prison

Incarcerated Black Bodies in Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*

Constante González Groba

As Eduardo Mendieta says, "The history of power is also the history of space, the space within which that power was deployed and exercised" (49). Race and space have always been inseparable: Racist politics are based on racialized spaces, be they spaces of confinement and oppression of the racialized Other or spaces from which those Others are systematically excluded. As Ronald Sundstrom says, "Race is not just expressed spatially; but it is experienced and produced spatially" (90). He further remarks that "The production of racialized places, and the investment of them with social, cultural, political, and economic meaning is one of the social forces that forges racial common sense, the geography of American life, and ultimately racial categories as such" (90). Mendieta argues that the United States is one of the countries where it is most evident that its history is the history of its biological body, which is also a history of its racial geography and topographies: "For the history of the United States is above all a history of racial conflict, one that has left its imprint in the very geography of the nation and the urban cartography of its metropolises" (49). One of those racialized topographies Mendieta refers to is that of prison, and the mass incarceration of African Americans is a phenomenon genealogically linked to slavery.

Although whites initially accepted emancipation and later integration, even if only in principle, they fought hard to maintain the racial hierarchy and preserve racial privileges that kept African Americans socially and symbolically "in their place." The Black Codes instituted at the end of the Civil War ensured the availability of blacks as cheap labor after slavery and forced thousands of nominally free blacks into unpaid labor. Many provisions of the Black Codes were reestablished after Reconstruction in the form of the so-called "Jim Crow" laws. Under Jim Crow southern blacks were subjected to a legally enforced discrimination and segregation that dramatically divided schools, public places and public transportation into black and white. Loïc Wacquant notes how, between the Great Migration of 1914–30 and the 1960s, white elites in northern industrial metropolises first fled to the suburbs to avoid racial mixing with the blacks confined to the ghettos, then reduced

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the social programs of the welfare state and supported "law-and-order" policies aimed at repressing "urban disorders connately perceived as racial threats" ("From" 49). He further contends that "Such policies pointed to yet another special institution capable of confining and controlling if not the entire African-American community, at least its most disruptive, disreputable and dangerous members: the prison" ("From" 49).

In our present time of "wokeness," Black Lives Matter and a significantly increased awareness of white privilege and systemic racism, few disagree that the legacy of slavery is central to understanding the mass incarceration and excessive punishment of a disproportionate majority of blacks and other minorities. African Americans have been victims of confinement since the days of that prison beneath the sun that was chattel slavery, the infamous institution that Frederick Douglass termed as the "prison-house of slavery" (75). For W.E.B. Du Bois it is the racist society itself that imprisons, more or less relentlessly depending on the intensity of skin coloring:

> The shades of the prison-house closed round about us all: walls strait and stubborn to the whitest, but relentlessly narrow, tall, and unscalable to sons of night who must plod darkly on in resignation, or beat unavailing palms against the stone, or steadily, half hopelessly, watch the streak of blue above. (5)

In *Native Son*, Richard Wright describes America as

> a black sprawling prison full of tiny black cells in which people lived; each cell had its stone jar of water and a crust of bread and no one could go from cell to cell and there were screams and curses and yells of suffering and nobody heard them, for the walls were thick and darkness was everywhere. (334–35)

In his essay "Everybody's Protest Novel," James Baldwin refers to protest novels as "a mirror of our confusion, dishonesty, panic, trapped and immobilized in the sunlit prison of the American dream" (16). Malcolm X denounced that "our color became to us like a prison" (qtd. in Caster 21) and equated being black in America with living in prison: "Don't be shocked when I say that I was in prison. You're still in prison. That's what America means: prison" (qtd. in Green 2).[1] Much more recently, the black activist Al Sharpton said in a speech in Jena, Louisiana, on September 20, 2007:

> In the 20th century, we had to fight for where we sat on the bus. Now, we've got a fight on how we sit in a courtroom. We've gone from plantations to penitentiaries, where they have tried to create a criminal justice system that particularly targets our young black men. ("Rev. Al Sharpton")

For black Americans, prison has persistently been, not merely a metaphor for life in America, but a painful reality, and even today so many African Americans report being followed everywhere by the presumption of danger and criminality, as if their skin were deemed a dangerous weapon.

Frederick Douglass, in an address to the American Anti-Slavery Society of May 10, 1865, soon after the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment and only a month and a half after Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox, argued for the continuation of anti-slavery activism:

> Slavery has been fruitful in giving itself names, it has been called "the peculiar institution," "the social system," and the "impediment" [...] It has been called by a great many names, and it will call itself by yet another name; and you and I and all of us had better wait and see what a new form this old monster will assume, in what new skin this old snake will come forth next. (qtd. in Seibel 7)

Douglass could not have been more prescient, and the "old monster" did indeed mutate into new variants, the main one being significant racial disparities in incarceration rates. As Martin Luther King, Jr. would remark almost a century later, "The Emancipation Proclamation freed the slave, a legal entity, but it failed to free the Negro, a person" (qtd. in Blackmon 394). *In Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman describes emancipation as a "nonevent [...] insinuated by the perpetuation of the plantation system and the refiguration of subjection" (116). The Thirteenth Amendment, passed by Congress on January 31, 1865, abolished slavery and servitude indeed, but it did not really end slavery, as it made an exception for convicts. By allowing slavery "as punishment for a crime," the amendment made racially motivated incarceration a de facto continuation of slavery. Peter Caster quotes from a South Carolina chair of a prison's board of directors who declared in 1888 that prisons in the state existed to house freed slaves: "After the emancipation of the colored people, whose idea of freedom from bondage was freedom from work and license to pillage, we had to establish means for their control. Hence came the penitentiary" (Caster 8).

In the South, some carceral institutions were built directly on the grounds of former slave plantations, and they still keep their plantation names, the original intent being to continue slavery by another name and re-incarcerate those who had been freed only in theory. A paradigmatic example is Angola Prison, the Louisiana State Penitentiary, which is today the country's largest maximum-security prison, described by Beth Shelburne as "mass incarceration's ground zero." This former plantation is now an 18,000-acre working farm that produces substantial crops of cotton, sugarcane and vegetables. Louisiana's imprisoned population, the highest in the country, is 66 percent black, 30 percent white and 4 percent Hispanic, according to the statistics given by the Prison Policy Initiative

("Louisiana"). In this institution, which perpetuates some of the practices of the plantation system, the mostly black prisoners work the fields, watched by armed officers on horseback. When inmates arrive, they have to do "hard labor" in the farm for the first three months with a starting pay of two cents an hour, and some are made to stay longer in the fields as a punishment for "bad behavior," a practice reminiscent of the forced labor of slavery (Shelburne).

Angola, which became a state prison in 1901, was originally one of the plantations owned by the Confederate Major Samuel L. James, who assumed control of the Louisiana State Penitentiary (then in Baton Rouge) in 1870 and forced prisoners to work on his plantations. The 1998 prizewinning documentary *The Farm: Life inside Angola Prison* effectively presents contemporary racialized incarceration as a consequence of a long history of oppression that started with slavery. Commenting on the documentary, Peter Caster notes that

> it is as if the previous century and a half never happened, the past not history or even past right now—the New South is just like the Old South, and Simmons's [one of the black inmates] hundred-year sentence is just like a noose round a neck from a century before. (158)

Prisoners in these institutions have often represented their situation as a de facto continuation of slavery, making ample use of the rhetorical strategy of equating prisons with slave plantations, particularly in such southern prisons as Angola in Louisiana or Eastham in Texas. Robert Chase quotes the artist and former prisoner Winfred Rembert, who recorded his experience on the Georgia prison roadwork chain gang in the 1960s:

> They say slavery was tough, but I just cannot believe it was any tougher than the chain gang. The chain gang is just inhuman. It's a place [prison] where all dignity is taken from you. You are not a man anymore. It's designed to break you down physically and emotionally. (107)

In *Captive Nation*, Dan Berger notes that in the 1970s "Dissident prisoners maintained that slavery was a permanent feature of black life, less as a regime of labor than as a system of injustice, a form of social alienation and political oppression" (14). Herman Wallace, a member of the Black Panther Party imprisoned in Angola, wrote to Elayn Hunt, Louisiana's Director of Corrections, in June 1973 that the consciousness raising in which he and other party members had been involved had produced a true "understanding of the real function of their institution. For we have been kidnapped, ransom[ed] off, stripped of manhood, and throwned [*sic*] in Neo-Slave camps" (qtd. in Chase 244).

In *Slaves of the State*, Dennis Childs also equates the contemporary prison system with neoslavery, singling out the South as the region that casts

a great shadow over the dual processes of slavery and incarceration. These two are so closely intertwined across time that "the civil death of penal entombment performs horrifying repetition of the social death of chattel enslavement" (5). In much the same vein, Mendieta argues that "The ethnoracial prison continues Patterson's 'social death' through its policies of cultural, social, and political exclusion" (54).[2] It is a process that Wacquant describes as moving from the social death of slavery to the civic death of inmates: "Just as bondage effected the 'social death' of imported African captives and their descendants on American soil, mass incarceration also induces the civic death of those it ensnares by extruding them from the social compact" ("From" 57).

As Khalil Gibran Muhammad asserts, "From the 1890s through the first four decades of the twentieth century, black criminality would become one of the most commonly cited and longest-lasting justifications for black inequality and mortality in the modern urban world" (20–21). According to Angela Davis,

> What during slavery had been the particular repressive power of the master became the far more devastating universal power of the state as Black people were divested of their status as slaves in order to be accorded a new status as criminals. ("Globalism" 152)

In the South, the so-called Black Codes replaced the laws that regulated slavery, and the criminal justice system became central to new ways of racial subjugation, the ultimate purpose being to block any degree of success or any assertion of independence on the part of blacks, once the mythical docile and contented slave had given way to the myth of the black male conceived as sexual predator and innately criminal. Anything which, no matter how remotely, challenged white superiority would be considered a crime punished by the law or, frequently, by lynching. In *Slavery by Another Name*, regarding the "Age of Neoslavery," Douglas Blackmon deals with the system that exploited legal loopholes and enacted laws specifically to intimidate and subjugate blacks, who were arbitrarily arrested by the thousands and charged for the cost of their own arrest, often ending up as forced laborers. Imprisoned, frequently for false charges, for newly criminalized behavior such as vagrancy, absence from work, or "uppity" words or gestures, blacks were leased to entrepreneurs, farmers or companies that demanded cheap labor. This type of slavery did not last a lifetime, nor did it extend from one generation to the next,

> But it was nonetheless slavery—a system in which armies of free men, guilty of no crimes and entitled by law to freedom, were compelled to labor without compensation, were repeatedly bought and sold, and were forced to do the bidding of white masters through the regular application of extraordinary physical coercion. (Blackmon 4)

This new system of slavery which dehumanized and terrorized African Americans brought millions of dollars into the treasuries of southern governments. Chase notes how "the coerced labor that they performed modernized the infrastructure and economy of the New South within new capital and industrial interests" (3).

The convict lease system that rendered so many blacks "slaves of the state" lasted from the end of Reconstruction to the early Progressive Era (1896–1916). Robert Chase reports that after the convict lease system it was "field labor [that] structured the day-to-day work of southern prisoners and bound them to the South's coercive work discipline" (3). As described by Chase, in Texas prisons, "prisoners worked on former slave plantations where they picked the crash crop of cotton, cleared the land, and harvested so many agricultural goods that they became one of the state's greatest agribusinesses during the post-World War II period" (3). This historian describes the system as "a perfected 'prison plantation'" that "worked prisoners as coerced field labor in a system that replicated the work of antebellum slavery, while it prioritized white prisoner power to construct an internal prison economy as slave market" (13).

As Wacquant asserts, "slavery and mass imprisonment are genealogically linked and […] one cannot understand the latter […] without returning to the former as historic starting point and functional analogue" ("From" 41–42). As he explains, "America's first three 'peculiar institutions,' slavery, Jim Crow, and the ghetto, have this in common: they were all instruments for the conjoint *extraction of labor* and *social ostracization* of an outcast group deemed inassimilable by virtue of the indelible threefold stigma it carries": arriving in America under bondage, being denied the vote, and being deprived of ethnic honor ("From" 44; italics in the original).

The so-called Prison-Industrial Complex of our times continues to exploit African American men by making use of their labor for far less than fair market wages. This constitutes a modern-day extension of the plantation slave economy and of the long period of Jim Crow segregation, both of which "similarly extracted resources from the African American community which produced multi-generational disadvantages that are still being felt today" (Smith and Hattery 389). Per the Thirteenth Amendment, unpaid prison labor is still legally in effect today. Heather Ann Thompson, an expert in mass incarceration, wrote in an article for *Time* magazine's issue of September 13–20, 2021:

> In fact, in 2021, every barrier to the use of prison labor that had been in place in 1971 [the year of the historic Attica prison uprising] has been eliminated, and there are more than a million people behind bars available to work for little to no money than there were back then. […] Be it for a private company seeking cheaper labor costs or a governor looking to break collective bargaining agreements, prison labor has become increasingly attractive over time. (56)

Since 1980 there was a fourfold increase in the rates of imprisonment, and the carceral overrepresentation of black men has reversed their historical underrepresentation in such areas as political leadership or national literature (Caster xiii). In an unbreakable vicious circle, this overrepresentation is both a cause and a consequence of the identification of blackness and criminality which constitutes one of the cruel legacies of slavery. As Peter Caster explains with regard to the racial disparities caused by the inequitable minimum sentences that began with the Reagan administration:

> A willingness to view black and low-income populations as criminals, a hard-line conservative stance casting drug use in general as a moral failure and certain forms of drugs in particular as beyond the pale, and the political fear of being perceived as soft on crime all combine to make predetermined criminality at once the cause and effect of jurisprudential conviction. (200–201)[3]

In his 2017 book *Locking Up Our Own*, James Forman notes that in 1954, the year of *Brown v. Board of Education*, one-third of the country's prisoners were black, and that by 1994 the number had come close to 50 percent, which, in his opinion, made the criminal justice system the arena "where today's civil rights struggle would be fought" (8). He points out that the most recent data indicate that "African Americans are held in state prisons at a rate five times that of whites," and that "In eleven states, at least one in twenty adult black men is in prison" (218). According to Wacquant, "the role of the carceral institution today is different [from previous periods] in that, for the first time in US history, it has been elevated to the rank of main machine for 'race making'" ("Deadly" 117).

The publication of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* in 2010 was a watershed event that shook the intellectual and political elites. Alexander demonstrates how mass incarceration actually re-enslaves African Americans in a nation in which many blindly believe that racism is dead. She argues that "we have not ended racial caste in America, we have merely redesigned it" and that "something akin to a racial class system currently exists in the United States" (2). Black incarceration functions like a present-day Jim Crow caste system because "it permanently locks a huge percentage of the African American community out of the mainstream society and economy" (13), which results in a replica of the subjugation of slavery and Jim Crow segregation, the latter being the period to which the persistent stereotype of the black male as aggressive beast can be traced. This is the product of a periodic redefinition of the rules of the game and implementation of new forms of racialized social control. As Alexander points out, "Since the nation's founding, African Americans repeatedly have been controlled through institutions such as slavery and Jim Crow, which appear to die, but then are reborn in new form, tailored to the needs and constraints of the time" (21).

Alexander contends that the criminal justice system becomes "a *gateway* into a much larger system of stigmatization and permanent marginalization" (12; italics in the original). This larger system, that of mass incarceration, ends up making the socioeconomic condition of former prisoners into a virtual prison, in that it "locks people not only behind actual bars in actual prisons, but also behind virtual bars and virtual walls" that are invisible to many but are as effective as the Jim Crow laws "at locking people of color into a permanent second-class citizenship" (11–12). The situation replicates the Jim Crow laws that consigned blacks to the lowest caste. Not only are more than half of the young black men in many large American cities under the control of the criminal justice system, or burdened with criminal records (16), but, after they are released, ex-convicts "enter a hidden underworld of legalized discrimination and permanent social exclusion" that makes them "members of America's new undercaste" (13). They are legally denied access to jobs, public housing, social welfare or even the right to vote in some states. For many, a single mistake or a single arrest results in a lifetime of subordination and marginalization. This legalized discrimination, which marginalizes such a large part of the African American community, is the most salient parallel with the Jim Crow segregation that preceded the fight for civil rights. Dorothy Roberts argues in the same vein that racial incarceration is a tool to exert power over oppressed minorities:

> Mass imprisonment of blacks and Latinos is a way for the state to exert direct control over poorly educated, unskilled, and jobless people who have no place in the market economy because of racism, while preserving a racial caste system that was supposed to be abolished by civil rights reforms. (303)

In October of 1982 President Ronald Reagan declared his War on Drugs. This coincided with the mass unemployment of inner-city communities, due to the loss of manual jobs to globalization, industry relocation and vast technological changes. Massive joblessness led to widespread consumption of drugs, particularly crack cocaine, while a backlash against the civil rights movement was finding an opening in the powerful weapon of the War on Drugs, which gave many racists a welcome opportunity to express their hostility to blacks. At a time when public funds were most needed for education and social services, there was an explosion of budgets for the police force and for the building and maintenance of prisons to punish blacks and other poor people, often for minor crimes that result directly from the major crimes of structural poverty, joblessness, and an unfair and racist penal system. As Wacquant observes, "The upsizing of the carceral function of government has been rigorously proportional to the downsizing of its welfare role," and during the 1990s the Clinton administration cut funding for public housing by 61 percent and increased corrections by 171 percent, "effectively making the construction of prisons the nation's main housing program for the poor"

("Class" 76–77). As Angela Davis says about the prison-industrial complex, "prisons do not disappear problems, they disappear human beings and the practice of disappearing vast numbers of people from poor, immigrant and racially marginalized communities literally has become big business." The massive escalation in the scale of incarceration stands in direct proportion to the squeezing of governmental programs to alleviate social needs, and, as Davis adds, "In fact, the dismantling of the welfare state and the growth of the prison industrial complex have taken place simultaneously and are intimately related to one another" ("Globalism" 147).

Because President Clinton did not want to be accused by conservatives of being soft on crime, he decisively escalated the drug war initiated by Reagan that discriminated against blacks, and this with the approval of many black leaders who mistakenly bought into the conservative notion of a pathological black culture and forgot that minorities need not only strong law enforcement in their neighborhoods but also decent jobs, schools and housing. Angela Davis observes that

> in the absence of broad, radical grassroots movements in poor black communities so devastated by new forms of youth-perpetrated violence, the ideological options are extremely sparse. Often there are no other ways to express collective rage and despair but to demand that police sweep the community clean of crack and Uzis, and of the people who use and sell drugs and wield weapons. ("Race" 269)

Davis notices the ironic case of Carol Moseley-Braun, the first black woman senator in US history, an enthusiastic sponsor of the Senate Anticrime Bill of 1993, and she notes the difficulty for blacks to extricate themselves "from the ideological power of the figure of the young black male as criminal" or at least to seriously confront it ("Race" 269, 270). James Forman calls attention to the topic of class divisions in the black community and notes that the risk of incarceration is much higher for black high school dropouts than for those with a college degree. He notes that "black elected officials have been much more likely to speak out against racial profiling (which harms African Americans of all classes) than against unconscionable prison conditions (which have little direct impact on middle-class or elite blacks)" (13).

If we cannot understand nineteenth-century American fiction without acknowledging slavery as context, it is even truer that we cannot understand contemporary African American fiction without acknowledging the role of the American prison system as context. Following in the footsteps of Toni Morrison, contemporary African American writers have been engaging in what she calls "a kind of literary archeology": Equipped with some information and a bit of guesswork, "you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply" ("Site" 238). Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and Colson Whitehead's

The Nickel Boys directly confront the US carceral system and its repetition of slavery in all but name. Jesmyn Ward makes an inroad into the past of Mississippi's Parchman prison to explore its connections to the present and to give voice to those traditionally silenced who come to us as instructive, friendly ghosts. Colson Whitehead joins fact and fiction to expose the interior lives of those who could not write it, and to unbury the improperly buried prisoner slaves of a real juvenile detention school in Florida.

Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing*: Listening to the Ghosts of the Past

Sing, Unburied, Sing, Jesmyn Ward's third novel, won the National Book Award for 2017. At the center of this novel, which emphasizes the persistence of the past, is a trip to Parchman Farm, the Mississippi state penitentiary, which gives the protagonist the opportunity to understand his connection to history. The racial violence and the forced agricultural labor of the mostly black inmates of Parchman Farm make it a later version of slavery and a continuation of the southern plantation system. The novel is thus a journey to the past of slavery and its aftermath, a past which has never died and is in many ways replicated in the present. More than a hundred and fifty years after the abolition of slavery, Parchman continues to be simultaneously a reminder and a reenactment of the institution that, as Angela Davis says, was "itself a form of incarceration" ("Racialized" 99). The prison equally functions as a metaphorical representation of the imprisonment of the present-day generation of African Americans held in the grip of transgenerational trauma that demands to be revisited and confronted. Influenced by Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Ward presents characters with the ability to see ghosts that are characterized by being simultaneously present and absent. The novel fits the type that Kathleen Brogan calls a "story of cultural haunting [which] needs to be distinguished from the more familiar ghost story" (5). In this type of story, "the ghost's elusiveness conveys a past not easily accessible" (29), and, as Brogan adds, "As both presence and absence, the ghost stands as an emblem of historical loss as well as a vehicle of historical recovery" (29). According to Jean Wyatt, "ghosts in Morrison's work often function as uncanny reminders of what has been repressed—including the national repressed" (165). Like Morrison in *Beloved*, Ward uses spectrality not only to convey the haunting nature of historical trauma and its effects on the present, but also to communicate the historical and individual traumas which demand alternative channels of expression because they elude ordinary realistic systems of representation.

The novel is narrated by three different voices: Jojo is a mixed-race teenage boy who struggles to take care of his little sister Kayla and is trying to understand himself and his world. Leonie is Jojo's neglectful mother, a black woman addicted to drugs and desiring to re-unite with her white lover, the father of Jojo and Kayla. She is haunted by the ghost of her dead

brother, Given, who was killed by her lover's cousin in a racial incident. The third voice is that of the ghost of a dead black teenager who will not make it home to the world of the dead until he learns about the circumstances of his violent death in Parchman prison.

The novel opens with Jojo on the day he has turned 13, saying, "I like to think I know what death is. I like to think that it's something I could look at straight" (1). The plot indeed traces Jojo's difficult journey to knowledge about death, and about life, which results in an anguished initiation into black manhood and a painful awareness of the prison house of the past and its effects on the present. The author herself has confirmed her intention to make this novel a modern-day *Bildunsgroman*: "I wanted to understand how he would navigate something of a coming of age in the modern South, where, yes, it is modern, but there are multiple waves of the past there" (qtd. in Begley 49). Most of the action takes place on the road, during a car journey from the coast of Mississippi to Parchman Prison, and back, to fetch Jojo's father, who has just been released after serving time for a drug offense. Jojo's grandfather, River, called Pop in the novel, served time at Parchman, where he was sent at 15 for giving shelter in his house to his brother, who had been involved in a fight with white men.

In order to enable Jojo to learn about himself and about the past, Ward makes use of a spectral device: The ghost of Richie, the black boy who was sent to the Parchman prison at the age of 12, for stealing food for his starving siblings.[4] The ghost is going to interact with Jojo and function as the guide into the awareness of his personal connection to the traumatic history of his race. Given that being a ghost affords him freedom of mobility he never had in life, Richie travels in the car at Jojo's side, from Parchman Prison down to the coast of Mississippi. He needs to know from Pop about the circumstances of his death, and Pop needs the ghost to confront his own traumatic memories, which cause blanks in the stories about Parchman that he has been telling Jojo. In an interview given to Adam Vitcavage for *The Millions*, Ward said that the violence that surrounds the violent southern history "is still very present" and that "the underlying understanding is that the history of this region bears very heavily on the present and informs our actions," which leads her to think that "the ghost story form is a great way to explore and express that" (Ward, "Haunted"). In our age of cultural amnesia, the ghost story becomes indispensable to express the inexpressible, to speak what Toni Morrison calls the "unspeakable things unspoken," the search for which becomes "A search, in other words, for the ghost in the machine" ("Unspeakable" 172).

African American literature has traditionally displayed a proliferation of ghosts, but in it the traditional gothic elements play a different role than in narratives such as Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" or Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," which exhibit a high component of fantasy and escapism. The gothic elements in African American fiction share some of the traditional literary functions, but use one vital component

which is social critique, and are usually part of an attempt to recover and make social use of poorly documented or erased cultural history. As Maisha Wester says in *African American Gothic*, "African American literature and culture has quite usually been understood as a determination to keep history present" (154). Teresa Goddu maintains that

> In the works of African-American writers from Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs to Charles Chesnutt, Pauline Hopkins, Richard Wright, Ann Petry, Ralph Ellison, Gloria Naylor, August Wilson, J. California Cooper, Toni Morrison, and others, the gothic has served as a useful mode in which to resurrect and resist America's racial history. (153)

In gothic African American fiction, the horror usually comes from reality, and the darkness is historical and not merely symbolical. According to Jeffrey Weinstock, "The ghost is that which interrupts the presentness of the present, and its haunting indicates that, beneath the surface of received history, there lurks another narrative, an untold story that calls into question the veracity of the authorized version of events" (5). One of the reasons for the prominence of the spectral in so much contemporary American ethnic literature is what Weinstock describes as "The usefulness of the ghost in the revisioning of history from alternate, competing perspectives" (5). Kathleen Brogan remarks that "The unifying theme in stories of cultural haunting is the need to identify and revise the cultural past" (29).

In the course of the novel, Jojo gets to know about two phases of the Parchman prison farm: The present-day version which he visits with his mother and little sister to pick up his father, and the one that was originally a cotton plantation, which he gets to know through Pop and through Richie, who only as a ghost is given a narrative voice, thus acquiring the agency that he did not possess in life. In her interview with Louis Elliott of *BOMB* magazine, the author says that it was what she read about Parchman Prison, "where twelve- and thirteen-year-old black boys were taken for petty crimes" and "tortured and beaten like slaves," that convinced her to write the character of Richie: "I wanted to give him agency. I wanted him to be able to interact with the other characters. Because I wanted that to happen I knew that he had to be a ghost" (Ward, "Ghosts").

Parchman Prison, about 300 miles north of Jesmyn Ward's Mississippi hometown, DeLille, is one of those realities that our cultural amnesia transforms into ghosts lost in the shadows of forgotten history. When we bring the ghostly into our narratives, we are acknowledging what Avery Gordon describes as "the difference it makes to start with the marginal, with what we normally exclude or banish, or, more commonly, with what we never even notice" (24–25). The ghost that demands we look into unseen entombed horrors becomes for Ward a most adequate device to unearth at least part of the untold story and the partly irrecoverable experience of neoslaves trapped in prisons like Parchman, where racial terror is rampant. The very

shameful history of pain and exploitation that Parchman itself represents is still a reality unknown and obscure as a ghost for many. Ward herself did not find out about the horrors of Parchman until she read David Oshinsky's "*Worse than Slavery": Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice*, and during the novel's promotion she was surprised "to see how many people didn't know that Parchman was a real place. They thought it was a figment of my imagination" ("Ghosts"). Slavery officially ended in 1865, but it has continued to live on through different permutations, and, according to Avery Gordon, "Such endings that are not over is what haunting is about" (139). Parchman is an extant example of the continuation of slavery by another name, and, as Pop says about his time there in the pre-civil rights era, "*It was murder. Mass murder*" (73; italics in the original). But the distinction between the past and the present is dissolved, and there seems to be no end to slavery and its aftermath. Indeed, things do not seem to be much better in the present, as Michael writes in a letter to Leonie: "*This ain't no place for no man. Black or White. Don't make much difference. This is a place for the dead*" (96; italics in the original). In all its different phases, Parchman has been a so-called "space of death," a term that, at least for black people, can be extended to the whole of the United States.[5] The term is taken from Michael Taussig, who, in *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, says that

> the space of death is important in the creation of meaning and consciousness, nowhere more so than in societies where torture is endemic and where the culture of terror flourishes. We may think of the space of death as a threshold that allows for illumination as well as extinction. (qtd. in Holland 4)

After the de jure abolition of slavery came a new phase of racial exploitation and torture that continued to fuel the engines of American capitalistic prosperity. The Parchman prison plantation was in its historical origins related to the turn to convict labor in the post-Civil War South and to what Dennis Childs describes as

> the unprecedented demographic shift in the South's official spaces of incarceration that occurred after the Civil War—with the number of officially imprisoned black people increasing from less than one percent before 1861 to as much as 90 percent in certain counties and states after 1865. (9)

As Michelle Alexander notes, "The state of Mississippi eventually moved from hiring convict labor to organize its own convict labor camp, known as Parchman Farm" (32). James K. Vardaman became governor of Mississippi in 1904, and that year Parchman, in the Delta, became a large prison farm of 20,000 acres that covered 46 square miles (Oshinsky 137).[6] The site

became a monument to Vardaman, "The White Chief" who believed that a good prison, like an efficient slave plantation, could serve to "socialize" young blacks who had "lost" their way (Oshinsky 110). In the early twentieth century, most of Mississippi's convicted felons were moved to Parchman Farm, where, in 1917, blacks made about 90 percent of the prison population (Oshinsky 137).

The closest thing to slavery that survived the Civil War, Parchman was by 1915 a self-sufficient establishment (Oshinsky 139). The Gulag of Mississippi, which throughout its history has been synonymous with punishment and brutality, resembled an antebellum plantation, with prisoners substituting for slaves. Both systems used captive labor to grow the same crops in the same ways; both employed lower-class whites to supervise the black labor groups. And, as in the slave plantations, the Parchman system combined physical punishment with paternalistic rewards to motivate the forced laborers. Whipping, with all its strong racial overtones because of its extensive use in the slave plantations, was the perfect instrument of discipline in a prison where most of the inmates were the descendants of former slaves. Parchman became an efficient and powerful moneymaking machine, and this was something familiar to southerners of both races, who could see in it what Oshinsky describes as "a powerful link to the past—a place of racial discipline where blacks in striped clothing worked the cotton fields for the enrichment of others" (155). Robert Chase quotes from the oral report given to him by lawyer Roy S. Haber, who visited Parchman, where he took a case, in 1970:

> It was an attempt on the part of Mississippi to be able to keep intact some of the vestiges of slave culture. They could not keep African Americans any longer in slavery outside of prison, but in prison you can make people work without paying them. They set this prison up to maintain the slave culture, inside and out. Black prisoners were supposed to pick 200 pounds of cotton. They were housed in overcrowded dormitories that resembled slave barracks. […] The Black prisoners were treated as slaves and not as human beings, as not having worth, as being chattel, all the vestiges that you had on the plantation were brought onto the prison. (195)

As Meera Atkinson says, "When it comes to trauma, truth is not only the thing you must not say, but also *the thing you cannot say*" (16; italics in the original). Because of his buried trauma, Pop never tells Jojo everything he knows or remembers about Parchman and he seems to repress memories, which explains his talking in circles:

> Whenever Pop done told me his and Richie's story, he talked in circles. Telling me the beginning over and over again. Telling me the middle over and over again. Circling the end like a big black buzzard angles

> around dead animals, possums or armadillos or wild pigs or hit deer, bloating and turning sour in the Mississippi heat. (248)

The longer the trauma is ignored and kept buried, the more intolerable the burden of unfinished business becomes. As Gabriele Schwab says, "People tend to bury violent or shameful histories. They create psychic crypts meant to stay sealed off from the self, interior tombs haunted by the ghosts of the past" (49). The friendly ghost of the convict boy Richie turns out to be a necessary device for Jojo to shape his identity and learn not only about the fundamentals of life, but also about the past of his family and his race, and the reverberations of that past in the present; and for Pop, Richie will provide the opportunity to confront his trauma. This ghost will not find peace, will not "go home" (231), as he puts it, until Pop discloses the circumstances of his tragic death. The story that Pop finally tells teaches Jojo about the complex intersections of race and sexuality, about the southern rape complex which produced the warrior mentality that led to the lynching of so many black males in the name of the pernicious fiction of the sexually pure white woman threatened by the "black beast rapist."[7] In the presence of Richie, Pop finally tells the part he has kept entombed: A very brutal inmate, named Blue, raped a woman prisoner and destroyed her face. He ran away and Richie ran with him because he "was sick of that place" (251). During his escape, Blue attacked a white girl and Pop, who was out with the dogs, saw the gathering of whites, wild with rage and ready to kill the two blacks: "And I knew that when it came to the two of them, when it came to Blue and Richie, they wasn't going to tell no difference. They was going to see two niggers, two beasts, who had touched a White woman" (253). The lynch mob caught up with Blue, and they cut pieces off him, skinned him and then shot and burned him. They were going to do the same to Richie, and Pop saved him by stabbing him to death, saying, "*Yes, Richie, I'm a take you home*," and then letting the dogs tear into him (255; italics in the original), an action that would traumatize him for the rest of his life and would make him a southern reincarnation of Macbeth: "I washed my hands every day, Jojo. But that damn blood ain't never come out. Hold my hands up to my face, I can smell it under my skin" (256). This merciful killing is reminiscent of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the novel where Sethe has to choose between merciful infanticide and prolonged social death for her daughter. *Beloved* is in fact one of several ghostly literary presences that whisper through Ward's book. She said in an interview that the fictional texts she was thinking about when she wrote this novel were "perhaps, *Beloved*, *As I Lay Dying*, the *Odyssey*" ("Ghosts").

Near the end of the novel, Jojo, who is trying to recover from the death of his grandmother and is once again abandoned by his neglectful parents, goes into the woods, and there he runs into Richie, who is "looking half-dead and half-asleep, and all ghost" (280). It is here that Richie tells Jojo about the many black ghosts wandering, and he climbs a tree full of ghosts

that speak through their eyes, as the unspeakable cannot be put into words, in a passage which is a prominent instance of ghosts acting as agents of cultural transmission and helping to establish a historical continuity of black bodies mangled and destroyed by racism:

> They perch like birds, but look as people. They speak with their eyes: *He raped me and suffocated me until I died I put my hands up and he shot me eight times she locked me in the shed and starved me to death while I listened to my babies playing with her in the yard they came in my cell in the middle of the night and they hung me they found I could read and they dragged me out to the barn and gouged my eyes before they beat me still I was sick and he said I was an abomination and Jesus say suffer little children so let her go and he put me under the water and I couldn't breathe.* (282–83; italics in the original)

These ghosts testify to a history of suffocation that began with the transatlantic imprisonment of the Middle Passage and extends beyond the time frame of the novel to unintentionally prophesy the "I can't breathe" of George Floyd dying asphyxiated under the knee of officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020.[8] They become what Teresa Goddu, writing about the ghost in Morrison's *Beloved*, calls "the spectral embodiment of this dilemma: she [Morrison] represents a history that can never be completely spoken or silenced, never fully controlled" (154).

As Avital Ronell says, "The relation to a past that, never behind us, is hounding and calling up to us […] implicates nothing less than an ethics. This ethics—provisional, restless, untried—[…] is an ethics of the haunted" (xviii, qtd. in Redding 120). These ghosts' collective interior monologue imposes upon Jojo the ethical obligation to listen to these anonymous voices who have no choice but to haunt, since they have never had access to any authorized platform and have been forced to silence; and it equally urges him to connect with what Avery Gordon calls "the pathos of their loss and the violence of the force that made them, their sheets and chains" (22). These testimonies constitute a whole story of collective anguish and historical trauma—they bring to Jojo's and the reader's attention what Gordon terms "organized forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us" and that in haunting "make their impact felt in everyday life in a way that confounds our analytic separations and confounds the social separations themselves" (19). The scene incorporates different levels of history into a present always marked by what has gone before, thus illustrating what Richie said earlier: "Because we don't walk no straight lines. It's all happening at once. All of it. We all here at once" (236).

The testimonies of these ghosts are reminders of unacknowledged and unresolved troubles, of that which is there and not there, past and present, and future, all at the same time. As Gordon says, "These specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being

contained or repressed or blocked from view" (xvi); they are here to remind us that the way we separate the past, the present and the future is not viable any longer. As Richie tells Jojo, "You don't know shit about time" (184). History is an active force in the present and the long legacy of racial oppression negates linear time and militates against the American myth of unstoppable progress. Thus, Parchman is a continuation of slavery by another name and its inmates are civilly dead "neoslaves."[9] As the ghost who destabilizes temporal and spatial boundaries, Richie says in one of his sections, "Parchman [is] past, present, and future all at once," because "time is a vast ocean, and […] everything is happening at once" (186). We have already noted how the racial violence and the forced labor in the fields make this prison a present-day version of a southern plantation. As Weinstock says, "As an entity out of place in time, as something from the past that emerges into the present, the phantom calls into question the linearity of history. And […] the ghost suggests the complex relationship between the constitution of individual subjectivity and the larger social collective" (4). Each reference to Parchman is simultaneously a reference to slavery and its continuation. Like Parchman, slavery is the past, the present and the future. Not even the dead are exempt from its consequences, at least until the trauma is confronted. It is not just the past of Richie and Pop's time there as teenagers; Pop relates their suffering there, which teaches them how it feels "to be made into an animal" (69), to the fear experienced by his black ancestors in African villages raided by slave traffickers and subjected to the forced journey from Africa to America: "they ate fear" because they knew about the slave ships and "about how they packed men and women into them" (69). Pop's confrontation of his suffering with the pain of his African ancestors is an indispensable step toward healing his own wounds and helping his own descendants. Toni Morrison refers to the "silence within the race" that was the Middle Passage, "a part of history […] that Black people themselves had never spoken about" and with which she decided to deal in *Beloved*: "There are certain things that are repressed because they are unthinkable and the only way to come free of that is to go back to them and deal with them" ("Toni" 105). The Middle Passage is indeed a primal antecedent of modern incarceration and, as Dennis Childs says, "for the African and those of African descent, the modern prison did not begin with Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, […] but with the coffles, barracoons, slave ships, and slave 'pens' of the Middle Passage" (29). Most appropriately, Childs refers to the slave ships as "the water-based moving prisons of the Atlantic" (43). Drawing a comparison, Robert Chase notes that a group of Black Panthers from New Orleans doing time at Louisiana's Angola prison in the 1970s "experienced geographic dislocation to southern rural prisons as a modern-day Middle Passage that denied them their freedom, masculinity, and humanity within prison plantations that constituted 'neoslavery'" (244).

Through the ghosts that function as intermediaries between past and present, between the world of the living and the dead, we are notified that what

is being concealed in our age of loss of historical perspective is very much alive and present. According to Avery Gordon, "To be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects" (190), and thus Jesmyn Ward is intent on paying attention to a past which shadows and haunts the present, thus emphasizing the persistence of the past and the absence of linear progression affirmed by Richie. When Ward was editing a collection of essays on the racial situation, titled *The Fire This Time* (2016), an initiative triggered by her rage and dismay at the murder of Trayvon Martin,[10] only three of the pieces she received touched on the future. This made her aware of

> how inextricably interwoven the past is in the present, how heavily the past bears on the future; we cannot talk about black lives mattering or police brutality without reckoning with the very foundation of this country. We must acknowledge the plantation, must unfold white sheets, must recall the black diaspora to understand what is happening now. ("Introduction" 9)

As a crucial component in the foundation of the country, slavery becomes a metaphorical ghost, as it is simultaneously the entombed past that demands acknowledgment and reparation, and a living presence, as long as racial oppression persists. As Saidiya Hartman puts it, "Racial subjection, incarceration, impoverishment and second-class citizenship: this is the legacy of slavery that still haunts us" ("Time" 766). This explains what Beloved says in her famous monologue, "All of it is now … it is always now" (210). The entrapment of the Middle Passage persists and Ward's Jojo himself is a victim of the effects of slavery and its transmutation into massive incarceration.

As Eric Anderson, Taylor Hagood and Daniel Turner observe, "the South is a cultural space where what's dead *doesn't* stay that way, with major impacts on the region's present and future" (8; italics in the original). In *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, Jesmyn Ward assumes the role of medium who invokes the dead and the silenced and thus allows the release of the huge potential buried in the alternative histories of the excluded. For Jojo, who in the novel's opening exclaimed rather optimistically, "I like to think I know what death is," the passage to manhood depends on learning to acknowledge voices from the dead that refuse to stay dead and which cry out for justice and recognition. And he is called to take part in the placating of ghosts that protest a long history of oppression that began with slavery and whose testimony about their deaths caused by racist violence opposes the powerful amnesia of a country where so many forget about the foundational crimes of slavery and genocide.

At one point, Richie says to Jojo: "I need you" (174). The dead need the living that they haunt, given that the traumas they represent demand our attention, but the living also need to haunt the dead (Redding 122). Our ghosts frighten us, but they also give us comfort; they express our desires for truth and justice as well as our need to confront the past head on, to

ask questions that we need to confront, even if they cannot be satisfactorily answered. As Weinstock says, "If ghosts do not return to correct history, then privileged narratives of history are not open to contestation" (6). The knowledge provided by the ghosts promises a future which is not predicated upon avoidance of the past.

Ward's novel ends on a note of hope and reconciliation, with Jojo's baby sister Kayla's pre-verbal song bringing relief to the ghosts, who seem satisfied that the younger generation acknowledges them and in doing so is coming to terms with the long history of suffering that they represent. Children seem to be more responsive and have a better capacity for alertness, an ability that Toni Morrison relates to the "good ghosts," like the one in *Beloved*: "I think of ghosts and haunting as just being alert. If you're really alert, you see the life that exists beyond the life that's on top" ("Toni Morrison's"). We have to presume that the novel's most alert and positive characters (Jojo, Pop and Kayla) have found, like the ghosts pacified by Kayla, "something like relief, something like remembrance, something like ease" (284). The unburied have been allowed to sing, to do the remembering for us, to tell their stories of enslavement, rape, lynching, imprisonment and other horrors, stories that demand, if not complete reparation, at least some degree of awareness and reconciliation. At the very end, the ghosts exclaim, "*Home,* […] *Home*" (285; italics in the original), to obey Kayla's command to "go home" (284). The ghosts must be honored through remembrance and through the acknowledgment of our continuity with them; otherwise, they are made homeless. As Joanne Chassot says, "Refusing to be forgotten, the dead call on the living with an insistence that ranges from benevolence, through mild nuisance, to overpowering and dangerous invasion, depending on the way the living respond to their presence" (9).

After his eventful and perilous journey to and back from Parchman, Jojo has made it home too, in the sense that, having confronted the ghost, he can now move forward, equipped with a new awareness of the tragic history of his race, and with valuable knowledge, not only about manhood, but also about life and death. As Richie tells him, "Now you understand life. Now you know. Death" (282). The knowledge gives Jojo a new energy and a new manliness, foundations which his irresponsible parents cannot provide as they are being consumed by the hungry ghost of drug addiction, about which he has seen so much during the car journey. We would like to think that, in the end, Jojo, even while conscious of the fragility of black life in America, is somehow better equipped to face the future and maybe break the cycle of incarceration that has severely damaged two generations of men in his family. Speaking about her novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison advises an indispensable confrontation with the past, but she warns against remaining imprisoned in it: "If you dwell, if you just dwell on the past you can't go forward. If you confront the past there is a possibility to move on" ("Toni" 111).

By giving voice to the ghost of Richie, in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* Ward opposes the silence imposed by power structures and contributes to the task

Sharon Holland describes as "not only uncovering silences but also transforming inarticulate places into conversational territories" (3–4). Thus, a "space of death" and terror like Parchman is rescued from oblivion and the dead, like Richie, are allowed to speak and given at least some of the agency that they did not have in life. By acting as mouthpiece for victims of slavery and its subsequent permutations, particularly victims of racial incarceration, Jesmyn Ward continues the task undertaken by Toni Morrison, who, according to Kathleen Brogan, "defines historical consciousness as a good form of haunting, in which the denied ghosts of the American past are finally integrated into America's national identity" (8).

"Who Spoke for the Black Boys?": Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*

In his 2016 novel *The Underground Railroad*, Colson Whitehead explored the exploitation of blacks during slavery through a plot that fuses the odyssey of Cora, a runaway slave, with the history and mythology of the United States, stressing the inseparability of slavery from American capitalism and the building of empire. In this novel, he has one character say: "Here's one delusion: that we can escape slavery. We can't. Its scars will never fade" (285). In *The Nickel Boys* (2019), another story of incarceration and escape, he explores a later variant of slavery, this time implemented through the imprisonment and the denial of breathing space to the descendants of the victims of the prison under the sun that was slavery. It is another "narrative of neoslavery" (Childs 21) aimed at disinterring and reclaiming improperly buried bodies and silenced personal histories.

The action is set in the 1960s, in the fictional Nickel Academy reform school for boys, an institution named after Trevor Nickel, who came to the school as director in 1946: "He made an impression at Klan meetings, however, with his impromptu speeches on moral improvement and the value of work, the disposition of young souls in need of care" (97), a description with echoes of Governor Vardaman of Mississippi, who believed that a good prison, like an efficient slave plantation, could serve to "socialize" young blacks who had "lost" their way, and that "it could teach them proper discipline, strong work habits, and respect for white authority" (Oshinsky 110). Nickel is based on the real Arthur G. Dozier school in Marianna, Florida, which existed from 1900 to 2011 and was racially segregated until the second half of the 1960s (Sandhu). An investigation was launched after dozens of bodies were found buried on the grounds of the school. The study ended in 2016, when a forensic pathology team from the University of South Florida uncovered human remains in fifty-five graves. When Whitehead's novel was in press, a contractor cleaning up the site reported the discovery of 27 "anomalies consistent with possible [extra] graves" (Luscombe).

Colson Whitehead first heard about Dozier in the summer of 2014, soon after Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, had been shot dead

by a white policeman in Ferguson, Missouri, and Eric Gardner had been choked to death in Staten Island by another white policeman (Whitehead, "Afterword" 214). He decided to put his imagination to the task of filling in the details of the forgotten and repressed history, to do his own metaphorical excavation of graves that contain the improperly buried, and thus give his own account of how these traumatic realities were felt and experienced, which the writer can do better than the historian or the archeologist. In his novel, written during the Trump era, he decided to take up the commitment to excavate America's sins against the black race, at a time when so many Americans were giving in to willful historical amnesia and finding comfort in their ignorance about the most painful aspects of their nation's history. As Whitehead says in his afterword to the novel, "Most of the White House boys [a Nickel survivors' organization] who came forward were white, but the majority of the students were African American. I wondered about the black boys, and what a novel inspired by Dozier might look like" (215).

The novel is uncompromisingly realistic in its depiction of this institution which in reality is a prison, with the captives "called students, rather than inmates, to distinguish them from the violent offenders that populated prisons" (74). Actually, in the place "All the violent offenders […] were on staff" (74). The place has its own torture chamber, called the White House, where the students are flogged into unconsciousness for minor offenses:

> The white boys bruised differently than the black boys and called it the Ice Cream Factory because you came out with bruises of every color. The black boys called it the White House because that was its official name and it fit and didn't need to be embellished. (64)

Sukhdev Sandhu reports Whitehead saying, "Any place where you have corrupt, malevolent authority figures who can exert their will on the innocent and powerless, then you're going to have this: the school as a plantation." Whitehead's fictional Nickel School contains indeed multiple echoes of the plantation: The students do a lot of farm work, in extensive fields whose northern end is marked by the swamp. There is "a kind of Nickel deadness" (74) in the eyes of the students, which reads as an obvious nod to Patterson's "social death." There is also the convict labor that characterizes the US prison system: A successful printing plant and a brick-making machine, for which the boys get no compensation. It is a cruel place characterized by a double enslavement: The boys are slaves of the state in an institution which, with its fields and workshops, seems like a prison plantation like Angola or Parchman, and their enslaved sexualized bodies are raped by the officers at their will. A situation where privileged whites rape young African American males problematizes the traditional race discourse of the so-called sexual rapacity of African American males. Near the end of the novel, this systemic denial of freedom and the excessive punishment are made extensive to the whole country: "This was one place,

but if there was one, there were hundreds, hundreds of Nickels and White Houses scattered across the land like pain factories" (173). The narrator explicitly relates the situation of these black boys, oppressed by whites in power, to the time of slavery: "Their daddies taught them how to keep a slave in line, passed down this brutal heirloom" (189). After the Civil War, whites carried on the family tradition, to the extent that "when a five-dollar fine for a Jim Crow charge—vagrancy, changing employers without permission, 'bumptious contact,' what have you—swept black men and women up into the maw of debt labor, the white sons remembered the family lore" (189). The formula is repeated in this reform school that takes advantage of the boys' labor and implements all kinds of torture, including solitary confinement.

Whitehead's prison school is a true house of horrors, though with none of the fantastic allegorization that characterizes the gothic rooms and mansions imagined by Poe or Hawthorne. The gothic elements in African American fiction may partly share the traditional literary functions of such fiction, but their primary focus is upon social critique in an attempt to recover and raise awareness of poorly documented or partially erased cultural history. As Rebecca Evans notes,

> By integrating the gothic into realist fictions, contemporary Black novelists weave distributed understandings of historical causality, agency, and timescale into one story, and they use these hybrid stories to challenge the reductive progress narrative of liberal modernity (according to which regimes of racial violence have ended). (452)

In *The Nickel Boys*, Whitehead ostensibly retains a frequent motif of gothic fiction: The double or foil, although admittedly his double characters do not defy the conventions of realism and have shed their original supernatural characteristics. He presents two black student inmates, Elwood Curtis and Jack Turner, who can be read as foils or doubles for one another. They stick together from their first meeting at the school, and although the narration initially stresses their differences, it later traces a slow process of convergence during which we see them becoming mutually illuminated and modified. Amit Marcus says that "In double narratives, the double and his original display rivalry, since they inhabit the same territory" (382), but this is not quite the case in *The Nickel Boys*, where there is mutual complementarity and the two boys become inseparable, as if to prove that the double is nothing but an immanent part of the self. It becomes a case of what Paul Luke calls "psychic mergence," which occurs when two interrelated characters mingle and blend their defining qualities and we have a process that leads to the blurring of the boundary lines between their respective selves, which culminates in the emergence of a kind of transpersonal identity (Luke 14–15).

As Karl Miller asserts, "We have believed that a novel is a multiple identity in which the novelist is dispersed and disguised and belied" (37).

According to Milica Zivkovic, "It is the central power of the double to interrogate the category of character—that definition of the self as a coherent, indivisible and continuous whole which has dominated western thought for centuries" (126). Samuel Fleck maintains that "the Double acquires the special connotation of a quasi-universal device that infiltrates the logic of the narrative and organizes the relations between the characters" (39–40). *The Nickel Boys* is a novel with two protagonists who function as doubles or foils for one another, and the author splits himself into the two characters, putting into each of them a different aspect of his own internal dilemma—are we making racial progress or stepping back? As Zivkovic asserts, "In reading prose fiction it is not uncommon to discover that the double is a literary, and specifically a fictional, device for articulating the experience of self-division" (122). In *The Nickel Boys*, this split or division reflects not only the divided mind of the author on the subject but also the division that characterizes contemporary America: The optimists who believe that the nation keeps making steady progress in racial relations and that things keep getting better for each successive black generation, and the pessimists who see steps back everywhere and the continuation of slavery by other names such as mass incarceration, police brutality, ghettoization, social exclusion or voter suppression. As Whitehead himself says, "A lot of energy is put into perpetuating the different means of controlling black people under slavery, under segregation and now under whatever you want to call this contemporary form" (Jackson 46). He explicitly acknowledges the role of his own double-mindedness concerning the matter in the conception of the plot: "So I picked two young protagonists who spoke to these different parts of my personality—the hopeful one and the more pragmatic or cynical one" ("Afterword" 217). In an interview given to *El País*, when asked if he really split his own personality into Elwood and Turner, Whitehead said that we all share a dialectics of confrontation between hope and realism and that neither of the two philosophies gets absolute dominion, and that it was good for him to give voice to the two parts of his personality and see how they argue with each other ("Colson" 44).

Whitehead projects his hopeful part onto Elwood Curtis, a black teenager who lives in Tallahassee with his kind, but cautious, grandmother Harriet. He never received much attention from his mother, who abandoned him when he was six, as was the case with Cora's mother in *The Underground Railroad*, both mothers escaping from hopelessness. El is a paragon of earnestness and integrity who represents the "earnestness he brought to all his responsibilities" (29) and grasps every opportunity to educate and better himself, which in the Jim Crow South is an intolerable transgression of the rules. Like Cora in *The Underground Railroad*, El perseveres, despite all the efforts of Jim Crow America to deny him the power of literacy. Whitehead says about him, "I wanted Elwood to be motivated by the spirit of the civil rights movement" (Sandhu). For Christmas of 1962, El receives "the best gift of his life" (2): The album titled *Martin Luther King at Zion Hill*. In

this collection of speeches that connects him to all those fighting for rights across the country, El sees not only the Africans persecuted by slavery and later oppressed by segregation but also "that luminous image to come, when all those places closed to his race were opened" (10). From King, El gets the belief that "you are as good as anybody" (10), and he systematically sticks to a code of conduct to which King gives shape: "*We must believe in our souls that we are somebody, that we are significant, that we are worthful, and we must walk the streets of life every day with this sense of dignity and this sense of somebody-ness*" (24–25; italics in the original).

Because of his earnestness, El is given the opportunity to take college courses while in high school. On the very first day of his college adventure, he hitchhikes and is picked up by a black man in a car that turns out to be stolen. He is arrested and immediately put in the cogs of the machinery of a racist criminal justice system. In a society in which race is one of the lenses through which other people see you and measure your ability to navigate space, a black teenager will not be treated as a distinct individual, and consequently members of his race tend to be systematically denied both spatial and social mobility within their own country. An ambitious black boy like El constitutes a threat to what George Yancy calls "the harmony and symmetry of white space" and becomes a victim of what this African American philosopher terms "white fear of Black embodied mobility, agency, and self-definition, which constitutes a threat to white power" (250). Black bodies in motion have historically meant danger to white power structures and, as black scholar Wallace Best asserts, a black body in motion "is always a signifier of something, scripted and coded. And for the most part, throughout our history black bodies in motion have been deemed a threat" (Best).

By giving no information whatsoever about the details of the trial, Whitehead drives home the point that it is a foregone conclusion for a black boy, in such circumstances, to be incarcerated and robbed of his dreams and life opportunities, given that in the Jim Crow South there is no presumption of innocence for African Americans. As Bryan Stevenson says in his article "A Presumption of Guilt," "People of color in the United States, particularly young black men, are often assumed to be guilty and dangerous" and "this presumption of guilt and the history that created it have significantly shaped every institution in American society, especially our criminal justice system." According to Yancy, "From the perspective of whiteness, the Black body *is* criminality itself" (xxx; italics in the original). As an African American, Elwood is, as Jeannine DeLombard puts it, "subject to the hyper-scrutiny and misapprehension that leads to black and brown body parts being 'criminalized already [into] weapons'" (515).[11] In fact, the next thing we know, he is at the segregated state prison-school. The good offices of his vigilant and responsible grandmother, who hires a lawyer to get El back home, are unproductive. This forced separation constitutes a repetition of the enslaved individual's systematic separation from family and friends through which social death operates.

El becomes friends with Jack Turner, onto whom Whitehead projects the pessimistic part of his persona. Turner has more experience than El regarding how to survive in the streets and knows how to keep his head down and avoid notice. He does not have anything like the motherly grandmother that El has, and he comes from a harsher environment, which gives him more experience of violence and the ability to protect himself under a cloak of cynicism. He believes that all humans are essentially evil, whereas El believes in moral decency. In contrast to the malleability of the optimistic El, Turner displays the toughness necessary to survive in the streets. Convinced that the system is rigged, he knows how to survive in the cruel environment of the juvenile institution by keeping his head down and not trusting anybody.

Since El and Turner seem more mature and self-composed that the rest, and more capable of keeping a secret, they are chosen for "community service," which allows them to go out into the "free world" (85). "Community service" consists of going in a van with a school supervisor to sell the "black students' supplies" (88) to local restaurants and to do unpaid jobs for important local people. El learns from Turner that it used to be much worse, a situation not much different from that of blacks in the worst days of convict labor: When you graduated you did not go home but into something akin to what Dennis calls "servitude parole" (15), frequent in the decades following emancipation. In Turner's words, "you had parole where they basically sold your monkey ass to people in town. Work like a slave, live in their basement or whatever. Beat you, kick you, feed you shit" (91). Much later, we learn that "In the first half of the twentieth century, boys who had been leased out to local families wound up dead sometimes" (143). Thus, a wide circle of white people benefit from a system that oppresses African Americans since young age. As Aminatta Forna says,

> [Whitehead] demonstrates to superb effect how racism in America has long operated as a codified and sanctioned activity intended to enrich one group at the expense of another. Racism and white supremacy are the ideologies underpinning the economic exploitation of black people, once given legal force by Jim Crow laws.

In stories with doubles the dynamic of the relationship between the two juxtaposed characters conveys the play of the ideas behind their respective attitudes or aspirations. As Whitehead acknowledges in his afterword to the novel,

> For Elwood, […] if you stand up, if you fight for justice, you can remake the world. Turner, on the other hand, has survived by seeing the world as it actually is, not as we want it to be […]. When Elwood and Turner meet, their debate about how to live and exist begins, and for me, that's the heart of the novel—the war between these two philosophies. (217)

The direct confrontation of opposite philosophies takes place when Turner makes himself sick to visit El in the school's hospital, where the latter is recovering from a brutal beating at the White House for the "infraction" of trying to stop a fight between two boys. For Turner, "there's nothing in here that changes people. In here and out there are the same, but in here no one has to act fake anymore" (79). In contrast, El is for fighting injustice both in the school and everywhere else, arguing that if you do not denounce injustice you are implicated (79) and that nowadays "We can stand up for ourselves" (80). For Turner there is no possibility of changing things, and his strategy is to survive, both in and outside the school: "you got to see how people act, and then you got to figure out how to get around them like an obstacle course. If you want to walk out of here" (80). Turner admires El's sturdiness but dislikes his idealism and bookishness. He sees wickedness everywhere and in everybody and teaches El, who is a voracious reader like Cora in *The Underground Railroad*, about "something that wasn't in books" (103), like the place where they tie up black boys and beat them to death. After this episode the process of convergence between El and Turner accelerates. El first learns to keep silent and quickly hits on a scheme that combines Turner's advice with what he has learned from his heroes in the movement: "Watch and think and plan" (84).

In chapter 11, we find El in New York City, during the 1968 garbage strike, and from here to the conclusion, the author intersperses chapters about El's struggles at the school with chapters about his later life. He works for a moving company and hopes to set up one of his own soon. We are privy to a reflection of his which relates external mobility with shifts in personality, a motif which frequently figures in stories of the double: "People get rid of plenty when they move—sometimes they're changing not just places but personalities" (136). In retrospect, this observation offers a clue to the surprising revelation in the novel's epilogue that Jack Turner has assumed the identity of his former friend and foil and has moved indeed, both physically and morally. It turns out that, after a period of keeping his head down to avoid trouble, El came to reproach himself for being "like one of those Negroes Dr. King spoke of in his letter from jail, so complacent and sleepy after years of oppression that they had adjusted to it and learned to sleep in it as their only bed" (154), and finally decided on a way he could "Get rid of Nickel" (156). In chapter 13, in 1988, before the shocking revelation about the change of identity, we get an indication of the progressive movement of Turner, now El, to a belief in human cooperation and togetherness that characterized his dead friend whose identity he has adopted both legally and psychologically: "Every November the race [New York marathon] pitted his skepticism about human beings against the fact that they were all in this city together, unlikely cousins" (158)—a belief in human togetherness and solidarity that the cynical old Turner did not have. He now expresses a celebration of the endurance required to prevail over the relentless competitiveness of city life: "*You can do it*" (158–59; emphasis in

the original), which we cannot but associate with the El who admired King and the civil rights activists.

In the chapter 14 flashback to Nickel we learn that El, inspired by the teachings and calls to action of Martin Luther King, had made detailed notes about the "community service" deliveries and all the corruption and the torture, to give to one of the inspectors that were coming to the school. When he concedes that "No one else can get me out of here, just me" (171), El is signaling his convergence with Turner's tactics. Simultaneously, Turner moves over to El's position: He gives El's letter to one of the inspectors and later comes to save him from being beaten to death and the two of them run away together, in a scene that emphasizes the fact that now they form a blended and inseparable "*We*" (195; emphasis in the original). During the escape, El thinks about his plans "to take up the challenge again," to stand up to bring about change, whereas the more cynical and practical Turner thinks only of jumping a train and going to freedom in the North, where "a Negro could make something of himself. Be his own man. Be his own boss" (198). Later in the novel we realize that Turner has actually embodied the two contradictory impulses for years. In the epilogue we come to fully grasp the book's brilliant cover when we learn that El has completed the journey from civil death to physical death, as he was shot when the two inseparable friends were running away.[12] But the "*We*" persists, as Turner has actually been using the name Elwood Curtis since when he was only "two weeks out of Nickel" (200), which confirms that the convergence of the two doubles was practically completed already: "He used the name from then on when anybody asked, to honor his friend. *To live for him*" (200; emphasis mine). Reading retrospectively, we now comprehend the full literal meaning of the narrator's information in the prologue that "In New York City there lived a Nickel Boy who *went by the name of Elwood Curtis*" (5; emphasis mine). After going back to Florida in 1970 to get a copy of El's birth certificate, "he turned into a man he thought Elwood would have been proud of" and "In El's name he tried to find another way" (202–03), this "(an)other way" being living out the dignity and the commitment El always stood for.

Identity has always been a key issue in stories of the double, and Turner's wife Millie is not sure if the man she married is Elwood or Turner (203), while he faces the persistent question, "Who was he?" (204). Milica Zivkovic asserts that "From 18th century gothic fiction and English Romanticism to the modern fantastic in horror films, the double motif has tried to erode this pillar of society—the unified and coherent subject, questioning the possibility of fictional representation of its unity" (127). Now Turner, who has incorporated into himself his former friend and foil, remembers "Elwood and his fine moral imperatives and his very fine ideas about the capacity of human beings to improve" (205); and indeed, he is living proof of this same capacity. Now Turner/El feels differently and joins the fight for reparations, while significantly acknowledging that his bravado had been something to cover his fear.

At the novel's conclusion, Turner is in Florida, making arrangements to pay for a decent burial of El's remains and to tell him "How that moment [when Elwood was cut down in the pasture] grew in Turner and *changed his life course*" (207; my emphasis). The novel suggests a small-scale parallel between El and his aspirational hero Martin Luther King: They are both "cut down," but their spirit lives in others who are inspired to carry the torch. Whitehead's novel gives us reason to believe that Turner, who has never had any caring adult to watch over him and had perfectly figured out how to function inside the detention facility without many avoidable complications, would not have conducted himself successfully and with a high moral compass had it not been for the influence of his dead friend and foil, in a society which did not provide any social services for people like him, who was marked for life by detention centers.

The shocking revelation of a change in legal and character identity that the author ties to the motif of the double makes perfect sense, as it looks back to its origins in romantic gothic fiction and is simultaneously rooted in real experience: It all takes place in a racist society in which mistaken identity was the living condition of many black Americans, many of whom were mistaken for another and often even lynched as a result. With his changed identity, Turner/El takes advantage of the fact that in American society the racialized white gaze produces not only hypervisibility but also invisibility of the racialized body and subject: The hypervisibility of being othered as different and dangerous, and associated to negative stereotypes, which is what initially led to El's detention and incarceration, and the invisibility of having one's individuality systematically unacknowledged, which in the present allows Turner to pass as El.

The Nickel Boys, a story of imprisonment, has ultimately turned out to be a narrative of redemption as well. The unanticipated reappearance of Elwood in a transformed Turner is both a tragedy and an assertion of hope, as well as an eventual triumph of the former's "sturdiness" and moral decency. He represents something immortal that lives on in Turner, who has finally chosen community over defection and affirmation over denial, and whose former attempts to distance himself from his friend's moral rectitude turned out to be merely a manifestation of selfish complacency. Jerry Cooper, one of the survivors of the Dozier school and the president of the White House Boys, one of the support groups that forced Florida's political leaders to take action, said about the survivors of the beatings and the violent deaths: "A lot of them ended up in prison […] They literally turned monsters loose, monsters that they created" (Luscombe). It was Turner's decision to adopt the identity of his friend and foil El that made him a good angel instead of a moral monster. That is the only way that Turner-turned-into-El can save himself and follow King's clarion call that "*we must walk the streets of life every day with this sense of dignity and this sense of somebody-ness*" (24–25; italics in the original). El's efforts, which used

to seem futile to Turner, have indeed made a difference, something Turner himself did not even imagine or intend when he took El under his wing upon the latter's arrival at the school.

Balance has been restored and a process of mutual enhancement and psychic convergence of the two foils has taken place. El was, and is, to a certain extent, that area of his self that Turner had insisted on repressing but has now incorporated. After all, doubles have a tradition of being simultaneously external and internal, and the relationship between two foils or character doubles is generally both intra- and intersubjective. Instead of the greater division which results in fictions about (self-) destructive rivalry between the character doubles, Whitehead's novel asserts a tendency toward psychic unification of complementary characters, the result being in this case a new hybrid psyche, instead of the mutual destruction of the doubles as in Poe's "William Wilson." The example of El has helped Turner to gain a new understanding of the need for social and racial commitment and to increase his awareness of reality, and the loss of his friend has led Turner, now El, to self-discovery and self-recovery. The two conflicting approaches to the situation of race in the United States that the author projected onto his two respective characters are like a Hegelian postulate of thesis and antithesis (the idealism and hope of El versus the realism and cynicism of Turner) that has led to resolution in a higher synthesis. The substitution of an inclusive logic of both/and for the reductive binarism of either/or brings about liberation from a confining psychological prison from which the author himself wants to escape through the liberating double-mindedness that he projects onto El and Turner, respectively.

With her ghost story about Parchman prison and his fictional investigation into the unmarked graves of the infamous Dozier school, respectively, Jesmyn Ward and Colson Whitehead function as "mediums" that invoke the dead and the silent and engage in what Toni Morrison described as the responsibility of writing "for all these people; these unburied, or at least unceremoniously buried, people made literate in art" (Naylor and Morrison 585). Ward allows the ghosts to sing for black southerners physically and socially killed by racism, and Whitehead speaks for the black boys of the "pain factories" whose lives were forgotten or never noticed and unburies the dead from the unmarked graves to which a national history has hastily confined them.[13] *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and *The Nickel Boys* can thus be read as instances of what Kathleen Brogan calls "secondary burials": Narratives in which unceremoniously buried victims of neoslavery are exhumed "to be reburied properly in the novel's narrative tomb" (27). Thus, the dead are integrated, rather than consigned to oblivion, and the past is incorporated into a revised history. Both Ward and Whitehead partake in the task that Joanne Chassot, writing about *Beloved*, describes as "the apparent contradiction of a literary and political project that simultaneously attempts to bury and dig up the dead" (32).

Notes

1 In *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin tells his nephew about the self-harming delusion of the white racists, "those innocents who believed that your imprisonment made them safe and [are] losing their grasp on reality" (294).
2 According to Orlando Patterson, "If the slave no longer belonged to a community, if he had no social existence outside of his master, then what was he? The initial response in almost all slaveholding societies was to define the slave as a socially dead person" (38).
3 Overrepresentation of blacks in prison is indeed one of the foundational characteristics of the American nation: according to Peter Caster, "Ever since the Boston Selectmen's 1723 proclamation that a gathering of 'more than two Indians, Negroes or Mulatto servants or slaves' was a punishable offense, and the overrepresentation of black men and women began in the nation's first prison, there has been a demonstrated willingness to name black and poor people as criminals" (203).
4 According to David Oshinsky, in the early days of this institution, "Juveniles comprised about 20 percent of the Parchman inmate population" and "Virtually all the juveniles were black" (283, n7).
5 According to Oshinsky, "Parchman was a dangerous, deadly place. Shootings and beatings were common; murders went unreported; the maximum security unit was a torture chamber" (245).
6 For the information about Parchman prison, I am heavily indebted to David Oshinsky.
7 The "black beast rapist" narrative gained ascendancy in the late 1880s. Referring to the deep psychological effects of the recession of the late 1880s and the depression of the 1890s in the South, Joel Williamson argues: "It seems fully possible that the rage against the black beast rapist was a kind of psychic compensation. If white men could not provide for their women materially as they had done before, they could certainly protect them from a much more awful threat—the outrage of their purity, and hence their piety, by black men" (82).
8 "I can't breathe" is a slogan associated with the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States. The phrase originates from the last words of Eric Garner, an unarmed black man who was killed in 2014 after being put in a chokehold by a New York policeman. Several other African Americans, such as Javier Ambler, Manuel Ellis, Elijah McClain and George Floyd, have said the same phrase prior to dying during similar law-enforcement encounters. According to a 2020 report by the *New York Times*, the phrase has been used by over 70 people who died in police custody (see Baker et al.).
9 See Childs 5–6 for George Jackson's use of the term "neoslavery."
10 Trayvon Martin was the unarmed 17-year-old African American who was shot dead in Sanford, Florida, on February 20, 2012, because he looked suspicious to a white community watcher. The outrage resulting from the acquittal of his killer, George Zimmerman, on July 13, 2013, sparked the Black Lives Matter Movement.
11 DeLombard takes the term from Claudia Rankine and her husband John Lucas's video series *Situations*.
12 The cover of the first edition shows a drawing of two black boys standing next to one another and projecting a single shadow.
13 Noticing that all the former prisoners of Nickel who have been active on the website about the place are white, the new Turner who passes as El asks: "Who spoke for the black boys? It was time someone did" (207).

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4 Pathologizing Race, Pathologizing Metastatic Racism

From Lillian Smith to Ibram Kendi

Constante González Groba

In Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help* (2009), set in the early 1960s, we are given a clear example of the kind of tools that white southern women used against African Americans in the days of segregation in Jackson, Mississippi.[1] The most racist character in *The Help* is Hilly Holbrook, who refers to African Americans as "those *other* people" (205; italics in the original). Like most of the other white women in the novel, Hilly nourishes her body with food prepared by black maids, while emotionally she is dependent on an invigorating diet of the dogma of white supremacy, a doctrine which renders black people as inferior beings who should be geographically or socially quarantined. Hilly is obsessed with the idea that whites must protect themselves from the diseases of black people, as seen in the note that she gives to her friend Skeeter to publish in the Newsletter of the Junior League of Jackson:

> *Hilly Holbrook introduces the Home Help Sanitation Initiative. A disease preventative measure. Low-cost bathroom installation in your garage or shed, for homes without such an important fixture.*
>
> *Ladies, did you know that:*
>
> - *99% of all colored diseases are carried in the urine*
> - *Whites can become permanently disabled by nearly all of these diseases because we lack immunities coloreds carry in their darker pigmentation*
> - *Some germs carried by whites can also be harmful to coloreds too*
>
> *Protect yourself. Protect your children. Protect your help.*
>
> *From the Holbrooks, we say, You're welcome!* (Stockett 158; italics in the original)

Stockett's novel exposes the contradictions of whites that benefit from their intimate but unequal relations with blacks, contradictions that are similar to the ones that Homi Bhabha detects in colonial societies, in which "The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food)" (118). In the segregated South as depicted by

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Stockett, black maids cook and clean for whites and nurse their children, but they cannot eat at the same table or use the same bathrooms.

The so-called organism metaphor draws an analogy between the national or social body and a physical body, and as Gerald O'Brien argues, "A prevalent theme in the use of the organism metaphor, as one might guess, is the possible contamination of the healthy segments of society by the unhealthy segments" (18), and "concepts such as disgust, pollution, and contagion are integral to the organism metaphor" (21). Disease has always been a significant political tool in the construction of the racial Other, and there is a long and persistent tradition of arguments revolving around disease and disability to justify racial oppression, be it in the form of slavery, segregation or structural racism. As noted by the historian of American racism Evelynn Hammonds, racists are characterized by "the belief that there is some kind of fundamental differences between human groups that matter in their bodies, that determines their health or their illness," a strategy that involves them "looking away from the kinds of social factors that impact health and illness and ability for people to work at their fullest capacities in the society that we were creating" (Hammonds). The refusal to look at social structures allows for the naturalization of the African American Other at the bottom of society. Considering African Americans to be biologically different assumes that it is natural for them to be at the bottom, and that they are indeed not fit to occupy any higher social position.

In her essay "Racism and Fascism," Toni Morrison describes one of the steps leading to the "final solution" in a Fascist system: "Pathologize the enemy in scholarly and popular mediums; recycle, for example, scientific racism and the myths of racial superiority in order to naturalize the pathology" (14). The use of the threat of uncleanness and disease as a political tool to exclude African Americans has a long tradition in the United States, a nation in whose very origins there was a highly infectious convergence of race, biology and politics. As Dorothy Roberts observes,

> Making race a biological concept served an important ideological function in revolutionary America. Biological difference was essential to justifying the enslavement of Africans in a nation founded on a radical commitment to liberty, equality, and natural rights. White Americans had to explain black subjugation as a natural condition, not one they imposed by brute force for the nation's economic profit. (24)

The conception of blacks as a threat to the purity of the social body can be traced back to the very beginnings of slavery, when whites sought to reconcile their racist practices with their professed Christianity by considering blacks as biologically inferior, as little more than animals with no soul and naturally destined for servitude and forced labor. As Eduardo Mendieta observes about the plantation system, "the anti-miscegenation laws established the black body as possession of the white master and as a polluting

element within the body politic. Its presence is allowed but as the mark of dispossession. To be tainted by blackness entails servitude" (51).

The Civil War years brought with them a proliferation of racist theories. One well-known advocate of the continuation of slavery was the New York physician Dr. J. H. Van Evrie, described by George Fredrickson as "interesting and significant as a theorist because his attack on the Negro character was accompanied by what appears to be a peculiarly radical conception of white democracy" (92). Van Evrie attacked class differences among American whites and predicted that American egalitarian democracy would defeat the despotisms of Europe. But, as Fredrickson notes, "his concept of white equality was calculated to appeal to socially insecure whites in search of a compensatory foundation for personal pride and status" (93). His aim was to persuade white working men that African Americans were biologically, and thus permanently, inferior. In his book *Negroes and Negro "Slavery": The First an Inferior Race: The Latter Its Normal Condition* (1861), this self-proclaimed scientist contended that slavery was the "normal condition" of African Americans, and that "the social order of the South" encouraged the "civilization, progress, and general welfare of both races" (201). He assured fellow racists that the parental affections of black people were very weak and that "the strongest affection" a slave "is capable of feeling is love for his master" (191). Free blacks were unnatural and "destined to extinction" in the American Anglo-Saxon nation (309). In a previous, shorter version of *Negroes and Negro "Slavery,"* subtitled *Introductory Number: Causes of Popular Delusion on the Subject* (1853), he had already asserted that the African American "is not a black white man, or a man merely with a black skin, but a DIFFERENT AND INFERIOR SPECIES OF MAN" (2, emphasis in the original), and that his brain is much smaller than that of Caucasians and thus "its acquisition of knowledge is limited to a single generation, and incapable of transmitting this to subsequent ones" (29). He warned that "intermingling the blood of races essentially different" would lead to "social suicide" (18).

Another proponent of "scientific racism" who merits mention here is Samuel Adolphus Cartwright, a noted doctor from Louisiana and professor of "diseases of the Negro" at the University of Louisiana, now Tulane University. In his widely read "Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race," he categorized diseases specific to blacks, one of them termed "drapetomania" which affects enslaved blacks, and which he described as "the disease causing Negroes to run away." The disease is best prevented if the white enslaver "keeps [the negro] in the position that we learn from the Scriptures he was intended to occupy, that is, the position of submission." It did not occur to the doctor to categorize slavery as something unnatural, and instead he pathologized "drapetomania," effectively saying that slavery is the natural state for African Americans. On the other hand, free blacks, who were at a disadvantage because they did not have whites taking care of them, frequently suffered from "dysaesthesia,"

which Cartwright describes as "a partial insensibility of the skin, and so great a hebetude of the intellectual faculties, as to be like a person half asleep, that is with difficulty aroused and kept awake" (Cartwright). As Dorothy Roberts notes, "By converting race into biological difference, Cartwright could ingenuously turn enslavement of Africans into a form of freedom and turn black freedom into slavery" (89).

The same doctrine of black biological inferiority which served as a rationale to justify slavery was used years later to justify post-emancipation variants of oppression. After slavery was abolished, white southerners became even more obsessed with asserting their superiority over African Americans, and all kinds of medical and scientific theories were used in favor of the need for segregation, for maintaining the "purity" of the South's ethnic and social body. Part of the southern myth of the Lost Cause was the idea that slavery had been a "positive good," that African Americans actually suffered from their emancipation and were as a result afflicted by numerous physical and mental diseases. To justify slavery and the subjugation of blacks that followed Reconstruction, disease was rendered a political and social tool to instill fear and a hate of non-whites who threatened the survival of the white South. The Lost Cause advocate Myrta Lockett Avary was one of many who propagated the belief that slavery had protected blacks from their savagery and defective biology. In her book *Dixie after the War* (1906), she claimed that

> After freedom, they [blacks] began to die of pulmonary complaints. There were frequent epidemics of typhoid fever, quarters not being well kept. "The race is dying out," said prophets. Negroes began to grow mad. An insane negro was rarely heard of during slavery. Regular hours, regular work, chiefly out of doors, sobriety, freedom from care and responsibility had kept the negro singularly exempt from insanity and various other afflictions that curse the white. Big lunatic asylums established for negroes soon after the war and their continual enlargement tell their own story. (196)

Another proponent of what Fredrickson terms "the degeneracy myth" (258) was Dr. Eugene Rollin Corson, a well-known physician from Savannah, Georgia. In 1893, he published a paper on "The Vital Equation of the Colored Race and Its Future in the United States" which continued the persistent practice of explaining the catastrophic symptoms of racial oppression as symptoms of disease. Corson attributed the high mortality rate of blacks not to environmental conditions or social exclusion, but to the end of the "old regime [of slavery], where they were well cared for." He argued that the younger generations of blacks, deprived from birth of the paternalistic protection of slavery, were liable to be even more widely affected by a variety of diseases which supposedly affected blacks more than whites. The excessively high rate of black mortality simply confirmed "the teachings of

ethnology and biology" about the anatomical and physical inferiority of African Americans. And because they did not have the intelligence to care for themselves, they rapidly reverted to savagery once freed from the control of slave owners. Dr. Corson's final verdict was that the black race would ultimately disappear, a victim of "the struggle for existence against a superior race" (qtd. in Fredrickson 248). As Susan Schweik argues, the

> concept of disease has long been tied to racial hierarchies, and the barrage of statistics brought forth in the name of socio-medical racism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries hammered home the point that blacks posed a major health and social menace. (194, qtd. in Lawrie 379)

In 1896 the German-born insurance statistician Frederick L. Hoffman published the book *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, described by Fredrickson as "the most influential discussion of the race question to appear in the late nineteenth century" (249). The book proposed the so-called extinction thesis and helped to convince most white insurance companies that they should not provide cover for blacks, since being a member of this racial group brought with it an unacceptable risk. In a letter to Edward Eggleston (5 August 1910), a racial propagandist from Virginia, Hoffman wrote that, partly as a result of his research, "our company [the Prudential] has not for a number of years insured Negroes except in cases where we were compelled to do so in compliance with the Law" (qtd. in Fredrickson 250, n36). Hoffman did not share the worries of those who feared that the black population might come to outnumber the whites. He contended, rather, that the black mortality rate had increased dramatically since emancipation, at which time the black population had been in excellent physical condition. The high rates of tuberculosis, syphilis and venereal diseases among black citizens were due to racial characteristics, not to social exclusion or environmental conditions. Some diseases were the result of the "inferior organisms and constitutional weakness" (Hoffman 66) of African Americans and others originated from "the fact of an immense amount of immorality which is a race trait, and of which scrofula, syphilis, and even consumption are the inevitable consequences" (Hoffman 95). The prediction was that all these characteristics and tendencies would in the end cause the extinction of the black race on American soil, which in our present time reads like an early and implicit subscription to the idea that black lives do not matter, as well as acquiescing to the so-called "biopolitics of disposability."[2] This was, after all, the period in which, according to Paul Lawrie, "The demands of rapid industrialization, imperialism, and mass consumerism required the creation of the 'vanishing Negro'" (379), a concept which promised social progress and more options for white workers in a period of rapid industrialization and urbanization, reassuring the white workforce that blacks were biologically incapable of overtaking them in

the fierce competition of capitalistic America. Blacks seemed to be naturally destined for disease and gradual extinction, whereas white Americans were naturally selected to succeed in the American dream of vigorous health and successful life.

From the very beginning, racist arguments for biological differences and a purported pathological inferiority of African Americans were counteracted by antiracist arguments for human equality and respect for variety. In the history of the racially segregated American South, the figure of Lillian Smith (1897–1966) deserves special attention. She was one of the very few white southerners of her time to denounce racial segregation, which she opposed in practically all her fiction, articles, speeches and journalism. Following close on the heels of the northern abolitionists, who had identified slavery itself as a disease, as a cancer on the body politic of the nation, Smith displaced the trope of disability to whites. She was one of the first southern whites to see the disease in terms of what Fredrickson describes as "the pathological white tendency to seize upon racial identity as a foundation for status" (95). Consequently, she turned the racist argument on its head, diagnosing the segregated South as a pathological society and explaining how segregation made southerners psychologically sick. Her best-known work is her autobiography, *Killers of the Dream* (1949, revised 1961), a "racial conversion narrative," as Fred Hobson refers to those autobiographies in which a white southerner comes to terms with their region's racial guilt and becomes a convert to a new southern reality, one previously hidden by the myth of their own family's sense of its history (Hobson1-2). In the book, Smith describes the enforced rituals of white supremacy which turn white children into automatons, and notes: "These ceremonials in honor of white supremacy, performed from babyhood, slip from the conscious mind down deep into muscles and glands and become difficult to tear out" (*Killers* 96). Political power penetrates the bodies of white children and haunts their childhoods. In the culture of segregation in which Lillian Smith was raised, the body itself became a site of political contention. Segregation is, after all, a system in which bodies are not allowed to be whole or to extend naturally in space, and their impenetrability and sanctity are always vulnerable, carrying as they do sexual and racial marks.

Segregation irreparably damages the psychological health of blacks as well as whites. Southern children do not grow up healthy and free. On the contrary, Smith notes, "we are stunted and warped and in our lifetime cannot grow straight again any more than can a tree, put in a steel-like twisting frame when young, grow tall and straight when the frame is torn away at maturity" (*Killers* 39. To be a southerner is to be the victim of a social system that is an instrument of torture, making one socially and psychically deformed. And this torture and deformity affects children of both races:

> I began to understand slowly at first but more clearly as the years passed, that the warped, distorted frame we have put around every Negro child

> from birth is around every white child also. Each is on a different side of the frame but each is pinioned there. And I knew that what cruelly shapes and cripples the personality of one is as cruelly shaping and crippling the personality of the other. (*Killers* 39)

She repeatedly sounds the same note as James Baldwin, who warns that "*Whoever debases others is debasing himself*" ("Down" 334; italics in the original) and reminds whites that "Our dehumanization of the Negro then is indivisible from our dehumanization of ourselves: the loss of our own identity is the price we pay for the annulment of his" ("Many" 20).

Lillian Smith stresses the idea that the private and the social body come together, and she was the writer who most explicitly described the connections between racial and sexual segregation, which to her were powerful emblems of the cultural schizophrenia of southern society. In one well-known passage she establishes a metaphorical parallel between the segregated parts of the white female child's body and the segregated spaces of southern towns, and simultaneously points to the toxic alliance between the legacy of racial segregation and that of Victorian sexual repression. For a white southern child to explore blackness entails as great a risk as exploring one's own body:

> By the time we were five years old we had learned, without hearing the words, that masturbation is wrong and segregation is right, and each had become a dread taboo that must never be broken, for we believed God, whom we feared and tried desperately to love, had made the rules concerning not only Him and our parents, but our bodies and Negroes. Therefore when we as small children crept over the race line and ate and played with Negroes or broke other segregation customs known to us, we felt the same dread fear of consequences, the same overwhelming guilt we felt when we crept over the sex line and played with our body. (*Killers* 83–84)

The God that sanctions segregation and instills in whites a fear of dark people and an obsession with racial purity is the same God that instills in the faithful a fear of the creative powers of their own bodies. Sexuality is dark and should be repressed with the same vehemence as blacks, and in the South the mythologization of the purity of the white woman desexualizes her and makes white womanhood a source of oppression and the reason for many brutal lynchings of black males. In fact, at the core of the doctrine inculcated into southern children is the principle that "not only Negroes but everything dark, dangerous, evil must be pushed to the rim of one's life" (*Killers* 90). Thus the white southerner is turned into a psychologically fractured and diminished being by his own culture, one that suppresses not only the humanity of blacks but also the creative and precious darkness in himself or herself. For Smith, then, integration is more than a strategy to improve race relations; it is the effort

to cure the psychological fractures of the individual and to stop the compartmentalization of a culture characterized by locked doors that prevent the free flow of vital energies. She was insistent in voicing her concern regarding what segregation does to white children, which is in some ways a sort of reflection of that done to black children, since within a culture of segregation both are marked by the same deprivation of healthy emotional growth.

Lillian Smith always studied the workings of racism in terms of psychological illness and the social harm it caused. She considered southern culture as schizophrenic, underlining the parallel between racism splitting the world and its splitting of the racist's personality. For Smith the schizophrenic is the person who "has completely lost his ability to love and to make human identifications," and she was convinced that

> when we reserve this humanity of ours, this precious quality of love, of tenderness, and of imaginative identification, for only people of our skin color […] we have split our lives in a way shockingly akin to those sick people whom we call schizophrenics. ("Humans" 38)

A seminal idea in the work of Smith is Mahatma Gandhi's view that colonial situations split and diminish the personalities of both the victims and the victimizers equally.[3] In a letter to Guy B. Johnson, executive director of the Southern Regional Council, she described segregation as "spiritual lynching" and maintained that "the lynched and the lynchers are our own people, our own selves" (in Gladney 87). She denounced the severe harm that the practice of segregation, "a form of cultural schizophrenia, bearing a curious resemblance to the schizophrenia of individual personality" (in Gladney 86), does to every southern child, both black and white, marked as they are by the same deprivation of healthy emotional growth in a culture of segregation:

> No colored child in our South is being given today what his personality needs in order to grow and mature richly and fully. No white child, under the segregation pattern, can be free of arrogance and hardness of heart, and blindness to human need—and hence no white child can grow freely and creatively under the crippling frame of segregation. (Gladney 87)

She could hardly be more specific in her description of the connection between racial segregation and psychological fracture, of the immense spiritual damage of an illusory racial identity.

It was Smith's conviction that the culture of segregation split the mind of southerners that impelled her to write *Killers of the Dream*, in order to show that for her segregation was not just an issue of racial harm, but also constituted a psychologically harming alienation from reality, and to persuade fellow southerners "that [they could] no longer lean on walls that do

not exist," that they should "accept [themselves] and all the earth's people as human beings," and in so doing could make "a world of open spaces with no walls in minds or between nations to throw their shadows across [their] children's lives" (in Gladney 132).[4] For the world to change, each individual should change themself, and for the change to happen it is indispensable to tear down the walls that today still shape our thinking and our culture, walls that in the Jim Crow South, according to Smith, turned people's minds "into segregated compartments," so much so that southerners could "believe simultaneously in brotherhood and racial discrimination" ("The Moral" 95). Indeed, Smith defines racial discrimination as "a strong wall behind which weak egos have hidden for a long time" ("Ten Years" 62). Segregation, with its psychologically comforting division into white and black, into pure and impure, is a psychological defense mechanism. Mental walls provide a false sense of security and serve to satisfy misguided mental needs; they don't so much protect us from dangerous others as from our own anxieties and fears; they are built more for those who live inside than for those outside. When we build a wall, we are really building a state of mind, a source of mental ease, a protection against the unknown in ourselves. In this sense, a wall is an implicit admission of vulnerability on the part of what Smith terms "weak egos." According to Costica Bradatan, in an article about the obsession of right-wing politicians to build a wall along the entire US-Mexico border, "Once the wall has been erected, it acquires a life of its own and structures people's lives according to its own rules. It gives them meaning and a sense of direction" ("Scaling"). This is precisely the point that Lillian Smith made when she argued that "many southerners have used the walls of segregation so long to lean on psychologically that they will find it very hard to stand on their own feet as human beings, when the walls go," with the risk of collapse into mental illness. She adds that "It is going to be hard for every one of us, no matter how stable and objective, to create within our own minds the new image of ourselves as mature human beings" ("Ten Years" 63) independently of the color of our skin.

Firmly convinced that a racist society is pathological, Lillian Smith did not merely analyze the spiritual sickness of the South from the perspective of Freudianism and Christian humanism. She also had the firm conviction that direct sociopolitical action is necessary if we want to change a social situation. Psychoanalysis alone can do very little to stop oppression or irrational fears if we do not change the status of the victims, that is if we do not change the pathogenic context. She became a friend and associate of Martin Luther King Jr. and agreed wholeheartedly with his policy of direct nonviolent action, with his labeling of racism as a "disease" whose cure could only be nonviolent direct action.[5] And in all her calls for urgent direct action, Smith made ample use of illness as metaphor. She conceived of herself as one of the writers hated by rural white southerners for writing honestly about the South, which for her is "as irrational as hating a doctor for telling you that you are ill" (*Killers* 192). Lillian Smith had a 13-year fight with

breast cancer from 1953 until her death in 1966, and indeed she used this same disease as a metaphor in the 1950s, the decade when the need was most urgent to find a cure for cancer, an illness that was so common and so troubling in the United States. Her fervent crusade for the civil rights of the black population in the 1950s coincided with the efforts of Sidney Farber and Mary Lasker, two oncologists who purposely used the word "crusade" in their battle against cancer. In *The Emperor of Maladies: A Biography of Cancer*, Siddhartha Mukherjee describes this crucial juncture in medical science as "a scientific battle imbued with such fanatical intensity that only a religious metaphor could capture its essence." He adds that "they would stop at nothing to drag even a reluctant nation toward it" (115), which was essentially the same tactic used by the civil rights leaders that Smith inspired and with whom she associated.

In the pathology of cancer, Lillian Smith found an appropriate and fitting metaphor for the values of the culture of segregation of her native South, a culture which she saw as a type of totalitarianism that harms the whole social body if left unchecked and out of control. In *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) Susan Sontag argues that "it is diseases thought to be multi-determined (that is, mysterious [, like cancer]) that have the widest possibilities as metaphors for what is felt to be socially or morally wrong" (62). In the final chapter, originally titled "Disease as Political Metaphor" (Sabini 272), Sontag notes: "Illnesses have always been used as metaphors to enliven charges that a society was corrupt or unjust. Traditional disease metaphors are principally a way of being vehement" (73). Lillian Smith was the most vehement white southern liberal of her time, to the point that she sometimes seemed like the bad psychiatrist who shouts at her "patients." As Sontag says, "The cancer metaphor seems hard to resist for those who wish to register indignation" (84). Cancer is an expansionist disease, like racism or colonialism, which Lillian Smith saw as parallels here, describing them as two cancers that metastasized throughout the world.

In order to avoid metastasis, the expansion of her breast cancer, Lillian Smith bravely and resolutely underwent a radical mastectomy in 1953. She saw racism as an equally malignant growth which would metastasize rapidly and implacably unless radical measures were taken to prevent the destruction of the whole social body. Consequently, she never had any patience with those southerners who opposed radical measures and who defended gradualism, usually in resistance to interference from the North. On 5 December 1956, the first anniversary of the bus boycott at Montgomery, Alabama, a speech by Lillian Smith was read to the civil rights workers and the organizers of the Institute on Non-Violence and Social Change. In the speech, entitled "The Right Way Is Not a Moderate Way," Smith wrote that "moderation never made a man or a nation great. Moderation never mastered ordeal or met a crisis successfully. Moderation never discovered anything; never invented anything; never dreamed a new dream" (68). She lamented that the "so-called moderates are doing nothing," that is, "they

are suffering from temporary moral and psychic paralysis" (72). The speech influenced Martin Luther King Jr., who paid close attention to Smith's arguments and kept a copy of the speech among his papers. Smith faced the same fierce opposition from gradualist white liberals that King encountered from accommodationist black leaders who preferred to patiently wait for those in power to extend equality or to ask judges to defend their constitutional rights. In *Now Is the Time* (1955) she flatly rejects the contention that "segregation cannot be done away with overnight" as "silly": "A house is not built overnight but it is built, often, in six months" (91).[6] Both King and Smith rejected the gradualists' argument that the natural flow of time would solve all problems, as if it were time alone that moved history, rather than those who critique and fight; they both had a different sense of time, reflected in King's famous assertion in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail": "We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right" (187). For Smith, the gradualists were "men who clung to their white culture as a cripple clings to his crutches" (*Killers* 136). King and Smith were among the first to recognize the importance and implications for the American nation of Gandhi's struggle to make British colonial rule in Asia illegitimate. They agreed on the urgent need for political paths that would function as radical alternatives to the trap of moderation that accommodated unjust social conditions, since in the end moderates agreed with the racist conception of the black person as a destitute child that needed help and protection. In a very significant parallel, there was during the same period in the United States a clash between two approaches to cancer research: The slow approach of Vannevar Bush, which consisted of long-term, basic scientific research, of waiting for fundamental questions about cancer to be solved before launching an all-out attack on the problem, and the urgent war on cancer demanded by Mary Lasker and Sidney Farber, who urged for strong commitment by Congress and the nation as a whole (Mukherjee 120–21). Mukherjee refers to the confrontation as "a deep intellectual divide that ran through the front lines of oncology: the rift between overmoderated caution and bold experimentation" (130).

In the speech "The Right Way Is Not a Moderate Way," which she could not deliver in person because of a momentary aggravation of her cancer, Lillian Smith compared people who fail to react to stop segregation because they are afraid and prefer to be tactful, with those

> who react in a similar way when they are told they have cancer. They decide to be moderate and do nothing; to rock along and postpone thinking about it. Why? Because they are scared. And, because of their fright, they convince themselves that if they do nothing, if they take a few vitamins, maybe, the cancer will go away. (69)

She explicitly warned fellow southerners against the self-defeating strategy of denial: "The tragic fact is, neither cancer nor segregation will go away

while we close our eyes. Both are dangerous diseases that have to be handled quickly and skilfully because they spread, they metastasize throughout the organism." And, being well aware of the interrelations between the individual physical body and the social body, she notes that "We have also seen sick race relations metastasize throughout our country—and indeed, throughout the whole earth" (69–70).

Smith's position on segregation is in essence no different from that of Sidney Farber on cancer. According to Mukherjee, Dr. Farber's fame grew in part because of his insistence that cancer "was a total disease—an illness that gripped patients not just physically, by psychically, socially, and emotionally" (Mukherjee 125). Both are problems that cannot be walled in, and in both cases there is no time to lose in facing them. Lillian Smith's warning to her fellow southerners, then, could not have been more urgent: "How we deal with this critical situation, how we face up to it, will determine our moral health as individuals, our cultural health as a region, our political health as a nation; and our prestige as a leader of democratic forces throughout the world" ("The Right Way" 71).

With her writings and speeches, Lillian Smith undoubtedly awoke many consciences in the United States, and her critical views on her country's racial practices contributed greatly to the growing calls for civil and legal transformation of the cancerous racist order during the 1940s and 1950s. I believe we can find parallels between some of her ideas and those of the contemporary black intellectual and historian Ibram Kendi. He has been writing against systemic racism with the same zeal as Lillian Smith did against segregation in her day and, since he was diagnosed with metastatic colon cancer in 2018, he has also been using the powerful metaphor of racism as a cancer that threatens the destruction of the body politic, spreading to the cells of courts, voting regulations, hospitals, schools, and prisons. Both Smith and Kendi make use of the metaphor of cancer to expose racism as a threat to the health of the social body and to denounce the inhumanity of racists who dehumanize marginalized groups; they use the organism metaphor which draws an analogy between the social body and the physical body—and which has been used persistently to justify the exclusion of undesired groups—as a vehicle for normative judgments about social conditions. For both writers, their aim is to foment disgust and revulsion at racist practices arising precisely from the dehumanization of vulnerable groups and to denounce those practices as a metastasized cancer that threatens the national body and indeed the whole world.

Kendi became an instant intellectual celebrity when he won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction for his book *Stamped from the Beginning*, with the somewhat pretentious subtitle *The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. He exhibits the same activist approach to scholarship that Lillian Smith displayed about literature and writing in general: She conceived of fiction not just as an aesthetic endeavor, but also as a vehicle for her political agenda to help the South and the whole of the nation to find a solution

to the racial problem. Similarly, Kendi's books are not so much for academic self-promotion as they are intended to change the world, and his preaching of the message urging Americans to find and diagnose racism and fight it with antiracist actions and policies is as vehement as Lillian Smith's. As a Christian humanist, Smith denounced the southern church for deviating from true Christianity and she sought to revive the religious impulse that had been so long dormant with respect to race.[7] Although Kendi is not a religious practitioner, he is driven by what Kelefa Sanneh calls "a kind of sacred fervor" that characterizes the present-day battle against racism. In his second book, *How to Be an Antiracist* (2019), Kendi makes explicit the connection between militant antiracism and religious zeal and makes a connection between his battle against racism and his parents' equation of progressive Christianity and antiracism: "I cannot disconnect my parents' religious strivings to be Christian from my secular strivings to be an antiracist" (*How* 17). On Kendi's parents, Sanneh notes that "They were inspired by Tom Skinner, a fiery black evangelist who preached the gospel of 'Jesus Christ the Radical,' and by James H. Cone, one of the originators of black-liberation theology" (Sanneh). Kendi's father went to hear Cone speak at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, and he asked Cone what makes a Christian. The reply was, "A Christian is one who is striving for liberation" (Kendi, "Is Your"). Kendi resolutely defends black liberation theology and compares two types of preachers: Those who "fundamentally preach about the problem being structural, racism, and society" and "use Jesus and the word to galvanize people to challenge society," and those who focus on saving and civilizing the individual and who forget that the problem is a racist system: "You have preachers who say the fundamental problem is the laziness of people, or the inability to not be violent" ("Is Your").

Kendi's approach is characterized by a rigid and uncompromising binarism: In a racist social system, attitudes and policies are either racist or antiracist, and being "not racist" is not a possibility. There are only racists who allow racist ideas to circulate, and antiracists who denounce racist ideas and policies and strive to eradicate them:

> One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an antiracist. One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of "not racist." (*How* 9)

He follows Dorothy Roberts in the conviction that "race is the product of racism; racism is not the product of race" (*Fatal* 25). He thus strongly rejects "the idea that ignorance and hate lead to racist ideas, which lead to racist policies" and expresses the firm belief that "In fact, self-interest leads to racist policies, which lead to racist ideas leading to all the ignorance and

hate" (*Stamped* 506). He defines racism as "a powerful collection of racist policies that are leading to racial inequality that are substantiated by racist ideas of racial hierarchy" (qtd. in Balch).

How to Be an Antiracist is apparently guided by Angela Davis's famous words, delivered in September 1979 at the Oakland Auditorium that Kendi himself quotes in *Stamped from the Beginning*: "In a racist society it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be antiracist" (429). Described by Jeffrey Stewart in a *New York Times* review as "a 21st-century manual of racial ethics," *How to Be an Antiracist* is, like Lillian Smith's *Killers of the Dream*, part personal memoir, part social analysis and part statement of policy principles and strategies for social change. I think we might describe the book metaphorically as being partly a black racial conversion narrative: A confessional self-examination that traces the author's own personal maturation and intellectual transformation, one in which he presents his personal trajectory as a model for becoming an antiracist. In the first section, "My Racist Introduction," Kendi provides a poignant examination of his own past racism, describing a day in 2000 when he gave a prizewinning speech at a Martin Luther King oratorial contest in Virginia. He remembers with shame the day of his "racist speech." "Racist," Kendi laments and confesses, because he deplored the bad habits of black youths, whose minds are still "in captivity" (6) because "They think it's okay to be those who are most feared in our society"; "They think it's okay not to think"; "They think it's okay to climb the high tree of pregnancy" and "to confine their dreams to sports and music!" (7). In his final year of high school, the young Kendi was unknowingly siding with certain racist black politicians of the Clinton years who blamed black youth for most of the problems of the black community. Comparing the wrong assumptions of his youth with his present thinking about race, Kendi acknowledges the importance of critical self-reflection and expresses his burning shame: "I didn't realize that to say something is wrong about a racial group is to say something is inferior about that racial group. I did not realize that to say something is inferior about a racial group is to say a racist idea" (*How* 7). Through reflecting on his own youthful mistake, Kendi has learned that blacks can be racists too, that "Internalized racism is the real Black on Black crime" (*How* 8). If racist ideas make white people think more of themselves, "Racist ideas make people of color think less of themselves, which makes them more vulnerable to racist ideas" (6). The speech was racist because it blamed blacks for their own failures, a practice that justifies the policies that cause and perpetuate black exclusion and underachievement. He was unknowingly giving in to the persistent misguided idea that there is something wrong with black people, and internalizing long-held notions of black inferiority and social pathology in a frequent form of black self-contempt and false consciousness which characterizes those unaware of how power operates within and through the subjectivities of those who are the target of oppression. As James Baldwin wrote in his "Open Letter to My Sister,

Angela Davis," "The American Triumph—in which the American tragedy has always been implicit—was to make black people despise themselves." One of Kendi's arguments is that "When the reaction to the Nazi Holocaust marginalized biological racism, cultural racism stepped into its place" (*How* 83). He exemplifies cultural racism through the writing of Gunnar Myrdal, who in his 1944 influential *An American Dilemma* judged black culture as a pathological deviation from the standard of the dominant white culture: "*In practically all its divergences, American Negro culture is not something independent of general American culture. It is a distorted development, or a pathological condition, of the general American culture*" (Myrdal 928; italics in the original).

Kendi's rigid definition of racism and racist ideas makes almost everyone in American history a racist, including not only influential black historical figures like Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois, but also Barack Obama. America's first black president was accused by Kendi and Ta-Nehisi Coates, as well as other significant figures—who demanded a serious acknowledgment of the structural racism that poisons America—of internalizing to different degrees some of the deeply entrenched white opinions about blacks, of siding with the assimilationists who traditionally argued that African Americans needed to change their behavior and improve their culture in order to assimilate into white society and catch up with white standards. Thus, Obama was taken to task over his famous 2008 speech about race as a presidential candidate. In the speech, Obama mixed what Kendi considers antiracist and assimilationist ideas: He lamented "the erosion of black families," which, although due in part to "a lack of economic opportunity," made it necessary for African Americans to face "our own complicity within the African American community in our condition" (Obama). For Ibram Kendi and Ta-Nehisi Coates, Obama's racial strategy was anything but radical, and he sold out to the thinking that the appalling statistics of black poverty and crime are the result of cultural pathologies that can be remedied through exceptional individual behavior. In complaining about Obama, Coates noted: "He declines to use his bully pulpit to address racism, using it instead to engage in the time-honored tradition of black self-hectoring, railing against the perceived failings of black culture" (*We Were* 135). Both Coates and Kendi identify Obama's approach with that of Booker T. Washington, included by Kendi in the group of the so-called assimilationists, those who propound "the racist idea that a racial group is culturally or behaviorally inferior and [support] cultural or behavioral enrichment programs to develop that racial group" (Kendi, *How* 24). The assimilationist paradigm, it can usefully be argued, should be corrected by Kendi's new concept of the antiracist, that is: "One who is expressing the idea that racial groups are equals and none needs developing, and is supporting policy that reduces racial inequity" (*How* 24).

Obama's "post-racial" pronouncements that place the blame on blacks themselves for their deplorable social conditions were reminiscent to Kendi

of the report "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," written in 1965 by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, President Johnson's Assistant Secretary of Labor. The document became a major milestone in the tradition of pathologizing the black community and attributing the problems to innate weaknesses and using these to justify oppression and neglect. The report demonstrated that civil rights legislation in the previous ten years had not improved the living conditions of black families, severely damaged by "three centuries of sometimes unimaginable mistreatment [that] have taken their toll on the Negro people" as well as by the "racist virus in the American blood stream [that] still affects us" (Moynihan). But Moynihan went on to make use of what Kendi calls "assimilationist ideas" (*Stamped* 391): Noting that almost one-fourth of black families were headed by women, he argued that discrimination had broken the black family and forced the black community

> into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well. (Moynihan)

In other words, families headed by females are inferior and black males, defeated and emasculated by discrimination, are even more oppressed than black women. As Angela Davis writes, "The controversial finale of the Moynihan Report was a call to introduce male authority (meaning male supremacy of course!) into the Black family and the community at large" (*Women* 10).

In one of the best-known passages from his report, Moynihan metaphorically identifies the black community with a diseased patient: "In a word, most Negro youth are in danger of being caught up in the tangle of pathology that affects their world, and probably a majority are so entrapped" (Moynihan). Coates argues that Moynihan's intention in writing the report had been to garner support for massive government intervention aimed at solving the structural social problems of black families, but "Instead his report was portrayed as an argument for leaving the black family to fend for itself" (*We Were* 228). Coates is as insistent as Kendi that it is prejudice that pathologizes black culture and that it was not any type of black inferiority that created the so-called "Negro problem," making a very explicit denunciation of Moynihan and the tradition of those intellectuals, even certain black ones, who consider that some of the problems of blacks are the fault of black people themselves:

> The laments about "black pathology," the criticism of black family structures by pundits and intellectuals, ring hollow in a country whose existence was predicated on the torture of black fathers, on the rape of black mothers, on the sale of black children. An honest assessment of

> America's relationship to the black family reveals the country to be not its nurturer but its destroyer. (*We Were* 201)

In the final chapter of *How to Be an Antiracist*, Kendi connects the metastatic stage-4 colon cancer he was diagnosed with in 2018, at the age of 35, with the racism of American society that he vehemently denounces. Like Lillian Smith, he also elaborates on the dangerous strategy of denial. When he fell ill in 2017, he ignored the symptoms for months. Even after the diagnosis, the denial persisted—surely it was only stage-1! Only days after the diagnosis, his article "The Heartbeat of Racism Is Denial" appeared in the *New York Times* (13 January 2018), arguing that "Only racists say they are not racist. Only the racist lives by the heartbeat of denial," whereas "The antiracist lives by the opposite heartbeat, one that rarely and irregularly sounds in America—the heartbeat of confession" ("Heartbeat" 235). Kendi immediately saw an analogy between his own denial of the ability to win his battle against cancer and "those denying our ability to succeed in the antiracism fight" (*How* 235). Like Lillian Smith before him, Kendi noticed that when you have cancer you are scared and feel instinctively reluctant to deal with it: If you do not deal with the cancer it will kill you, and similarly, if you do not resolutely deal with racism it will metastasize and pathologize the whole social body. In a later *New Republic* article (September 2020), Kendi turned his own denial of cancer into a metaphor for Americans in the Trump era telling themselves that racism "is a big problem, but it can't have spread to almost every part of the body politic" ("Is This?"). And he finds a telling parallel between the choice he faced when told he had stage-4 cancer (denial and death versus recognition and life) and the two choices his country faced during Trump's presidency: To get rid of Trump and decide that there is no need to be actively antiracist, thus denying "the true gravity of the problem and the need for drastic action," or to realize that the country and its citizens "are at a point of no return. No returning to the bad old habit of denial. No returning to cynicism. No returning to normal—the normal in which racist policies, defended by racist ideas, lead to racial inequities" ("Is This?").

For Kendi, the most effective antidote for racism is to perform surgery that removes racist policies and to systematically flood the body politic with antiracist policies. He urges the same impatient radicalism that Lillian Smith did in her day: To combat America's "metastatic racism" we must act radically and resolutely rather than taking refuge in the false neutrality of being "not racist." Like Smith, he says that he cannot separate his metastatic cancer from metastatic racism, and he equally advocates treating racism in the way we treat cancer, as well as making a connection of the respective plans of treatment. His recommended treatment: "Saturate the body politic with the chemotherapy or immunotherapy of antiracist policies that shrink the tumors of racial inequities, that kill undetectable cancer cells. Remove any remaining

racist policies, the way surgeons remove the tumors" (*How* 237–38). He goes one step further than Lillian Smith and explicitly urges humanity to make a connection between the urgent fight against cancer and the equally urgent fight against metastatic racism, which must begin by pouring more resources into scientific research than into a racialized criminal justice system: "What if humanity connected the two? Not just the number of people of all races who would not die each year from cancer if we launched a war against cancer instead of against bodies of color who kill us in lesser numbers" (*How* 237).

In the last paragraph of his book, Kendi sides with the pessimism of Ta-Nehisi Coates and others who see racism as a tumor which cannot be removed, one that Coates describes as "a pervasive system both native and essential to that [American social] body" (*We Were* 37). Kendi's conclusion draws on the same negativity: "But racism is one of the fastest-spreading and most fatal cancers humanity has ever known. It is hard to find a place where its cancer cells are not dividing and multiplying" (*How* 238).

As a Christian humanist, Lillian Smith insisted that racial segregation harmed both blacks and whites, but she focused almost exclusively on the psychological harm that racism does to whites. Kendi is aware of the harm that white supremacy does to whites, not as individuals but as a group; he singles out the racist whites who support Republican policies that harm white Americans, such as loose gun laws so that whites feel that they can protect themselves against violent blacks but which in fact result in white male gun-related suicides, or the rejection of provisions in the Affordable Care Act by Republican governors intent on excluding non-whites from access to services that could equally save white and black lives, and thus the fortunes of the families and communities involved. He explicitly expresses his agreement with Jonathan Metzl's position in *Dying of Whiteness*:

> White America's investment in maintaining an imagined place atop a racial hierarchy—that is, an investment in a sense of whiteness—ironically harms the aggregate well-being of US whites as a demographic group, thereby making whiteness itself a negative health indicator. (9, qtd. in Kendi, "The Greatest")

No doubt there is quite a stretch from the liberal Christian humanism of Lillian Smith, intent on moving hearts and minds to end racial segregation that harmed both blacks and whites, to Kendi's urgent insistence on the insufficiency of being simply "not racist" and his most polemical postulate that individual behavior can only affect the life of individuals, "But policies determine the success of groups. And it is racist power that creates the policies that cause racial inequities" (*How* 94). The disease to fight in our twenty-first century is not Jim Crow segregation but the systemic racism that persists and can be cured only with a treatment that Ibram Kendi calls antiracism, this through antiracist policies that lead to racial equality. Both Smith and Kendi coincide in the need to take drastic measures to extirpate

the cancer of racism that pathologizes certain social groups as inferior and detrimental to the social body's proper functioning. Indeed, one of the tenets that Kendi is insistent about is precisely that "One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an anti-racist" (*How* 9).

Notes

1 Some of the discussion of Lillian Smith in this chapter was previously included in the author's "Illness as Metaphor in the American South: Lillian Smith's Diagnosis of a Schizophrenic Culture and a Metastasized Social Body," *The Scourges of the South: Essays on "The Sickly South" in History, Literature, and Popular Culture*. Ed. Thomas Bjerre and Beata Zawadka, 2014. Published here with the permission of Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

2 In his article "Reading Hurricane Katrina," Henry Giroux coined the phrase "new biopolitics of disposability" to refer to the desertion of black victims of the Katrina storm, when thousands were left to die, and the survivors were rounded up in large numbers.

3 The time that Lillian Smith spent in China as a music teacher at a Methodist music school, from 1923 to 1925, was crucial for her intellectual development and added an international dimension to her thinking about the modern world. In her biography of Smith, Anne Loveland says: "Her political consciousness was awakened for the first time as she observed the operation of European colonialism and the aftermath of the Chinese Revolution of 1911 and 1912 and as she heard and read about Mahatma Gandhi's fight for Indian independence" (12).

4 The recipient of this letter is unknown (Gladney 127).

5 David Blight notes that James Baldwin, during his visit to the South in 1957, "met Coretta King, whom he admired, at a church basement reception, and listened while the reverend [Luther King] explained to his parishioners that racism was a 'disease' and nonviolence its cure" (216).

6 *Now Is the Time* is Smith's passionate defense of America's moral obligation to civil rights, intended to capitalize on the momentum provided by the 1954 Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board* ruling which outlawed school segregation.

7 In "Humans in Bondage," an article from 1944, she wrote: "As for love […] once preachers preached about it, and then lost their own belief in its magic. But psychiatrists have rediscovered it. They are telling us that love is powerful medicine in emotional illness, as specific for many mental 'infections' as penicillin for physical ailments. Perhaps the church will take courage from science and once more declare its faith in the love of God and man" (54).

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Part III

De-Pathologizing Access to Food and Land

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5 "Healthy Is the New Gangsta"

Food Apartheid and Black Culinary Culture in Southern Hip-Hop

Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis

At the end of the twentieth century during hip-hop's socially conscious era exemplified by Public Enemy, the genre engaged in social and political issues from discrimination and exclusion to police harassment and other forms of oppression, structural inequalities and to health disparities adversely impacting African American communities. Hip-hop lyrics also depict the daily politics of consumption in those communities, which is primarily dominated by two food-related factors: The black culinary culture known as soul food and urban food swamps, which are "areas with a high-density of establishments selling high-calorie fast food and junk food, relative to healthier food options" (Cooksey-Stowers et al. 1). Hip-hop lyrics often expose the detrimental impact of such factors on those who live at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum. While hip-hop as a form of cultural production has been examined in academia through the prisms of various critical cultural theories, the rhetoric of eating and lifestyle, especially healthy approaches, as expressed in hip-hop songs has been virtually absent from scholarly debate.[1]

Addressing that lacuna, this chapter will point out how rappers, some of them representing the Dirty South, challenge the culinary heritage and soul food of their community, exposing the deleterious underbelly of junk food and illustrating the turn toward more health-conscious cuisine in the early twenty-first century. A T-shirt from the rapper Stic.man, Florida-born member of Dead Prez, makes the point and provides the title of this chapter.[2] In my analysis of hip-hop songs as emancipatory messages addressing African Americans' often-pathologized access to healthy food, I will draw on studies of foodways of the enslaved by Jessica Harris and Frederick Douglass Opie and on critical analytics in order to deconstruct the narrative of relations between race, body and geography. Sociological and medical studies will serve as guides in tracing out connections between geographies of race (food swamps), culinary history (soul food) and ailing black bodies, connections that open up and connect in different ways.

I intend to situate hip-hop songs within historical, social and cultural contexts that demonstrate how the legacy of plantation slavery remains inscribed on the tables where African American communities share meals.

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While the songs chosen for analysis here are certainly not an exhaustive sampling of emancipatory messages about legacies of slavery and racism that are veiled in food references, they are most skillful in extensively exposing and disrupting intersections of racial and food politics. Before delving into African Americans' pathologized access to healthy, sustainable food, however, I will detour in order to explore and contextualize the observations to come: First, with a brief generic overview of hip-hop, then with an exploration of southern takeover of hip-hop's soundscape since this millennium got underway, then with mapping out food as a recurring trope in the genre's lyrical narratives.

Hip-hop: From the Streets to the Mainstream

Hip-hop as a cultural and artistic phenomenon arose from the need of African American youth and those of Puerto Rican and Caribbean heritage to reflect on their lives, histories and aspirations (Price III 1). For disenfranchised youth whose images were being pathologized in mainstream culture as maladjusted, menacing and deviant (Sullivan 607), hip-hop provided a source "of alternative identity formation and social status" (Rose 34). As such, hip-hop "reflects the social, economic, political, and cultural realities and conditions of their lives, speaking to them in a language and manner they understand" (Alridge and Stewart 190). This reflection and self-affirmation in art offers "a counter-dominant message" validating the experiences of black audiences (Sullivan 616), in specific.

As a cultural movement hip-hop surfaced in the mid-1970s on "the immensely impoverished, crime-ridden, drug-infested streets of the Bronx" (Price III 4). Historically this time period was fertile ground for such a cultural movement. The movement originated among a generation which "was born after the civil rights and black power movements," as Asante explains, and as such hip-hop "certainly captures the essence of the rebellious, courageous, creative, politically discontent teens and youngsters of the 80s and 90s" (1). The late 1980s and early 1990s were hip-hop's golden age, as the movement was acclaimed outside the poor, ghettoized borough of the Bronx and neighboring Harlem and reached a nationwide audience. At that stage in hip-hop's evolution, rappers, including Run-DMC, in their sociopolitical commentaries "addressed gang violence, police brutality, and other politically charged issues, such as poverty and racism" (Sullivan 606). Commercialization of hip-hop swelled with greater MTV exposure (with the channel's 1988 premiere of *Yo! MTV Raps*) and with more broadly encompassing themes as hip-hop transformed from a new national phenomenon and went global. By the late 1990s the local movement had spread from the streets to the mainstream as the top-selling music genre.

Hip-hop that "calls for social relevance, originality, and a focused dedication to produce art that challenges American mainstream artistic expression" (Gladney 291) was spawned by the aesthetic agenda and political

advocacy of the Black Arts Movements of the 1960s. A more in-depth look reveals interrelations between hip-hop as spoken-word poetry and political activism. It follows that many hip-hop artists are not just performers: They are activists who by rapping about relevant, socially conscious matters mobilize communities of color and empower youth to stand against injustice. Demonstrating this argument, Roychoudhury and others deftly point out that "[i]t is through Hip Hop's commitment to conceptualizing the good life, and seeking social transformation that Hip Hoppers struggle for liberation, taking an activist stance toward envisioning the future and realizing social justice" (184). The genre's artists-activists inform their listeners about exigencies of African American lives through addressing issues including "underlying themes of unfairness, injustice, and betrayal" (Miller, "Rap's Dirty South" 182). These rappers are "prophets of the hood," to borrow the title of Imani Perry's 2004 study, and through them hip-hop has become "the black CNN," an expression attributed to Chuck D of Public Enemy (Watkins 129–130).

The South's Takeover of the Hip-hop Scene

As hip-hop gained nationwide visibility, its mark grew especially prominent on the West Coast. Soon, alongside the East Coast hip-hop that derived from New York City, the competing regional affiliation of West Coast gangsta hip-hop emerged from Los Angeles. This dual representation of hip-hop and the eventual rivalry was framed in the media as a coastal rap war, with the rivalry fueled by two powerhouse rappers: Tupac Shakur based in LA and the Notorious B.I.G. from Brooklyn. This bicoastal friction was further complicated by southern hip-hop's emergence on the national scene in the mid-1990s. This new regional hip-hop's alleged lyrical simplicity, use of regional slang, danceable rhythms and party-music style alienated coastal rappers, producers and listeners (Westhoff 9). They cast southern hip-hop as "anti-intellectual and unsophisticated" (Younger), dismissing it as "ignorant, catchy, pop, hollow, shameful" (Laymon). Since the South was "dismissed as culturally slow, meaningless, and less hip (hop) than New York," according to Kayse Laymon, southern rappers as representatives of "country rap" (Grem 62) faced daunting competition in the rap-music market, pitted against coastal hip-hoppers with established reputations (Westhoff 7, Grem 56). "The East Coast's cultural hegemony" deprecated southern rap as inferior; that bias of and erasure by the media lasted until the early 2000s (Younger).

By 1995, when *The Source* magazine gave its annual Best New Rap Group award to the Atlanta-based duo OutKast (Big Boi and André 3000), southern rap was attaining a mainstream national presence.[3] In the coming years OutKast garnered critical acclaim (six Grammy Awards) while achieving huge commercial success (selling over twenty million records). They have been crucial in steering southern hip-hop from the peripheries

to its major role on the hip-hop soundscape, evocatively captured in the region's recognition as the "Third Coast" (Sarig 57).

As southern hip-hop came from the underground into the mainstream, its rappers were blending "older rap styles with southern music, accents, and themes" (Grem 56). Before the up-and-coming regional genre had found its own distinctive voice, they had related to black experience as coastal hip-hop was bringing it and claimed that identity as their own (Grem 57). This tactical maneuver has firmly put various rappers in southern hip-hop hall of fame. From Miami, 2 Live Crew peddled sexually charged, bass-laden music with "Me So Horny" in 1989, and in Atlanta Lil Jon distilled "hard-core sounds from the west [...], bass beats from down in Florida, and assorted styles and imagery from up north" (Sarig xx). Tapping in to West Coast gangsta style were Master P in New Orleans with *The Ghettos Tryin to Kill Me!* and Geto Boys in Houston with "Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta." The latter crew's debut album, *Making Trouble*, touched on the dark violence of horrorcore, while Three 6 Mafia's *Mystic Stylez* was a southern outlier from Memphis, also in horrorcore style.

Despite this sonic and lyrical diversity, southern hip-hop can be defined by its differing, regionally identified aesthetics: Southern accents, varied sonic footprints (a syncopated sound, heavy on bass),[4] and by musical performance from chants to booty dances. The lyrical content, which keeps hip-hop "*local*" (Laymon) while alluding to the South's history of bondage—call-and-response lyrics that echo field hollers—as well its carceral history differentiates it from other regions (Bradley; Grem; Miller "Dirty Decade" and "Rap's Dirty South").

These rappers and others by stressing place-based identification (affinities with their roots) gave authenticity and credibility to black southern lives that were being excluded from mainstream hip-hop representations. This pride in place did not preclude acknowledgment of their region's "troubling racial history, its continuing record of black on black violence, and its corrupt judicial system" (Grem 61). These two competing narratives crystallized in the concept of the Dirty South. The term was introduced by Goodie Mob, an Atlanta-based group, in "Dirty South," one of the lead tracks on their debut album, *Soul Food* (1995). The concept plays on assumptions "and already familiar stereotypes of the South as variously backwards, abject, slow, corrupt, communal, down-to-earth, rural, or oversexed" (Miller, "Dirty Decade") and also on a "dirtier" side of Atlanta: "mothers struggling to raise good kids, teenagers reflecting on their uncertain future, young adults troubled by gang life" (Grem 61). Pertinent here is "the dirtiness of the treatment of southern black folks, even in the post–civil rights era, which deromanticizes the belief that the movement ended the racial and socioeconomic tensions facing southern black communities" (Bradley). Yet Goodie Mob complicates hastily drawn associations of southern "dirtiness" with corruption, poverty, lewdness, rusticity, and drug and gun dealing, by embracing the marginalization of black southerners and attempting to

revise narratives about their culture. As Grem points out precisely: "[b]y pulling together in black unity, blacks in Atlanta and around the Dirty South could turn the economic and social problems they faced into 'food for my soul'" (61).

While "Atlanta has moved from the margins to becoming hip-hop's center of gravity, part of a larger shift in hip-hop innovation to the south" (Caramanica), rappers from other cities have been drawing national attention to the Dirty South as well. These include Geto Boys (Houston), UGK (Port Arthur, Texas), Lil Wayne and Ca$h Money (New Orleans), Three 6 Mafia (Memphis) and Rick Ross (Miami), who no longer wanted "to adhere to certain stylistic and conceptual limitations in order to sustain a wider rap music authenticity that would ultimately contribute to their long-term economic prospects within the national market" (Miller, "Dirty Decade"). Embracing their origins and helping define the shape of southern rap, "their unique coupling of regional and racial identity had earned them increased attention from listeners and critics alike and a reputation as innovators of a fresh, new sound and style in hip-hop culture" (Grem 56).[5]

Southern hip-hop songs gave voice to those "living in American obscurity" (Priest). Darren Grem's hypothesis that OutKast "reworked these rather standard [American] themes, placing them in the context of southern living and the local black culture of Atlanta" (59–60) can be extended to define the rappers who "kept a record of the peripheral cultures that shaped our [southern] language and movement" (Priest). Even as southern rappers strive to "keep it real *local*" (Laymon), the reality they describe resonates with audiences in other regions, for they are registering relatable racial concerns, a fact that Joy Priest has evocatively summed up as: "Everywhere in America, Dixie. Everywhere a running history of bondage beneath the surface of society, peeking out." Interestingly, one means with which hip-hop evidences these interrelations between haunting past, racial identity, physical bodies and (dis)empowerment is in both literal and metaphorical instances of food consumption.

Black Food Matters

Capturing pressing issues, hip-hop speaks both through its music—the lyrics and sonic signature—and through fashion design and visual arts. It has thus become "a black cultural expression that prioritizes black voices from the margins of urban America" (Rose 2). Such an explosion of voices signals the need among marginalized groups to express and preserve their culture and even more importantly to (re)negotiate their identities and envision the future (Roychoudhury et al. 184). Hence, rather than simply cashing in on hip-hop as a thriving entertainment industry, many rappers serve as de facto educators[6] who offer what Greg Dimitriadis labels "alternative 'lived' curriculum" to "often intensely disaffected young people" (8, 44). These rappers, by relating to problems among disenfranchised youth (55), create a

community that goes beyond an individually lived reality to challenge racial constructs and stereotypes perpetuated in the dominant cultural consciousness. Hip-hop's lyrical narratives of identity negotiations are characterized by several leitmotifs. For the uninitiated, hip-hop can seem just a sum of recurring tropes: Violence (guns), misogyny (objectified female bodies), consumerism (jewelry, other luxury goods) and riches (bling bling, including gold chains and grills). Food, though, with these widely recognized stereotypical motifs, is among the pervasive images used in hip-hop to define racial and cultural belonging.

Many casual food references embellish hip-hop lyrics and offer a taste of African Americans' daily experiences. In the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," the first hip-hop record to reach the Top 40 on the Billboard charts, Wonder Mike infamously describes his disappointment at his friend's house: Soggy macaroni, mushed peas, and "chicken that tastes like wood." Food is often used as a favorite metaphor in describing physical passions—for instance, in Da Brat's "Ghetto Love" a partner makes "dinner, collard greens, candied yams and steak." At other times rappers expand on foodstuff associations to vaunt their achievements and brag about details of their lifestyles. For instance, cheese is another word for money.[7] Collard greens are also used as a metaphor for cash: ScHoolboy Q's song "Collard Greens" uses them as a metaphor for a stack of banknotes wrapped in a currency strap. An extravagant lifestyle is earned through another foodways reference: Cream (an acronym for "cash rules everything around me").[8] Referring to the connection of hip-hop culture to thug lifestyle, rappers reference drugs and criminal activities in their lyrics, often coded as foodstuffs. Broccoli and asparagus stand for weed (E-40's "Broccoli"), while yams are heroin balloons (Kendrick Lamar, "King Kunta").[9] Guns are also adapted into food metaphors in hip-hop slang, with OutKast and Nas referring to them as biscuits (in "Red Velvet" and "The Message," respectively). Connecting violence with pasta is evocative of mafia-style doing business.[10] Beef is widely used to indicate grudges and feuds between rappers (the most infamous being between Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G.). The most evocative beef metaphor was used by The Notorious B.I.G. in "What's Beef?" and probably by Jay-Z, who confesses in "Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)" that "I don't know how to sleep, I gotta eat, stay on my toes / Got a lotta beef, so logically, I prey on my foes" (*Vol.2 ... Hard Knock Life*).

Food in hip-hop lyrics goes beyond simple mimetic representations of African American communities. It becomes more than the mere inclusion of metaphors and gastronomic references. Some rappers frame their outsider status on the national hip-hop scene in gastronomic terms. For instance, on the title track of *ATLiens*, OutKast invite the audience to "throw your hands in the air / And wave 'em like you just don't care / And if you like fish and grits and all that pimp sh*t / Everybody let me hear you say 'O-Yea-yer'" ("ATLiens"). Through this point of reference, "OutKast tied such stylistic differences to the theme of exclusion, presenting southern

blacks as 'aliens' in their own cities and southern rappers as 'aliens' to the rest of the rap industry" (Grem 63). Additionally, OutKast frame southern culture's superiority in general and that of the Dirty South in particular in culinary terms.[11] The duo announce their disillusionment with West Coast hip-hop through food and drink references, and the member Big Boi's preference for "sippin' sauce" instead of the "juice and gin" he formerly appreciated is more than just a statement of his culinary preferences ("Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik"). When "juice and gin" are given proper hip-hop context, the drink is associated with Snoop Dogg ("Gin and Juice"), then Big Boi's preference for "sauce" (a codeine-laced cocktail in southern clubs) signifies his artistic evolution: From a rapper who held West Coast hip-hop in esteem, he becomes a rapper who has found his own distinctive style and confidence, both which are encapsulated in the slang meaning of "sauce." André 3000 chimes in; he also embodies the confidence and sense of superiority of southern hip-hop through references to black culinary culture: "Like collard greens and Hoecakes, I got soul / That's something you ain't got / That's why your style is rot-ten." They are unapologetic about their roots, offering evocative comments through references to southern food and drinks on the fact that black southern culture in general, and its hip-hop in particular, have the edge over its bicoastal rivals.

Other rappers, including Childish Gambino, frame their accusations of other rappers' lack of authenticity with food references: "You faker than some Sweet'N Low" ("IV Sweatpants"). Those rappers might have silverware—Gambino cleverly indicates their riches through allusions to jewelry and to silver cutlery—yet he challenges their position in the hip-hop community: "Are you eating though? Nigga, are you eating though?" Using the slang meaning of eating as "making money," Gambino continues to question rivals' ability to be genuinely successful: "Breakfast, lunch, and dinner's for beginners, you ain't even know"—that is, he makes more money than they can even imagine.[12] In the cutthroat business of hip-hop, rappers compete for recognition, fame and money. Thus, using the metaphor of consumption, they become "rapper eater[s]," to use Lil Wayne's self-designation ("The Rapper Eater"). Other hip-hop artists from MF Doom and Action Bronson to Ghostface Killah are gastro-rappers, tantalizing our senses with endless food references. Their status as rapper eaters is literal rather than metaphorical. MF Doom included a smorgasbord of gastronomic references on his album *Mm ... Food*, as has Ghostface Killah in his songs, and Action Bronson, formerly a successful chef, peppered his album *Bon Appetit.....Bitch!!!!!* with a gourmand's vocabulary.

Food has become an integral aspect of hip-hop as both provide nourishment to body and soul. KRS-One rapped that "I got the hip-hop juice for the hip-hop food" ("Return of the Boom Bap"). And Doodlebug of the Digable Planets envisions a strong connection between lyrics and food in the group's songs. Through crafting beats and condensed lyrics and rhymes, Doodlebug offers "Food for thought so get a buffet plate / The lyrics are so fat you might

gain weight," and much that will enlighten listeners: "Brewin funk inside my soul kitchen / So pull up a chair, here's a bib, have a listen" ("Where I'm From"). To quote Imani Perry, such interplay of food and hip-hop "nourishes by offering community membership that entails a body of cultural knowledge, yet it also nourishes by offering a counterhegemonic authority and subjectivity to the force of white supremacy in American culture in the form of the mc" (44). Rappers often use their lyrics as a vehicle for fostering awareness in their communities, thus empowering their audience to reinvent their lives. After all, as the poet and playwright Amiri Baraka said, "[t]he artist's role is to raise the consciousness of the people. To make them understand life, the world and themselves more completely. Otherwise I don't know why you do it" (qtd. in O'Neal). OutKast, in ushering southern hip-hop into the mainstream American soundscape, caution their listeners: "It's only so much time left in this crazy world / Wake up niggas and realize what's going on around you / […] Take back your existence or die like a punk" ("True Dat").

(De)pathologizing Access to Food

As agents of alternative pedagogy to disenfranchised youth, rappers can offer harsh commentary on the "the nuances, pathology and most importantly, resilience of America's best kept secret […] the black ghetto" (Dawsey 59, qtd. in Smitherman 7). The Digable Planets convey that message in "Where I'm From": "We speak in ghetto tongue cause ghetto's the life." Replicating the structure of a plantation, a ghetto cordons off racial difference and in so doing pathologizes blackness. Since the ghetto as an inner-city space perpetuates the cycle of pathologization through racial oppression (Wilson, *Truly Disadvantaged* 10), many rappers refer to their humble origins in their lyrics and thus "authenticate themselves through their experience of social struggle, and stories of disadvantage give MCs the credibility they need to appear 'real' to their listeners" (Hess 14).

Those born in the Dirty South, which for many meant "poverty, projects, congestion" (qtd. in Miller, "Rap's Dirty South" 188), could relate to Goodie Mob's lyrics in which we hear that "Smoke steams from under the lid that's on the pot / Ain't never had a lot but thankful for" ("Soul Food").[13] Such depictions of lack allude to complex historical and sociological antecedents. Looming large in the Dead Prez song "Download" is an entangled relationship between haunting racial history (food restrictions as planters' means of controlling their human chattels) and place (a plantation as a site of racial oppression and violence):

> Eating scraps from the table but it kept us alive
> Making something from nothing, still we hope for the best
> Making miracles happen, daily coping with less.[14]

Reminiscences of abject malnourishment "pierce" many slave narratives, which served the function of recoding the horrors of lived experience on

plantations. In these narratives, formerly enslaved people archived how food restrictions, modifications and consumption patterns were used by planters and overseers to discipline, humiliate and ultimately dehumanize their human chattels.[15] Additionally, the narratives document that a certain dose of tenacity coupled with inventiveness was required during slavery to try to survive with dignity on an empty stomach when one was being offered throwaways for sustenance. "The survival-oriented Black woman," as Marvalene Hughes explains, "trusts her creative skills to 'make something out of nothing.' She acquired the unique survival ability to cook (and therefore use) all parts of everything" (276).

In the contemporary context, blacks' consumption of "scraps" or leftovers reveals the perennial nature of racial oppression and subjugation in "an economically depressed and racist environment" (Wilson, *Truly Disadvantaged* 8), yet also indicates the potential among African Americans to persevere in the face of adverse circumstances. Through Dead Prez's celebration of creative impulses and the enduring spirit of African Americans who had to subsist on scraps, the hip-hop pair rejects the stereotypical image of blacks as victims to white domination. Instead of being simply defined by powerlessness, tragedy and depravity, black people (re)imagine their position in response to whites. Thus subsistence on scraps can be analyzed as survival, but more importantly as endurance and resistance to that domination. This notion closely resembles Gerald Vizenor's concept of "survivance" among Native peoples of North America, making it a message of celebration and defiance.

Clearly the food restrictions mentioned above as an afterlife of food distribution on plantations are not endemic to the black South and transcend regional boundaries. For instance, the pangs of material deprivation and feelings of food insecurity are also depicted in RZA's memories of grits from childhood in "Grits." The intensely felt poverty of a sprawling family dependent on food stamps grows even more evocative when RZA describes the texture of grits in extremely close detail. The detailed depiction of preparing grits metonymically represents a family in penury and reveals the extent of nutritional trauma a child must have felt. Being consigned to poverty from childhood results in what William Julius Wilson has referred to as "an accumulation of disadvantages [which flows from] previous periods of prejudice and discrimination, disadvantages that have been passed on from generation to generation" (*Truly Disadvantaged* 126). There are 27.4 percent of the African American population living in poverty, compared to 10 percent of white Americans (Mishel 420). Poverty rates among minority children are three times that of white children: 30.4 percent to 10.4 percent ("The Rise in Child Poverty" 2018, Mishel 420). Adverse socioeconomic circumstances into which one is born (from income to housing and education) determine the risk of living in poverty. Poverty, then, is a powerful predicator of poor food choices and a determinant of good health or lack thereof. When such liabilities among previous generations are transferred

to the one that follows, these accumulated disadvantages resulting from social structures and systemic inequalities are impacting whole collectivities, not just individuals. In their songs, many rappers evidence the sense of food insecurity that was endemic in housing projects and in the hood. For example, The Notorious B.I.G. raps: "it's hard being young from the slums / Eatin' five-cent gums not knowin' where your meal's comin' from" ("Things Done Changed").

With some regularity, rappers present their journey from penury to luxury using culinary metaphors, often telling of their rags-to-riches journeys through foods. Among the most evocative culinary representations is The Notorious B.I.G.'s song "Juicy," in which he raps about his progress from public housing and sardines for dinner to an extravagant life of brunches, lunches and sipping champagne when he's thirsty. Knowing that wealth brings respect, rappers choose to flaunt culinary delicacies in the environment of economically disadvantaged communities. A morning bowl of lobster bisque symbolizes Rick Ross's prosperity and indulgence: "Am I really just a narcissist? / 'Cause I wake up to a bowl of lobster bisque" ("I Love My Bitches").

These rappers, however, represent only the tiny fraction of African Americans who have escaped lives mired in poverty. By the end of the twentieth century, the amount of the inner-city population living in extreme poverty had increased by almost 150 percent (Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* 46; Leigh, 19). A ghetto replicates the plantation's spatial containment, as noted above, and also retains the element of exploitation that had been characteristic of the plantation's original socio-spatial structure. The two coexisting social trends of urbanization and the Great Migration collided in the process of racial gentrification. White flight relocated whites to the suburbs, leaving inner cities to poor blacks. This trend was precipitated by policies in housing and in bank loans, which segregated the cities. This afterlife of slavery is visible in structural disadvantages that result from residential segregation (with housing "estates" as a residue of plantation barracks) and in poverty and racial profiling (a criminal-justice policy implemented in our era of the New Jim Crow, detailed in Michelle Alexander's book named for the era). While geography is a neutral term in itself, many spaces are racialized through acts of inclusion and exclusion (Lipsitz 12).

Racialized urban spaces are negatively impacted by systemic practices of discrimination. One of those practices is the process of "supermarket redlining," defined by Elizabeth Eisenhauer as the practice among foodstore chains of avoiding low-income areas.[16] This practice holds great significance for African Americans, of whom only 8 percent have a supermarket in their census tract (Treuhaft and Karpyn 7). For communities of color, longer distances for food shopping and fewer healthy options at nearby food stores further isolate them and complicate the geography of their nutritional choices (Treuhaft and Karpyn).[17] According to one study, four times as many supermarkets were present in predominantly white neighborhoods,

while another concluded that supermarkets have four times the number of "heart-healthy" options as neighborhood convenience stores (Morland et al. 27). In "Chitlins & Pepsi," when Strong Arm Steady want to promote a healthy (vegan) diet, they mention Whole Foods and Trader Joe's as preferable shopping alternatives. For Mike WiLL Made-it and Big Sean, in their "On the Come Up," the ability to take care of loved ones is signified by a kitchen stocked at Whole Foods. More often than not, however, these stores may be well beyond the financial reach of minorities of color. In "Shine," Pharoahe Monch raps about exactly this inaccessibility in low-income neighborhoods to healthy food alternatives sold in any organic stores such as Whole Foods.

Yet there are contradictory research findings about the impact of limited or lack of access to wholesome options on customers' health and wellbeing. Some research demonstrates that it has a disproportionately negative effect on the dietary quality in low-income communities of color (Morland et al. 24). Other results, based on Department of Agriculture (USDA) findings, demonstrate that "household and neighborhood resources, education, and taste preferences" impact residents' food choices more than superstore proximity does (Brown).[18] If we cannot simply blame low-income status for poor dietary choices in these neighborhoods of color (in keeping with the USDA report), then correlated factors need to be taken into account. In Nolan Brown's assessment of the situation, "You can lead human beings to Whole Foods, but you can't make them buy organic kale there," suggesting the need for "addressing the systemic and multilayered causes" (Guyer-Stevens) rather than simply relying on monocausal solutions (for instance, opening more organic stores). Michelle Obama adopted a similar strategy: She has promoted new farmers' markets and grocery stores in "food deserts" (Brown), but she has also vowed to educate Americans to end childhood obesity through the "Let's Move Campaign."

While geography in itself is not racially prejudiced or biased, some policymaking decisions concerning urban spaces can surely be seen as insidiously discriminatory and exploitative. The supermarket redlining mentioned above, one element of the urban nutritional landscape, happens to overlap topographically with low-income minority neighborhoods. In such communities there is a dearth of affordable, healthy food options, where it is "easier to find a Slurpee than a smoothie, cheaper to get the Big Mac meal than grab dinner at a salad bar" (Brooks).[19] Although the USDA originally defined those spaces as "food deserts," that term has long been discredited as it does not accurately define nutritional environments where a high density of establishments promote highly caloric fast food (Cooksey-Stowers et al. 1). The problem is not a lack of food options, as the term "desert" suggests, but rather the abject quality of food options: Predominantly processed, junk, and fast foods. Thus the new spatial metaphor of the food swamp was introduced to define the essence of an environment where "fast food and junk food inundate healthy alternatives"

(Cooksey-Stowers et al. 1). Nutrition scientists have repeatedly demonstrated that "fast food restaurants are prevalent in low-income and ethnic minority areas" (Fleischhacker e469). If we weigh in the factor that access to fast-food outlets increase peoples' intake of these unhealthy foods (Moore et al.), it should come as no surprise that in black neighborhoods and kitchens low-nutrient food such as junk food is a staple. The ratio of fast-food joints to whole-foods outlets appears to transcend national boundaries in North America. In his song "Kanye, 2009," Sho Baraka, a Canadian rapper, asks a rhetorical question that catches the essence of the socioeconomic swamp—Baraka terms them "slums"—in which minorities live in North America: "why ain't no Whole Foods in the hood / All I see is fast food here, can we eat good?"

It is difficult to forge a healthy relationship with food when one is surrounded by fast-food joints and bombarded with junk-food advertisements.[20] Since junk-food adverts target black and Hispanic youth disproportionately (Harris et al., "Increasing Disparities"), it is unsurprising that these groups mostly consume the least nutritional foods, such as fast foods, candy, fatty snacks and sugary drinks. Increasingly, rappers have realized that the affordability and prevalence of fast foods in communities of color have an adverse impact on their health. Ice Cube contends that McDonald's "might give you cancer" ("A Bird in the Hand"). Dead Prez unmask the destructive, addictive nature of junk food: "We glues to the TV screen commercials in-between / Crack Donalds, Murda King" ("Download"). Their take adds another dimension to the pathologized access to food: Crack and murda reveal a violent and deadly aspect of consuming fast food.

In a roundtable discussion on health issues in hip-hop, the rapper SwizZz explained that

> You see the lack of grocery stores in urban communities, and for people in some 'hoods it's easier to get access to guns than it is to get fruits or vegetables. It's really ridiculous. In certain impoverished communities, all they know fast food, and it's really killing urban communities. (qtd. in Trampe)

Thus, if we add a component of systemic racism to the idea of a food desert or swamp, a new conceptualization is born at the intersection of residential segregation, economic capital (capitalist accumulation) and dispossession, namely, "food apartheid" (Reese 7). Food apartheid adds a component of systemic racism to the "neutral" economic idea of food desert or food swamp. In *Soul Food Junkies*, Byron Hurt's documentary, Marc Lamont Hill contends this correlation between black geographies, food system and racism:

> When you want to wipe out an entire generation of people, when you want to engage in a kind of 21st century genocide, all you have to do is

> continue to do what we're doing, which is deprive people of access to healthy food.

A certain degree of malign purposefulness is evident in opening new fast-food joints instead of grocery stores in minority neighborhoods. In dire financial situations people tend to buy the cheapest calories, which can be found in junk, fast and processed foods, and if fast-food retailers and convenience stores outnumber grocery stores and supermarkets, then their choice is quite predetermined. Goodie Mob realizes this foul play:

> The little that I got why not be
> Fast food got me feeling sick
> Them crackers think they slick
> By trying to make this bullsh*t affordable. ("Soul Food")[21]

Slavery's legacy does well in the United States. It has led to health and wealth inequalities that have plagued and pathologized black bodies for years. It is as if the affordability of fast food is intended to keep poor blacks in the vicious circle of poverty and ill health. Superstore redlining ensures that they are not able to make things better for themselves.

The "afterlife of slavery" (Hartman 6) finds a vivid illustration in hip-hop's engagement with the politics of food and its complex historical and sociological antecedents, combined with the geographies of race. Soul food is yet another element that completes the picture of the pernicious, pervasive legacy of enslavement and disenfranchisement of people of color. Soul food, or black southern culinary culture, is an expression of racial-identity formation and negotiation. It was nutritional restrictions on plantations that forced enslaved people to find culinary solutions, faced with pathologized access to sufficient and nutritious foods.[22] In *Vibration Cooking*, Verta Mae Grosvenor looks for the origins of soul food in racial oppression on plantations. Grosvenor admires survival: "Isn't it amazing that black people in spite of all the misery and oppression have been able to keep on keeping on?" Which has been possible, according to Grosvenor, largely thanks to soul food's staple ingredients, e.g., "neck bones and dry peas" (20). White oppressors might have controlled black bodies through gruesome violence, acts of humiliation and dehumanization, but the souls of the enslaved people proved impervious to such mistreatment. Echoing Grosvenor's assessment, Frederick Douglass Opie asserts that soul food is a symbol of resilience and resistance, given that "[a]t its heart, soul is the ability to survive and keep on keeping on despite racist obstacles to obtaining life's necessities. In the language of soul, the more you have been through and survived, the more soul you have" (ch. 7). Similarly Ntozake Shange explains that "black-eyed peas and rice or 'Hoppin' John,' even collard greens and pig's feet, are not so much arbitrary predilections of

the 'nigra' as they are symbolic defiance" (*If I Can Cook* 2). In this context Dead Prez's disclosure that "We adapt to the struggle / Only way we survive" in "Download" is a reference to the dietary compromises and adaptations that constitute the core of soul food as a cuisine, and more importantly to the shared experience of suffering and endurance with dignity. Thus fortitude and perseverance are written between the lines both of soul-food recipes and hip-hop lyrics. And while soul food registers suffering among African Americans, more importantly it indicates surviving with pride.

Along with conveying racial consciousness and preserving cultural identity, soul food also connects African Americans in a further aspect of their lived experiences: The health liabilities of their cuisine. In *The New Soul Food Cookbook*, Wilbert Jones encapsulates the benefits of soul food along with its potential detriments: "[t]he good news has always been that soul food is delicious, hearty, and laden with tradition. The bad news is that much of it is also laden with fat, cholesterol, sodium, and excess sugar" (xi). Goodie Mob's "Soul Food" includes those two competing narratives about black southern foodways: Glorification of the culinary heritage of African Americans and the mention of the troublesome underbelly of soul food. The song celebrates such delicacies as "a plate of soul food chicken, rice and gravy," and "[m]acaroni and cheese and collard greens."[23] Specialties such as hot grits and hot soup are used as healing measures, while waffles[24] provide a pleasant sustenance; hot wings[25] from Mo-Joe's served with celery and blue-cheese dressing cause intense bodily reactions. The disadvantage of soul-food consumption hinted at in "Soul Food"—"Southern Fry won't allow my body to lie still"—reverberates in other hip-hop lyrics as well. Nas rhymes that after eating fried chicken, "Then I flock to the bed then plop, when we done, I need rest" ("Fried Chicken"). The sexual innuendo of the song aside, its lyrics might just as well refer to a condition called "itis": A state of drowsiness after eating large meals made of fat- and carbohydrate-rich foods so memorably portrayed in "The Itis," the tenth episode of *The Boondock*s' first season, the adult-animated sitcom aired on the Cartoon Network. Traditional soul food is depicted here as "a destructive element in black culture, responsible not only for disease and death but also for a breakdown in the economic, social, and moral fiber of a community," according to Nettles (108).

However, a lethargic, sleepy feeling after eating is hardly the only health liability of soul food. In "Soul Food," we hear that obesity is another consequence of overindulging in "fried chicken / a heaping helping of fried chicken / macaroni and cheese and collard greens." Confessions that "I'm full as tick" and he is "too big for [his] jeans" hint at a submerged narrative of obesity and diet-related health conditions.[26] Research findings reveal that a traditional diet of high-fat and high-cholesterol foods (such as collard greens with ham hocks, grits, fried chicken, chitterlings or chitlins)

correlates with the incidence of chronic diseases in the African American population, from diabetes and stroke to coronary heart disease and hypertension (Nettles 108).[27] Alice Randall's observation that "there's a church, a liquor store and a dialysis center on every corner in black Memphis" ("Black Women and Fat") indicates the disproportionate burden of chronic diseases in urban hoods. The imagery of life-threatening soul food reverberates in Dead Prez's "Download," where the duo revisit the pestilent impact of soul food in poverty-ridden neighborhoods: "Raised in the ghetto, singing songs – called survival / But eating soul food to have you dead on arrival / Hand on the rifle, other hand on the bible." This potentially deadly aspect of soul food, alluded to in the image of lethal guns, is counterbalanced with the redemptive potential of the Bible, the text guiding Christians in repenting their sins and leading their lives. A combination of the accumulation of disadvantage (poverty in a ghetto) and culinary proclivities as a residue of the past (soul food) has led to health inequalities plaguing black neighborhoods for decades. After all, as Zora Neale Hurston puts it, "there is something about poverty that smells like death" (*Dust Tracks* 116).

Though dietary behavior among African Americans is commonly acknowledged to cause chronic health conditions, in general they can seem to be addicted to black southern cuisine. Soul food's addictive quality is aptly evident in the title of Byron Hurt's documentary *Soul Food Junkies*. Critiques take on a very accurate representation in Nas's "Fried Chicken," where he offers the most vocal debate about treats including the titular fried chicken, candied yams and collard greens:

> Mmm, fried chicken, fly vixen
> Give me heart disease but need you in my kitchen …
> Mrs. Fried Chicken, you gon' be a nigga death …
> Mrs. Fried Chicken, you was my addiction
> Dripping with high cholest.[28]

Knowing that obsessively eating soul food is detrimental to their health doesn't stop people from indulging in this self-destructive culinary practice. With disarming honesty, Nas rhymes that fried chicken "gon' be a nigga death […] / I'ma eat some sh*t until what I'm eating kills me / And I choose to do that, why? / Cause that's just what niggas do, hahahahaha" ("Fried Chicken"). This, however, may not necessarily imply lack of self-reflection on Nas's part. Rather, much like using the N-word as a term of racial self-designation, Nas criticizes the addictive quality of soul food through exaggerating his people's stereotypical irrationality. In so doing, Nas takes the weight of responsibility for harmful eating habits from African Americans themselves—supposedly they don't know any better—and places it on prejudiced people who actually benefit from subjugating the Other race.

By the 1960s, some in African American communities were questioning soul food on two grounds: Religious and nutritional (Opie ch. 9). The former

were inspired by the advocacy of healthy eating and of healthy lifestyles of Elija Muhammad, Georgia-born founder of the Nation of Islam (NOI), while Dick Gregory's nutritional opinions proved the most powerful voice of the latter. Muhammad's religiously motivated rejection of pork is echoed in dietary restrictions imposed by the Five Percent Nation. Nowadays, rappers including Rakim, Jay-Z, Method Man and Big Daddy Kane live by these dietary guidelines. Since Five Percenters seek self-improvement through abstaining from eating pork, Sean Price raps that "I don't dine on swine. / I don't beef with turkeys" ("Like You") and Jay-Z calls out "f*ck the pigs, no pork on my fork" ("H·A·M").[29] Muhammad's rejection of pork was quickly followed by rejection of other traditional elements of the African American diet (soul food), which, as with planters' throwaways, served as reminders of enslavement and oppression (Opie ch. 9), as well as processed, sugary and greasy foods. The NOI leader warned his followers that "You might find yourself eating death if you follow them [white people]" in unhealthy eating practices (*How to Eat to Live* 1:6), which Muhammad believed were a white-man strategy to "weaken and eventually wear out black folk" (qtd. in Opie ch. 9).

A similar rhetoric tying nutrition with what was alleged to be planned racial genocide and/or liberation of black people was adopted by Dick Gregory, whose prominence as an entertainer included being a civil rights activist and proponent of a natural-food diet. Gregory called soul food "nothing but garbage," referring to the offal and throwaways that made up the slave diet, and also labeled it a form of racial genocide: "the quickest way to wipe out a group of people is to put them on a soul food diet" (qtd. in Witt 134). Additionally, Gregory's recommendations for healthy diets take into account one more factor: Animal rights. As a civil rights activist, Gregory connected animal welfare and human rights: "Animals and humans suffer and die alike. Violence causes the same pain, the same spilling of blood, the same stench of death, the same arrogant, cruel and brutal taking of life" (16). Overlapping with advocacy of humane treatment of animals and our own bodies is the philosophy of nonviolence central to Martin Luther King Jr.'s call for justice and peace. Dexter King, son of the activist leader, connects his father's legacy with animal rights and human rights: "If you're violent to yourself by putting [harmful] things into your body that violates its spirit, it will be difficult not to perpetuate that [violence] onto someone else" (Church 128).

This convergence of animal and human rights with environmental justice reverberates in hip-hop lyrics. For instance, Goodie Mob rap that "Yeah beef is cheaper but / It's pumped with 'red dye' between two pieces of bread" ("Soul Food"). Boogie Down Productions call beef a "poisonous product," as cows are drugged by farmers to grow more quickly, and they point to the side effects of such production, with stress levels making cows sick ("Beef"), which has hazardous effects also on humans: "Any drug is addictive by any name / Even drugs in meat, they are the same" ("Beef"). The intensity of

the opposition to corporate capitalism and large-scale agribusiness reflect that urgency, as does the simultaneous need to eat correctly. Boogie Down Productions advise listeners to see:

> How many cows must be pumped up fatter
> How many rats gotta fall in the batter
> How many chickens that eat sh*t you eat
> How much high blood pressure you get from pig feet. ("Beef")

Spreading awareness about animal welfare, rappers, including Chuck D, KRS-One and Masta Killa, join the chorus of compassionate voices fighting for social justice for all. Others, such as RZA, Jermaine Dupri and Styles P, collaborate with PETA to fight for animal rights.

A healthy plant-based diet adopted by rappers—"I don't eat no meat, no dairy, no sweets / only ripe vegetables, fresh fruit and whole wheat" (Dead Prez, "Be Healthy") and "Ham is pork, and the pork is foul / Kinda like a pig and that ain't my style" (Milk Dee, "Spam")—reverberates with the renunciation of meat, sugar-laden drinks and other unhealthy foods that Dick Gregory advocated decades earlier. Though veganism is often identified as a white elitist trend, it has gained credence in the African American community. Due to various health issues,[30] rappers, including MK, RZA, GZA and Stic.man, have made the transition to veganism, while others have switched to low-carb diets.[31] KRS-One sees meat as a major culprit in the hood: "It's the number one drug on the street" ("Beef"). RZA promotes raw foods and has converted half a dozen rappers to veganism. Snoop Dogg is a vocal fan of Beyond Fried Chicken now on menus at the KFC chain. As a vegan advocate, will.i.am is engaged with food justice and animal rights. DJ Cavem is both a "ghetto gourmet vegan chef" and a rapper. Vegetarian and vegan diets are often referenced in hip-hop's food discourse: Big Daddy Kane raps that "I got gold teeth, and they don't chew beef / No pork on my fork, strictly fish on my dish" ("Young, Gifted and Black"); around that time, Rakim announced that fish was his favorite dish, in "Paid in Full." A Tribe Called Quest have revealed their flexitarian dietary preferences: "I don't eat no ham and eggs, 'cause they're high in cholesterol / [s]trictly collard greens and the occasional steak" ("Ham 'N' Eggs").[32]

As Muhammad and Gregory had insisted, the African American diet as a residue of pathologized plantation-era access to wholesome dietary options can reinforce white supremacy by wearing out and killing black bodies. If we add contemporary food swamps to the equation, which are in fact forms of codified nutritional segregation, then accepting the nutritional status quo is not resistance. Resistance to past and present pathologization of African Americans' access to food is active in practices of conscious, healthy eating (such as vegan soul food). "Where there's health neglect / There's no self-respect," as Dead Prez rhyme ("Download"). Finding self-worth and pride in one's race is contingent upon managing one's health through culinary

choices, Stic.man explains: "My goal in life is not to be rich or wealthy / Cause true wealth comes from good health, and wise ways / We got to start taking better care of ourselves" ("Be Healthy").

In an interview with Okomoto, Stic.man extends this correspondence between respect and health to the whole black community: "We deserve the best and we can start living like we understand our value by choosing to adopt healthier habits. When the hood is strong, we are truly unstoppable." This revolutionary shift in the hip-hop community is reflected in the documentary *Feel Rich: Health Is the New Wealth*. Plant-based eating as a solution to the deterioration of bodies and minds is no longer just dietary decisions by individual rappers and their advocacy of holistic health. It has become a nearly universal principle of hip-hop. Rappers from Styles P, Stic .man and Jadakiss to the Hip Hop Is Green team of artists and performers were among the signers of the 10th Element of Hip Hop Health & Wellness Proclamation on April 2, 2016, at the Schomburg Center in Harlem. This proclamation identified the achievement and promotion of plant-based eating and life in balance with ourselves and with the planet as the latest addition to the defining elements of hip-hop culture.

Many rappers adopt anti-oppressive practices, such as plant-based diets and animal-rights activism, and promote respect for the planet, food justice, urban organic gardening, holistic health and fitness. Such defiance against mainstream supremacy can be achieved through healing the community. Veganizing soul food (vegan chefs include Tassili Ma'at, Jenné Claiborne and Bryant Terry),[33] running a juice bar such as Juices for Life (Styles P and Jadakiss), launching a healthy cookbook such as 2 Chainz' *#MEALTIME* cookbook, creating the subgenres "fit hop"[34] and "eco-hip hop,"[35] and supporting the food-justice movement (Bryant Terry, Stic.man)[36] are all ways of "defying the death industry," as Tassili Ma'at terms it. If one understands and activates social capital within black community, they can transcend limitations reinforced by structural determinants—food swamps, supermarket redlining—and turn the community's weakness (soul food as its health culprit) into its exact opposite, a triumph, with vegan soul food as one example. As Dead Prez rap: "Learnin' how to take the negative and flip for the best / Everyday bring challenge, every challenge is a chance to advance" ("Overstand").

For many years, through the eras of slavery and segregation and even in the post–civil rights period, various forces have conspired to regulate the body of black people: "The powerless devoured in the matrix / Of politics, pimps, and glass pipe" (Dead Prez, "Food, Clothes & Shelter"). This traumatic past casts a long shadow on the present generation. Acknowledging that, Dead Prez draw attention to "how they dealt the deck / We inherited stress / Had to bury our best / Martin, Malcolm X / Bullet holes in they chest" ("Download"). The unnamed violence to the collective African American body is encapsulated in trauma that has resulted from the assassinations of those civil rights leaders and the early deaths of others. As Dead Prez put it in "Food, Clothes &

Shelter," racist encounters and racial profiling ("my childhood peers catching years in the numbers"), along with violence and death ("sunken faces and powder traces"), cause sustained stress that is, according to various medical studies, "a social toxin" (Reynolds). This toxic effect of stress on human beings literally becomes "embedded at the cellular level" (Reynolds). This leads Dead Prez to admit: "[I] try to lift my stress that I'm under / How I made it this far makes me wonder" ("Food, Clothes & Shelter").[37]

The hip-hop songs analyzed above, much like protest songs, which are defined by compassion and optimism, express the harsh realities of ghetto life, with all its correlatives: Poverty, police brutality, lack of perspectives, the food apartheid which is the central focus of this chapter, and more. They condemn the situation while often proposing solutions to social injustice, a characteristic element of protest songs as identified by Berger (59). One of those solutions is to "reinforce an awakening or increased state of consciousness/awareness in the listener who, through this 'revival,' is encouraged to both recognize and eradicate the social injustice" (Berger 59). This is how Dead Prez draw attention to the struggle to survive while faced with costly and caustic residues of past systems (plantation slavery, Jim Crow segregation), which are also so clearly imprinted on the contemporary foodscape:

> Slavery is over cousin, but then at lunch it wasn't
> If food is the last plantation then I'm Harriet Tubman […]
> But you can't free a slave unless he knows he's in bondage. ("Download")

Legalized slavery may have been abolished a century and a half ago; however, the legacy is very much present nowadays in pathologized access to nutritious food. The history of oppression and abuse is written on tables in black hoods (food apartheid, soul food). A reference to the USDA, which due to its racist practices has been called the last plantation (Samuel), suggests that the past is not forgotten, that the tentacles of slavery continue to invade society in other less evident ways. Stic.man and other rappers, much like Harriet Tubman before abolition, want to lead African Americans to freedom, which as this century progresses means decolonizing their communities' diets as an act of rebellion against racial injustice and discrimination. Stic.man wants to inspire others to realign their diets and take better care of themselves. This is how "hip hop is trying to get you healthy" (Leah) by educating African Americans about plant-based eating, organic gardening, fitness, sobriety, food justice and animal rights, and eating good while on a hood budget.[38]

In Conclusion

Hip-hop offers a chance to rewrite the prevailing narrative that has pathologized black existence and culture and continues to do so. This pathologization of black bodies has been achieved through associations

of socioeconomic position (inner-city ghettos) with black cultural capital and poor food choices (the proclivity for soul food, often in excess). While critically engaging with issues of legacies of slavery—racial discrimination, structural inequality, food apartheid and myriad others—hip-hop "can provide an alternative to those circumstances and can be used to develop skill, intelligence, and self-discipline" (Franklin 188). Hip-hop artists have discovered that one way to overcome vestiges of oppressive mindsets and cumulative effects of racial subordination (e.g., food apartheid) is to redefine and depathologize African American culture through revisiting black foodways. Which is why, as Van Jones explains, "Hip Hop is now the drumbeat for the whole world. If Hip Hop decides to move in a green direction the world will move in a green direction" (qtd. in *Hip Hop Is Green*).

This health-conscious turn in hip-hop—evident, for example, in the messages of Stic.man, DJ Cavem, Jadakiss and other rappers-cum-wellness activists—is seconded by activists, including "gangsta gardener" Ron Finley and Karen Washington, "urban farming's de facto godmother" (Brones), who work at a grassroots level to depathologize black people's access to wholesome food and bring healthier choices to underprivileged minorities of color. In their songs, rappers expose the pervasive reach of white domination resulting in food and health disparities. They attempt to reverse contemporary plantation-like politics, which controls African Americans through food apartheid. And simultaneously they are ushering their brothers and sisters along in adopting more health-conscious cuisines and the multitude of benefits, both individual and communal, that will follow.

Notes

1 The few article-length studies I am aware of that tackle the issue of food in hip-hop songs are: Brian Graves' "You Are What You Beat: Food Metaphors and Southern Black Identity in Twentieth-Century African American Literature and Goodie Mob's 'Soul Food'" (2015) and Tyler Bunzey's "Sounding Soul (Food): The Discursive Interconnection of Sound, Food, and Place in Southern Hip-hop" (2020).
While their works share some general observations with the present chapter about intersections of food and race in southern hip-hop, Graves and Bunzey pursue a different end and cover a different analytical material. Both researchers concentrate on intersections of food and place-based identity, while my analysis extends to include considerations of geographies of race intersecting with culinary history and the combined impact these have on black bodies.

2 In Seamus McKiernan's capacity as a writer for *Huffington Post*, he conducted an interview with Stic.man. In the title interview, hip-hop's green turn was acknowledged through a reference to the T-shirt's motto: "Healthy Is the New Gangsta: An Interview with Dead Prez's Stic."

3 Westhoff asserts of the 1990s that by "one mid-decade count, southern artists were getting nearly twice as much radio play as their East Coast counterparts, and eight times more than west coasters" (*Dirty South* 8). In the early years of the new millennium, southern artists accounted for 50 percent of the singles on hip-hop's charts (Sarig xiv).

4 Major sonic footprints of southern hip-hop range from Miami bass, New Orleans bounce and Houston chopped and screwed to Memphis / Atlanta crunk and Atlanta trap. This stylistic diversity comes as little surprise when compared to coastal counterparts, which come largely from two cities, NYC and LA, as southern rap derives from across the entire region.
5 Sonic divergences and variations across the South point to a history of musical genres that evolved in various places there. Musical legacies of blues, jazz, gospel, soul and funk have contributed to the sound of southern hip-hop. Intraregional sonic influences give hip-hop its specific local flavors, from New Orleans' bounce and the funky, soulful horrorcore of Memphis to Atlanta's crunk and trap.
6 Embracing his role of educating his listeners, KRS-One, a founder of Boogie Down Productions, also goes by the stage name Teacha.
7 Manish Man rhymes in a chorus about "Number one, my niggas gotta chase the cheese" (Jermaine Dupri, "Rules of the Game").
8 The term "c.r.e.a.m" is one of the most referenced catch phrases in the history of hip-hop. It was introduced by the Wu-Tang Clan in the song of that title on their 1993 album *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)*. In contextualizing the acronym "cash rules everything around me," Method Man of Wu-Tang explains that money is power.
9 Yams, along with representing connections to the criminal and drug underworld, constitute an interesting literary allusion. The most evocative usage of yams in African American literature comes from Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*. In the novel, yams represent the eponymous hero's intense longing for the South and the simultaneous acceptance of one's heritage, consumed on the New York City streets. In Kendrick Lamar's "King Kunta," the rapper might be using this literary reference to contextualize his self-worth as a black man, which gives him legitimacy in the hip-hop community.
10 Lil Wayne brings mafioso-style solutions to problems with the image of pasta: "Lay the beef on this noodle make some luger lasagna / forty-cal fettuccine, trey-pound pasta / You reach for this medallion, you must like Italian, nigga" ("You Ain't Got Nothin").
11 As an important part of their southern image, both Goodie Mob and OutKast "often rap about southern foods as signifiers of regional identity and pride" (Graves 124).
12 Eating in Childish Gambino's lyrics can be interpreted as making money, but also as having sex; both interpretations derive from a double meaning in slang of the verb "to eat."
13 Trick Daddy also reveals his poverty through dietary options in his family home: "Growed up eatin spam sandwiches / Sugar water and mayonnaise sandwich" ("In da Wind").
14 Bunzey remarks that "The ability to make a foodway out of no way—taking meat scraps like offal and making chitterlings or taking the tough leaves of collards and making sauteed greens—represents the struggle of Black communities throughout the diaspora to thrive even in violent conditions" (255).
15 I discuss this topic from the perspective of the enslaved and planters, respectively, in two articles:
"The Rhetorics of Food as an Everyday Strategy of Resistance in Slave Narratives," *Res Rhetorica* 9.1 (2022), 32–51. https://resrhetorica.com/index.php/RR/article/view/615/342 and "Kij i marchewka – pożywienie jako narzędzie kontroli w narracjach niewolników," *Przemoc*, vol. 8, *Wielkie Tematy Literatury Amerykańskiej*, ed. Agnieszka Woźniakowka and Sonia Kaputa, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2019, 11–27.
16 After reading the report of Philadelphia's Department of Public Health, James Garrow points to the correlation between the number of healthy stores and

median income in a neighborhood. When median income decreases, so does the number of stores.

17 Proximity-driven conceptualizations of access to supermarkets as the factor in assessing food deserts can be readily challenged in our times of facilitated mobility. However, in the case of the African American population, convenient traveling distance seems to be a relevant factor in nutrition options as 24 percent of African Americans do not own cars (Giancatarino and Noor).

18 In other words, as Alana Rhone and others suggest, "income and resource constraints may be greater barriers to accessing healthy food retailers than proximity."

19 In "Hoe Cakes," MF Doom rebukes the poor quality of mass-produced fast food, pointing to the fact that fresh produce is replaced with substandard processed versions ("And the heat to turn beef to horsemeat chalupa").

20 Researchers have already proven that a food desert and a food swamp are obesogenic neighborhood food environments (Cooksey-Stowers et al.).

21 Paying attention to different aspects of intersections of fast food and black identity, Graves mentions the "fears of racial subordination and emasculation in the fast food industry," in connection with these lyrics in "Soul Food" (130), while Bunzey states that "'fast food' can also signify commoditized and commercialized rap that contains little substantive artistic content" (261).

22 To read more about soul food's adaptability to social circumstances and nutritional restrictions, see: Jessica Harris's *High on the Hog* and Frederick Douglass Opie's *Hog and Hominy.*

23 Bunzey rightly asserts that "a bowl of grits or a plate of greens have provided Black artists with symbols of comfort, strength, and identity in a fundamentally racially repressive nation" (251).

24 Waffles—especially the southern staple, chicken and waffles—and the Waffle House chain make cameo appearances in numerous hip-hop songs. It should come as no surprise, since this southern chain is a cultural icon and, as it is open 24/7, it is a popular after-party spot for musicians, frequently referenced in southern hip-hop (Jermaine Dupri's "Welcome to Atlanta," 2 Chainz's "Extremely Blessed,").

25 A characteristic feature of soul food is adding hot sauces to many dishes. Jadakiss, accompanied by Pharrell Williams, raps about this condiment in "Hot Sauce to Go" (*Kiss of Death*, 2004). Frederick Douglass Opie and Adrian Miller draw connections between Africans, slavery and hot sauces (in *Hog and Hominy* and *Soul Food*, respectively).

26 Graves sees a connection between rural identity and food in this passage, likening it to the shame of rural southern identity in Ellison's *Invisible Man* (128–129).

27 In his song "Beef Rapp," MF Doom compares the deadly effects of feuds (or beefs) with other rappers to the effects of eating fried food: "I suggest you change your diet / It can lead to high blood pressure if you fry it / Or even a stroke, heart attack, heart disease."

28 Fried chicken is clearly a double entendre in this song; it is literally a tasty culprit in provoking heart disease, while it implicitly refers to a sexually irresistible woman (vixen) who can cause the downfall of a man attracted to her, much like deep-fried chicken is a health liability for those who overindulge in it. Sexual innuendo is even more explicit in subsequent lines of the song.

29 Jay-Z and Kanye West play with a euphemistic potential of the word "pig." They play with a double-meaning: the rappers show religious disdain for "pigs" through an avoidance of pork in their diets (they are Five Percenters), while in the broader context of the song's lyrics, the line alludes to African Americans' attitudes toward the police and law enforcement.

30 For instance, Stic.man came down with gout in his early 20s and 2 Chainz suffered from ulcers and reflux.
31 Mentioned in Childish Gambino's "Black Faces" and "Shoulda Known," *ROYALTY* mixtape, 2012.
32 Similarly, MF Doom warns that blood pressure might result from both rage and cholesterol.
33 Many African American chefs are readjusting soul food to the new biophysical environment—that is, to one affected by food swamps and an obesity epidemic. These chefs strive to reconcile authentic, traditional soul-food cuisine with a health-conscious diet that can prove effective in managing chronic illnesses that are disproportionately affecting people of color.
34 Michael Trampe notes that Stic.man and his wife believe in holistic health and fitness and thus unite health, fitness and wellness in the RGB FIT club, the lifestyle brand they created. Additionally, Stic.man's album *The Workout* helped create the fit-hop genre. Other rappers have also embraced holistic health and fitness; one of them, LL Cool J, shares his success in the book *LL Cool J's Platinum Workout*.
35 DJ Cavem, vegan chef, activist and organic gardener from Denver, coined the term "eco hip hop" in 2007. On his award-wining album, *The Produce Section*, DJ Cavem raps about food justice, plant-based foods and climate change. He performed his eco-friendly rhymes at the White House during the Obama administration.
36 This does not imply, however, that majority of rappers have jumped on the healthy-food bandwagon. A considerable group have invested their money, out of their sheer love for food, in tasty but not-so-healthy sectors of the restaurant business. For instance, Kanye West bought the rights to open ten Chicago locations of the iconic LA-based Fatburger chain (the fast, casual chain is popular with hip-hop artists, and the late Notorrious B.I.G. would dine there). Wingstop, a popular chicken-wing franchise, belongs to Rick Ross. The Caribbean/soul-food joint Doug E's Chicken & Waffles is owned by Doug E. Fresh, and Ludacris invested in Chicken + Beer, a restaurant opened at the Atlanta airport.
37 Many victims suffering sustained exposure to racial oppression can testify that "living traumatized leaves you nervous and numb against a background of 'depression, feelings of hopelessness, and a general closing off of the spirit as the mind tries to insulate itself from further harm'" (Williams-Forson, *Eating While Black* 93).
38 The advice Stic.man of Dead Prez provides in an NPR interview with Michael Martin includes simple tips on how to build your "dietary discipline" for health on a hood budget: buy fresh produce, not prepackaged, taking into account seasonal availability; prepare soups; budget and prioritize in your shopping cart; join a community garden; and drink more water.

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6 Black Land Matters

Geographies of Race and Politics of Land in Natalie Baszile's *Queen Sugar*

Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis

"Recognize that land and food have been used as a weapon to keep black people oppressed," asserts the late Curtis Hayes Muhammad. "Recognize also that land and food are essential to liberation for black people," the veteran civil rights activist continues (in Penniman "Radical Farmers"). Embedded in Muhammad's statement are African Americans' relations with land and agriculture, which have been pathologized through centuries of enslavement and then through sharecropping, the plantation-to-prison pipeline and racist federal farm policies. Capitalistic power logics entangled with racial politics have managed to all but alienate the broader black community from farming. Yet a recent and considerable increase of interest in agrarian space emphasizes black resistance to those plantation legacies of economic exploitation along racial lines.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how African American farmers recover and reinvent their identities in rural geographies of the contemporary South. My analysis of Natalie Baszile's novel *Queen Sugar* (2014) will demonstrate how "racial capitalism" and affective economies, as the latter notion has been introduced by Sara Ahmed, have complicated African Americans' connection with the land. The pastoral trope of rendering their desire for land abnormal, if not pathological, has been inverted in the early twenty-first century and has created a counter-site of otherness. Land now embodies a discourse of resistance to contemporary politics that can be taken to be plantation-like. Thus I will discuss the sugarcane farm run by the novel's fictional Bordelon family as a paradigmatic demonstration of Foucault's concept of heterotopia.

Baszile's *Queen Sugar* presents the story of Charley Bordelon, uprooted from urban life in Los Angeles by her paternal inheritance of 800 acres of cane fields in southern Louisiana. To claim this patrimony, Charley, recently widowed, and her daughter, Micah, reunite in Saint Josephine Parish with Miss Honey, her paternal grandmother, and with Ralph Angel, her older half-brother. The novel traces Charley's evolution from a neophyte landowner who wonders "what her father had been thinking to leave her a sugarcane farm in south *bumfuck* Louisiana" (*Queen Sugar* 8). Initially the farm feels "[m]ore like eight hundred problems" to her (69), which is why "Charley

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had cursed her father's name more than once for pressing this so-called gift into her hands" (69). Yet through trials and tribulations, Charley discovers that her sense of self is bound by geographies of race and the politics of land.

In Baszile's novel,[1] geographies of race need to be read within the complicated sociohistorical context in the United States of black relations with land. As Ronald Sundstrom has put it eloquently: "Race is not just expressed spatially, but it is experienced and produced spatially. Race is placed, and racial places become encrusted with racial representations that become all too often materialized due to racist action and neglect" (90). Only with contextualized insights into changing sociohistorical specificities, from chattel slavery through Jim Crow–era segregation and up to contemporary forms of oppression, can we appreciate the locational epistemology of plantations and how African Americans manage to transform the space of subjugation, control and punishment into counter-sites of sovereignty and self-sustainability.

Even though the experience of slavery is never explicitly mentioned in the novel,[2] it serves to underline black southerners' experiences in the early twenty-first century, when *Queen Sugar* is set. Thus the present chapter will begin by exploring a historical overview of geographies of black bondage and with a history of racist policies including successive broken promises by various governments and institutions. I am aware that relying on statistics and numbers, as Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods argue, while "identifying the 'where' of Blackness in positivist terms can reduce Black lives to essential measurable 'facts' rather than presenting communities that have struggled, resisted, and contributed to the production of space" (qtd. in Reese 10–11). Yet, tellingly and much like Hinson and Robinson, I believe that "hidden beneath the factual details of blatant and egregious actions were the daily lived experiences of the farmers" (293).

Politics of Land

In Baszile's foreword to the anthology *We Are Each Other's Harvest* (2021), she writes of black people's age-old affinity with land and the agricultural competences that would then establish the colonies and build the United States:

> This country was built on the free labor of enslaved people [who] carried their agriculture expertise with them when they arrived on America's colonial shores. Black people's labor and knowledge of agriculture built this country. Farming is part of our national identity; it is central to America's origin story. (4)

Even given this centrality of black agricultural skills, their presence in the agricultural South was marred from the very beginning by exploitation and oppression. The planter elite, to denaturalize them and keep them in

bondage, purposefully erased the sense of belonging that comes from owning the land one is working through "various practices of spatialized violence that targeted black bodies and profited from erasing a black sense of place" (McKittrick, "On Plantations" 948).

McKittrick also points to a paradoxical pathologization of blacks' connections to land:

> an economized and enforced placelessness […] demanded the enslaved work and thus be chained to the land—[this] normalized black dispossession, white supremacy, and other colonial–racial geographies, while naturalizing the racist underpinnings of land exploitation as accumulation and emancipation. ("On Plantations" 949)

This concurrent, contradictory separation from and binding to the land taught blacks "to hate the land," as stated by Eldridge Cleaver, the early Black Panther Party leader. "From sunup to sundown, the slaves worked the land: plowing, sowing, and reaping crops for somebody else, for profit they themselves would never see or taste" (Cleaver 57). This demeaning of agricultural endeavors that were at the core of their heritage comes as little surprise when capitalist greed is taken into account, which drove planters to treat the enslaved as a disposable asset. Virtually unlimited power was often handed to overseers to control and punish unruly human chattel: The whip and myriad other forms of violence dangled over them, ever present even when not being actively wielded.[3]

Many southern planters were notorious for greed and for the moral collapse that led them to remorselessly degrade black lives. The most infamous fictional master of them all is Simon Legree of the Red River region in Louisiana, in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and the roll call of brutish and abusive masters, whether prominent in their communities or outliers, is terribly long. In historical records and in fictional narratives, "large planters were among the wealthiest businesspeople of their time" (Rosenthal 3). When the fact is accounted for that "slave-grown sugar [had been] the most valuable commodity of the eighteenth century Atlantic world" (Rosenthal 3), it becomes evident that the 1,500 or so sugarcane plantations in Louisiana in the 1850s were still generating exorbitant wealth for their owners (McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies" 5). Cane plantations, to be successful, had to function like a well-oiled machine, and planters needed to rely on "dependable labor at every stage of the production process" (Rosenthal 15). This process is extensively documented in *Twelve Years a Slave*, the narrative written by Solomon Northup, a free black kidnapped and sold into slavery in the Red River region, including some seasons in cane fields. Due to each cutting season's brevity, lasting from mid-October until Christmas (Follett 135), sugarcane planters maximized productivity: "[o]n cane plantations in sugar time, there is no distinction as to the days of the week" (Northup 195). Such boosting of productivity came

at a huge human toll. Northup documented that "in cane-cutting the [field] hands are not allowed to sit down long enough to eat their dinners" and an overworked slave who collapsed or fainted was doused with buckets of water and immediately "compelled to continue his labor" (225). Due to such ruthless practices, and many other inhumane ones, "[s]lavery on Louisiana sugar plantations acquired a particular reputation for hardship and torment as planters tried to extract exhausting, coordinated, and precise labor from men and women holding hoes and cane knives" (Scott, *Degrees of Freedom* 12). A tour guide at the Whitney Plantation, now a slavery museum, points out acutely: "A plantation was a factory, an industry that used enslaved people to make a product to make a profit. […] People said there was brutality in cotton, but death in cane" (Weingarten).

The abolition of slavery under the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 did not dismantle systems and structures of racial subjugation; these then morphed into systems of oppression under other names. Du Bois, already realizing this reincarnation of slavery in Jim Crow's iteration of racist thralldom by the early twentieth century, stated that "[t]he slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery" (*Black Reconstruction* 26). Though the amendment had clearly prohibited slavery, a route it left open to involuntary servitude was as a form of punishment for crime.[4] Under new Black Codes, temporary joblessness among black farm workers was criminalized. This was purportedly due to their shiftless nature, and vagrancy statutes penalized them for refusing to sign a contract with a landowner. One form of Black Codes, "pig laws," were enacted and "unfairly penalized poor African Americans for crimes such as stealing a farm animal" ("Black Codes"). In reality these Black Codes, rather than assisting freed blacks and ushering them along in their newly acquired liberty or preparing them "for a constructive role in the social, political, and economic life of the South" (Stampp 79), were introduced with the intention "to keep the Negro, as long as possible, exactly what he was: a propertyless rural laborer under strict controls, without political rights, and with inferior legal rights" (Stampp 79). In the post-emancipation South until 1867, de jure enslavement had been recast as de facto peonage (also known as debt slavery), which was then legally outlawed by Congress.

Involuntary labor as the result of "restrictive work contracts, debt peonage, convict labor, and surety agreements" starkly recalled for African Americans their lack of personal liberty in postwar society (Wunder, "Labor Relations" 45). Disproportionate penalties for committing "crimes" in such areas as employment and agriculture (including grand larceny of poultry) were imposed by law and through tactics of terror (Wunder, "Black Codes" 81). Sharecropping, the crop-lien system (in which harvests would be exchanged for materials that had been provided for planting them), tenant farming and economic arrangements including systems of debt peonage seem to replicate "racial and managerial logics of the antebellum plantation," which McInnis identifies as an "afterlife of the plantation" ("A

Corporate Plantation" 526). With these forms of economic abuse, which he characterizes as "the institutions, logics, and practices that evolved in the wake of emancipation, yet were specifically tied to the physical spaces and biopolitical functions of the plantation as a mode of labor organization" (526), whites reimplemented superiority and dominance over black farmers while also attempting to cripple or ruin the latter's natural affinity with the land. They knew full well that land offered farmers "a sense of personal power and independence" (Zabawa 68) and "a means to autonomy and prosperity" (Roll 132), and also "meant stability and opportunity for black families, a shot at upward mobility and economic security for future generations" (Douglas, "Untold Acres").[5] For such reasons blacks were striving to sate what Du Bois called "land hunger – this absolutely fundamental and essential thing to any real emancipation of the slaves" (*Black Reconstruction* 537).[6]

Whites, aware that "denial of access to land has been a key element in Black economic underdevelopment" (Zabawa 67), resorted to violence, imbalanced bureaucratic measures such as inflated property taxes and legal mechanisms to suppress land ownership among blacks (Hinson & Robinson 288; Presser). Du Bois already realized that it was in the best interests of the planter elite, through labor exploitation (peonage) and land theft,[7] "to keep the bulk of Negroes as landless laborers" (*Black Reconstruction* 537). Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* retells an all-too-familiar tale of a black man cheated out of his land by white men. Macon Dead Sr. called his 150 acres Lincoln's Heaven, out of respect for that president, the great emancipator. The very name of the farm alludes to the promised land—or to that which had been promised by Northerners. However, that promise of abundance, prosperity and freedom was cut short by white greed. Macon, emancipated and illiterate, is tricked into signing his property over to white landowners and forced off of it.[8] His dream is blown away when his head is shot five feet into the air while he sits on a fence attempting to defend his property (ch. 2).

Recognizing that land loss means "loss of independence, and the related lack of control of and participation in social, political, and economic arenas" (Zabawa 68), some "[c]rooked landowners maneuvered sharecroppers into debt," as Ibram Kendi asserts, "and laws prevented sharecroppers from leaving landowners to whom they owed money" (254). Sharecropping, based on exploitative logic on plantations operating on capitalist greed, is vividly illustrated by Cresswell Plantation in the Du Bois novel *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911). In the situation it presents, black sharecroppers generate immense wealth for the Cresswell family, who had tricked them into poverty through debts. Colonel Cresswell disingenuously explains that "[t]he only way to get decent work out of some niggers is to let them believe they're buying land. In nine cases out of ten he works hard a while and then throws up the job. We get back our land and he makes good wages for his work." Then in the tenth case, "we could get rid of him when we want to. White people rule here" (ch. 33).[9]

Decades later, this inability to accumulate economic capital and establish self-sustainability based on farming still haunts and hinders African Americans. In *Queen Sugar*, NeNee Desonier's case illustrates this predicament. The 77-year-old cane worker's family had "worked cane for six generations, and after all that we ain't got nothin' to show for it," Desonier's granddaughter explains.

> She worked cane since she was *nine* years old, and *this* is all she's got. […] Does she own anything but this trailer and the little speck of sorry-ass ground it sits on? […] Those big cane farmers cut corners with her every chance they got. […] If it wasn't for social security […] and the little bit us grandkids scrape together each month, my grandmother would be out on the road. (*Queen Sugar* 53)

It is as if, to quote Hinson and Robinson, "blacks were intended to work the land, but never to own the land" (283).

Reading between the Lies[10]

Land (re)distribution among freed people in the post-emancipation South demonstrates the evolution over time of agrarian structural racism in maintaining power and dominance over African Americans. This history of land allocation, beginning with General Sherman's Field Order No. 15 (1865) and the Southern Homestead Act (1866), is based on a strain of broken promises that have lived on in racially discriminatory land practices enacted by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). Sherman, in seeking to find appropriate forms of restitution for freed blacks near the end of the Civil War, had consulted their ministers. Reverend Garrison Frazier explained to the general the importance of land to black autonomy:

> The way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land, and turn it and till it by our own labor […] and we can soon maintain ourselves and have something to spare. […] We want to be placed on land until we are able to buy it and make it our own. (qtd. in Gates, "The Truth Behind" para. 12)

With President Lincoln's approval, Field Order No. 15 reserved roughly 400,000 acres of coastal land confiscated in South Carolina and Georgia from landowners loyal to the Confederate cause, acreage that was then allocated to newly emancipated blacks for their exclusive settlement as a form of reparations for their enslavement. Affordable terms offered the promise of ownership: Not over 40 acres of tillable land to lease and possibly a mule. Sherman's order, commonly referred to as "forty acres and a mule," aimed "to help former enslaved Africans become self-sufficient" (Hinson & Robinson 286). Symbolically for blacks, the act of working one's land

represented "all the hopes, dreams, and possibilities of freedom, of being able to own one's land and make decisions about one's destiny and livelihood […] being a black landowner and farmer is a reversal of decades of slavery and sharecropping" (Schell 5). With Field Order No. 15, land that had long been the site of planters' oppressions was reimagined into a site of freedom, survival and self-determination.

This dream of economic autonomy and self-sufficiency, meant to come true with those forty acres and a mule, died with President Lincoln in April 1865. His successor, Andrew Johnson (born in North Carolina), overturned the order and ordered the return of the land to its former owners.[11] Du Bois, in recognizing this failed promise, explains that

> public lands were opened for settlements to the very few freedmen who had tools and capital. But the vision of 'forty acres and a mule'—the righteous and reasonable ambition to become a landholder, which the nation had all but categorically promised the freedman—was destined in most cases to bitter disappointment. (*The Souls of Black Folk* 27)

He realized that such dreams materialized only for a disproportionately small group of freed blacks: "If by 1874 the Georgia Negro alone owned three hundred and fifty thousand acres of land, it was by grace of his thrift rather than by bounty of the government" (27). At that point in history, "only about 5% of black families in the Deep South owned land" (Presser).[12] That percentile, however, grows even more laudable due to the means of its acquisition: Through those new owners' perseverance and prudence, not through official redistribution plans.

Those blacks who managed to obtain and keep land gained an almost mythical status in their communities. For this very reason Macon Dead Sr. became a folk hero for his people in Danville. He was "the farmer they wanted to be, the clever irrigator, the peach tree grower, the hog slaughterer, the wild-turkey roaster, the man who could plow forty in no time flat and sang like an angel while he did it" (*Song of Solomon*, ch. 10). The legend of Lincoln's Heaven revolves around Macon, its creator, who

> had come out of nowhere, as ignorant as a hammer and broke as a convict, with nothing but free papers, […] and in one year he'd leased ten acres, the next ten more. Sixteen years later he had one of the best farms in Montour County. (*Song of Solomon*, ch. 10)

This and other such stories attempt to rewrite the traditionally imposed narrative of "blacks as the objects of Lincoln's benevolence" (Beavers 34)[13] as examples of agency and self-determination even when the latter proved transient or ill-fated.[14]

For freed blacks who were less successful at obtaining their 40 acres of former plantation lands, "the Southern Homestead Act seemed to be

a possible avenue to Black landownership" (Edwards 103). Passed by Congress in June 1866, the act offered public land in five southern states to citizens "who had never borne arms against the United States government,"[15] including recently freed blacks. Yet the promise of their own land did not materialize on at least three counts. First, the most productive and fertile land had been allotted to whites, while heavily forested land was distributed among emancipated blacks (Edwards 105). Then, even given promises of wide availability of land, many potential black homesteaders did not have the financial resources required to purchase it (Edwards 105). Third, as Edwards asserts, "Black homesteaders were subjected to southern whites' unremitting racism, hostility, and violence; local whites seemed determined to use any means to prevent freedpeople from transforming themselves into viable, landowning small farmers" (105). Along with debt peonage and the lien as the bases of sharecropping, over the decade that the Southern Homestead Act was enforced—Congress repealed it in 1876 as the dismantling of Reconstruction initiatives got underway—it did very little to aid African Americans along the path to land ownership.

In 1862, Lincoln had established the USDA as a new federal department intended to help all Americans acquire "useful information on subjects connected with agriculture in the most general and comprehensive sense of that word" (Caffey 3). Though the president officially called it the People's Department, the USDA from its inception has been infamous for racist practices of dispossession leading to land loss (Clark 139, 141). The department became "a hotbed of racial bias and harassment" (Naff 229). It adopted new "discriminatory, damaging and ongoing" tactics of discriminating against black farmers (Rosenberg and Stucki), with racism appearing to be rebranded in a new context in the twentieth century. Then, the USDA manifested an allochronic view of African Americans, identified by Duncan as "contemporary forms of racial oppression and inequality" (67). Blacks, instead of being seen through their actual lived reality, tend to be viewed through these allochronic frames that had already been established by the antebellum period—that is, as primitive, inferior and less than human.[16]

Hence in departmental policies and practices, black farmers were to be treated through the prism of a racial identity severely at odds with contemporary ideas about sovereignty and agency, which point to racial-identity formation based on white supremacist legacies of slavery: Sharecropping, peonage and tenancy. One can even see USDA policies as a legacy of plantation slavery, based on "an uneven colonial–racial economy that […] legalized black servitude while simultaneously sanctioning black placelessness and constraint" (McKittrick, "On Plantations" 948). One can observe psychological effects of allochronic perspective on some black farmers who seem to internalize racism, which "[e]rodes individual sense of value [… and] undermines collective action" (Jones 1214). For instance, in *Queen Sugar* Denton, a black farmer of "stellar reputation" (161) in both the black and the white communities, comments about black workers choosing to

work for white landowners: "The white man's ice is always colder" (201). With such a statement that questions the "intrinsic worth" of black farmhands (Jones 1213), Denton seems to unconsciously reproduce a pathologized view of his people.

This awareness that the USDA has both failed to act on black farmers' best interests and to respond to their pressing needs, and has purposefully sabotaged them, has earned the department the evocative nickname of "the last plantation" (Hoffman; Grim 272). Run by white bureaucrats (Daniel xii), the department continues to privilege white farmers in agricultural programs, including low-interest federal loan programs,[17] while "erect[ing] high hurdles, often barriers, that discouraged or prevented minorities and women from securing acreage allotments, loans, and information" (Daniel xi). Black land ownership has been marginalized through discriminatory USDA procedures, from dispossession through "heirs' property" and "partition sales" to banking policies and mortgage foreclosures (Hinson & Robinson 289; Daniel 254).[18] Given so many diverse attempts to curb black land ownership, the department's biased policies could just as well synecdochally represent racist sentiment on both individual and institutional levels.[19]

The situation has been ubiquitous to the extent that it ceased to raise any eyebrows. In *Queen Sugar*, this irrefutable truth is revealed to Charley. Looking for a qualified man to help manage the farm, Charley goes to the Blue Bowl, an eatery frequented by local farmers. Denton, a man who will eventually run the farm with her, explains:

> I was in the cane business sixty years, and I can tell you, every man in this dining room has seen his share of troubles. […] But I've seen the way these white fellas look out for each other, and it's no accident they are where they are. (88)

This divisive self-support has clearly cost black farmers. One of them, Malcom Duplechain, could not expand sugarcane operations due to collusion among white farmers. That Duplechain was outbid at an auction for a farm is nothing unusual—yet it is extremely notable when a supposedly sealed bid is bettered by just a hundred dollars (32).

With black farmers facing broken promises and blatant discrimination at the USDA,[20] at the zenith of their holdings in the 1910s, they had still managed to acquire between 16 and 19 million acres of land.[21] Despite many concerted efforts to thwart their landownership (through sharecropping, land loss and disenfranchisement), black-operated farms had gone through a 23 percent growth, in comparison to 10.6 percent among white farms. This resulted in nearly a million black farmers by 1920, or 14 percent of all farms (the 1920 census reported blacks to be about 10 percent of the population).[22] Beginning in the 1930s with prejudicial exclusion from New Deal subsidies, then continuing with the USDA's discriminatory practices

in the 1970s and 1980s, a dramatic land loss was enacted: Between 1920 and 1997, African Americans lost control of 98 percent of that earlier total (Wood & Gilbert 45). Black people now control about 2 percent of US farmland (Penniman, "A New Generation").

Charley Bordelon in *Queen Sugar* is a fictional representative of such a severely reduced total.

Depathologizing African Americans' Relations with Land

The South's rural landscape, haunted by its plantation past, is a palimpsest of various regional experiences that either privileged or pathologized one's relation to land. The physical landscape bound to the plantation economy reflected a social system based on chattel slavery. This organizational structure in society in turn affected physical and psychological experiences of the region for its enslaved blacks and then for those who followed and were nominally emancipated. This stratified southern landscape, haunted by the past, illustrates de Certeau's assertions about layers of history:

> The revolutions of history, economic mutations, demographic mixtures lie in layers within it and remain there, hidden in customs, rites, and spatial practices. The legible discourses that formerly articulated them have disappeared, or left only fragments in language. This place, on its surface, seems to be a collage. […] A piling up of heterogeneous places. Each one […] refers to a different mode of territorial unity, of socioeconomic distribution, of political conflicts and of identifying symbolism. The whole made up of pieces that are not contemporary and still linked to the totalities that have fallen into ruins. (*The Practice of Everyday Life* 201)[23]

The interplay of layers of history has affected the racialized experience of the South. Contemporary racial identities, including sedimented layers of enslavement and Jim Crow, do "not simply reflect the existence of racialized space in society"; as Lipsitz states, "they come to function as a part of it" (*How Racism Takes Place* 54).

Because of the palimpsestic nature of racialized spaces, black-owned farms in the South have more layers of meaning than they reveal to an untrained eye. The superimposition of various temporal and spatial layers on each other produces that Michel Foucault called heterotopia, "the other" parallel space. In juxtaposing heterotopia with utopia, Foucault asserts that heterotopias are:

> [real] places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. ("Of Other Spaces" 24)[24]

The sugarcane farm in *Queen Sugar*, depicted as a heterotopic space, then becomes the "counter-site" where afterlives of the plantation era are enacted, negotiated and contested against the backdrop of a white pastoral idyll.[25] Through references to historical residues of plantations and social structures associated with them, black-owned farms embody a paradoxical feature of heterotopias, as spaces that are "absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about" (Foucault 24). Additionally, heterotopias may shift their forms and functions (Foucault 25), which is why black-owned farms are characterized by variable networks of temporal and spatial relations that define their existence, in a paradigmatic demonstration of Foucault's heterotopias.

Natalie Baszile, through Charley Bordelon's expectations of, hopes about and struggles with the Louisiana countryside, articulates the racialized spatial imaginary, both in its layers of complicated history and in "its power to create new opportunities and life chances" (*Lipsitz* 52). Using Charley's perspective as an outsider, as someone disconnected from her familial and agricultural roots, Baszile can rework and reconcile the meaning of the antebellum pastoral ideal, which excluded African Americans even though they bore the greatest burden of maintaining its whitewashed facade. The southern pastoral, an invariable constant that the region has capitalized on since antebellum times, is represented as the arcadian idyll, a paradisiacal rural landscape offering to the planter elite enjoyments of good life and abundant provender. This generally carefree life, complete with dangling Spanish moss and towering magnolia trees out on the land, stands aloof from an outside world opposing this pastoral idyll. A plantation's idealized atmosphere was visualized as Arcadia, Paradise or Eden, so evocatively depicted by Thomas Jefferson in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785) and rendered in John Pendleton Kennedy's fiction (*Swallow Barn* 1832) and that of Thomas Nelson Page (*In Ole Virginia* 1887). Such writings describing idyllic plantations present the perspective from which southerners viewed their society in general and their place in their community in particular.

In *Queen Sugar*, Charley's attitude toward and experience of rural Louisiana can be explained through Sara Ahmed's notion of "affective economies." According to Ahmed, objects or subjects are not emotionally charged by their own intrinsic quality but acquire affective value through circulation of feelings and emotions: "[a]ffect does not reside in an object or sign, but is an affect of the circulation between objects and signs" (120). Applying Ahmed's "affective economies" suggests that the southern pastoral idyll is not inherently a happy or serene setting; it is imagined as such and, accordingly, becomes socially experienced as such by privileged white landowners. This in turn fosters a binding sense of group affiliation, ideologically mobilized in popular moonlight-and-magnolia writings. Charley's experiences in and of the sugarcane lands of Louisiana are consistent with her emotional state and her hopes for the future. Disconnected from her

heritage, seeking soothing comforts, pleasures and happiness, all of which are commonly aligned with bucolic landscapes, at first Charley is enthralled by the local landscape. Having just arrived, she

> caught a scent of Louisiana on the June breeze; the aroma of red clay, peppery as cayenne, musty as compost, and beneath it, the hint of mildew and Gulf water [… and] an ocean of sugarcane: waist-high stalks and slender, emerald-green leaves with tilled soil between. Cane as far as her eyes could see. (4–5)[26]

If Ahmed's theory of affective alignments between people and objects/spaces is accepted, then pastorality cannot be an inherent quality of land, but instead is a state of mind through which Charley, like many others before her, views the nature around her by way of an attitude or through subjective lenses. Her retreat into rural Louisiana, a place known to her to date only through childhood vacations at her grandma's, exemplifies associating the rural with simple, blissful life. Her views and interpretations of an idealized local landscape consist of the three pastoral motifs enumerated by Lucinda MacKethan in *The Dream of Arcady*:

> the urge to celebrate the simplicities of a natural order; the urge to idealize a golden age almost always associated with childhood; and the urge to criticize a contemporary social situation according to an earlier and purer set of standards. (4)

Since the idealized pastoral idea endows the rural with comfort, pleasure and balance, Charley expects redeeming qualities from this rural landscape. She subconsciously idealizes the rural, enacting what Raymond Williams refers to as "[a]n idealisation, based on a temporary situation and a desire for stability," which "served to cover and to evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the time" (45). Recently widowed, she is aching for safety, stability and order in her life, qualities she associates with the countryside. "She needed this farm, wherever it was. She needed a second chance. She needed momentum. And a good shove" (*Queen Sugar* 8). Clearly, Charley treats this journey to take up her paternal inheritance as an antidote to her failures and the disappointments of LA's urban space, from student loans to a rented house, a clunky old car and the sense of being a terrible mother.

She may well have been innately inclined to hear "the siren song" that the South, according to Maya Angelou, sings to all black Americans (46). "The melody may be ignored, despised or ridiculed, but we all hear it," Angelou explains (46). Over the centuries, the rural South has proven to be both an alluring and a perilous place for blacks. Pathologization of their connection with land then became so severe that many blacks "have come to measure their own value according to the number of degrees they are away from the

soil" (Cleaver 58).[27] Ernest Bordelon, Charley's father, was no exception. However, though driven away to California by a traumatic childhood experience on the plantation—being hit in the face with a shovel for drinking before white field hands (124–125), which certainly qualifies as "the overt racial harassment that was a constant in southern life" (hooks 38)—Ernest felt the pull toward the land, he heard "the siren song." If emotions, as Ahmed postulates, "mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective," then emotions "align individuals with communities […] through the very intensity of their attachments" (119). Ernest, even though each vacation he and Charley spent back there ended up with his extreme frustration with anything southern (123), wanted nevertheless to create a positive affective alignment between his daughter and the agrarian South. After all, place is "a powerful signifier of identity for a black person in the South" (Davis 274).

Now an adult, Charley wants to belong and to be part of a larger community. She hopes that contact with this land will offer a balm to her tormented soul, and projects her longing for a blissful past on rural Louisiana. While normally nostalgia is a yearning for something no longer recoverable (Reese 71), for a simpler past and more peaceful times, in this case it is more complicated. The problem lies in the fact that the southern pastoral is grounded in the antebellum plantation economy, with its greatness predicated on slave subjugation and abuse and on that black labor then being erased from the southern mythos' grand narrative.[28] This pastoral idyll never acknowledged pain, dehumanization, coercion and exploitation, clashing directly with the harsh reality of black geographies.[29]

Her initial impressions of the local fields are marred by cracks in the idealized image of the rural South: "the remnants of an old sugar mill—brick smokestacks, rusted corrugated siding, dust-caked windows—loomed over the cane" (*Queen Sugar* 6). Charley's farm had also been badly neglected: "Stunted cane overrun with weeds, rusting equipment, broken tools scattered on the shop floor" (77). Those stunted stalks "dotted the earth, their straggly leaves a starved shade of pale green with deeply sunburned edges. Grass and weeds grew thick and matted between the rows." And she wonders: "Where were the neatly tilled rows, the lush cane plants high as a man's shoulder? Where was the moist soil, dark and rich as ground French Roast? Charley stared out over fields that should have looked like the hundreds of lush acres she passed on the drive down, but didn't" (9). Reality certainly bites.

After a few days, Charley's sentimental anticipation about these cane fields takes on an even more anti-pastoral, anti-utopian pall. In the middle of her farm was "[a]n old John Deere tractor with a blown-out windshield and weeds twisting though the fender hulked out front. Rust-pocked chemical drums and stacks of cracked tires littered the side yard. The place had a post-apocalyptic feel" (48). The discord between expected pastoral beauties and the stark reality of cane fields allows Baszile to explore a palimpsestic nature

in racialized spaces[30] and resignify relations between African Americans and land. In so doing, the writer heeds Du Bois's postulate that "arguing with Mr. Thomas Nelson Page"—a prominent apologist for slavery and father of the plantation-romance tradition—"is not only sane, but the imperative duty of thinking black men" (*Souls of Black Folk* 43).

A "Quiet Confidence […] and a Defiance": Farming While Black

As mentioned earlier, the number of black farmers in the United States decreased dramatically over the course of the twentieth century: "A war waged by deed of title has dispossessed 98 percent of black agricultural landowners in America" (Newkirk II). Approximately 2 percent of farmers across the nation were black at the beginning of the new millennium (Penniman, "To Free Ourselves"). Given the statistics, Carol Estes points to the fact that "members of the US Civil Rights Commission didn't need a crystal ball when they predicted in 1982 that black farmers would be extinct by 2000." However, as Estes notes, "they didn't take into account African American farmers who simply refuse to quit," and an increasing number of black farmers have successfully struggled to keep their land. The odds, however, conspired against them: Unfair practices of farm succession (Schell 7), land grabbing (Douglas) and denial of loans (Schell 6) are among the legal mechanisms and illegal pressures purposefully arrayed to hinder them (Newkirk II).[31]

In *Queen Sugar*, Charley comes up against the "freaking capitalist system," to use the farmer Alison Delcambre's assessment of odds he and others have been facing (191), which in the South has taken the form of "racial capitalism."[32] In the past, white supremacists had accumulated capital as land, labor and resources through violence and subjugation: Slavery, colonialism and migrant exploitation. By the twenty-first century, it was manipulation and systemic injustices such as displacing "uneven life chances" that were being deployed to accumulate and/or redistribute land among prosperous whites (Melamed 77–78).[33] In the novel, Charley and the others are up against Jacques Landry and Samuel Baron, representing the local mill Saint Mary's Co-op "in their corporate uniforms, wielding their power in her face" (166). They belong to the group of "beady-eyed m[e]n with a hyena's skulking posture [who] stared into faces as if trying to identify the weakest in the herd" of both black and poor white farmers (157). As such, Landry and Baron are the faces of racist capitalism. No wonder that Charley refers to Landry as a "corporate thug threatening to run [her] out of business" (76).

Mills, which operated the sugar warehouses, could dictate terms to farmers. The agrarian "rules of engagement" have changed, with cane mills favoring big farms largely owned by whites who can afford to be paid in installments by mills owned by the likes of Landry and Baron, rather than a month after delivering their harvest, as it used to be (191–192). Baron states,

on first meeting Charley, "that cane farming is a tough business. Every day, there's a report of another farm going under, another mill shutting down. It's depressing after a while." This might be construed as a warning or a threat. His comment upon offering to buy out her farm once it has proven beyond her means to maintain it, that "[o]ne can only exploit an opportunity with the right resources" (162), alludes to USDA loan policies favoring white landowners and big co-ops. This had happened to Alison Delcambre, even though he "[k]nows everything there is to know about sugarcane and then some" (190). Should a farmer be too successful and hence a threat to the landed white status quo, as Alison did, a mill can cancel his contract even after 30 years and force him out of business (190). Schell's assessment is hard to argue against:

> [t]o lose a family farm is a form of death and the loss of a dream for any farm owner, but for black farmers discriminated against in USDA farm loan and aid programs, there are other historical resonances—a continuation of Jim Crow practices—and a loss of hope for freedom and self-determination.

One of "the most courageous forms of economic self-determination" is when black farmers work their acreage and refuse to lose to economics and racism (Williams & Ficara). Looking at such refusals from an ethnographic perspective, Carole McGranahan explains that "[t]o refuse can be generative and strategic, a deliberate move toward one thing, belief, practice, or community and away from another. Refusals illuminate limits and possibilities" ("Theorizing Refusal" 319; qtd. in Reese 4). Charley's future possibilities were ensured by Ernest Bordelon's earlier refusal while coming of age in the agrarian South to have his humanity erased.

Ernest, as a small-scale real estate mogul in LA, did not inherit the LeJeune plantation on which he had worked growing up; to come up with the down payment when it was put on the market, he sold all his properties (30). He wants Charley to find autonomy and self-determination[34] in the very place where in his childhood he had been brutally exposed to Jim Crow racial laws. A provision in Ernest's will stipulated that should Charley choose to sell the property or take out a mortgage on it, the land—worth "a million, one twenty" (36)—would be turned over to charity (35). This turned out not to be a "so-called gift," as Charley felt at first (123), but instead was tough aid in her finding resilience and "quiet confidence" steeled with defiance (84), qualities that were captured in the statuette of a cane cutter that Ernest gave his daughter, the figure: "swung a cane knife. […] The curve of his back like he could lift ten times his weight […]; his determined gaze, as though he could cut a thousand acres by himself" (82–83).[35] This statuette represents Ernest's act of defiance against humiliation and subjugation at the hands of Mr. LeJeune when he worked the cane in LeJeune's fields. Ernest wanted Charley to salvage her autonomy

and find latent layers of self-determination, then to pass affectionate bonds to the land on to the next generations. In one of many moments of crisis, she realizes "[t]hat farm would get going again, no matter what stood in its path. For her daughter, for her father" (85). She recalls this thought just before the cane-grinding season begins. While under duress, she considers auctioning *The Cane Cutter*, knowing full well that it "symbolized generations of struggle and perseverance in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. […] He'd meant for her to have it, to own it, to be inspired by it, and to pass it on" (325–326). The statuette embodies racist injustice, abuse and exploitation as African Americans have experienced them since enslavement. Charley then comes to understand that generations of struggle illustrated by *The Cane Cutter* could not have taken place as solitary efforts. Since emancipation, "Black people have used farming to build self-determined communities and resist oppressive structures that tear them down" (Gripper).

Reclamations and the Vitality of Communal Resilience

Since antebellum times, black families have opposed the ruling elite's pathologization of their connection with land. While they resisted the practices of "othering"—the exclusion and erasure of their presence perpetrated by white supremacists—black farmers nurtured a sense of belonging that came from cultivating land, which at first they had not been allowed to own and then were being dispossessed of. Their survival depended on community solidarity and cooperation among families and communities. Charley's attempts at revitalizing the sugarcane fields she inherited, which the LeJeune heirs had neglected, are no different. Farms like Charley's embody "geographies of self-reliance,"[36] a term which, as Ashanté Reese shows, contains "phenomenological concerns: memory, nostalgia, personal and communal priorities, hope, engagements with history, and racialized responsibility" (8). As McInnis states, "sites and symbols can perpetuate historical injuries," with farmland in the South bearing marks of the sustained violence of plantation history ("Black Women's Geographies" 30–31). Those cane fields in the present-day signal "an acknowledgment and indictment of black subjection" (31), revealed in personal memories that are paralleled by Ernest's traumatic childhood experience in the novel and in the broader transgenerational trauma of plantation slavery.

Nostalgia, another constitutive element of Reese's geographies of self-reliance, features in attempts by black farmers to revitalize and to reclaim their connection with the land, connections that had been distorted and pathologized in the agrarian South's dominant pastoral vision. These geographies also reveal personal and communal priorities—in the case of blacks who farm, economic empowerment seems to matter as much as spiritual nurturance. Reese sees "self-reliance as a practice of refusal" (11). Here, it is these farmers' refusal, against the odds, to abandon their dream of

sovereignty that comes with land ownership. By the novel's end, Charley has dared to dream big, despite blatant racism among the elites—the notorious Jacques Landry and Samuel Baron of Saint Mary's Sugar Co-op being among the best worst examples—and partiality among social institutions, including loans refused by banks, with her loan applications denied ten times in two days (260). She has

> looked through the window into the powder-blue sky and imagined her fields, the rows of cane—her cane, her father's cane—looking lush and orderly like the fields she passed when they drove in all those months ago. She allowed herself, maybe for the first time, to think her dream would come true. (366)

Her hope for self-actualization through agriculture and her natural surroundings is further incited with each instance of familial and communal support, especially in the face of adversity.

She has also internalized a racialized responsibility, the final element of a geography of self-reliance. Charley feels responsible for her family and community, even for Ralph Angel, her half-brother who stole her *Cane Cutter* statuette—in his view, as compensation for being left out of their father's will (112). Charley's concerns are for Ralph being "caught up in the world of injustice" (371), yet she is exasperated by his being inadequate, arrogant and weak,[37] and by his embrace of a victim role, which bell hooks identifies as surrender of one's agency (49). Once Charley retrieves the statuette from the police, she gives it to Blue, her nephew, for it represents defiance and confidence, and after the untimely death of Ralph, his father, he will need all available support, love and incentive to get by.

Charley has drawn strength from cooperative economics, including intraracial assistance and cultivation of white support whenever possible (Daniel 5–6). She has embraced her farm in an act of self-invention; she reconstructs herself in relation to the land. Yet a permanent fixture in Charley's life has been her dependence on the support of men around her. From a woman whose existence had been completed by her husband and daughter, Charley evolves into a confident and defiant farmer. Yet she needs support to cultivate her cane fields. It is men who come to her rescue. Remy Newell, the divorced white farmer who becomes her beau, does this very tellingly at an auction when he bids for a tractor so Charley's purchase of it flies under Landry's radar (173) and when he has a hand in Micah's invitation onto the Queen Sugar parade boat (320). Denton, known by all as "a man of integrity and honor, steady and forthright" (115), mentors Charley and manages her farm. Others who become actively involved include Alison Delcambre, a poor white farmer being forced out of business due to business debts, who lends his expertise (190), and Hollywood, who mows Miss Honey's yard and who loans Charley his savings so she can avoid selling out to Landry and Baron.

As experiences of many black farmers attest, land ownership alone is no guarantee of access to pastoral security in the rural South, nor does it offer "a viable (if circumscribed) future" (McInnis, "Behold the Land" 92). When combined with communal cooperation, land ownership creates "the possibility of an insurgent, alternative plantation future" (McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies" 30). Hands-on work with her land—participating in the very physical labor of pulling armloads of cane stalks, she shocks her workers (237), while from the outset Denton encourages her to actually taste the soil (118)—gains Charley a claim to her roots there and access to her people's collective past. With this claim and this access, the cane farm becomes an extension of her black identity. Waiting in line with her crop at the Bayonne Sugar Mill—"the largest, most powerful sugar mill of them all" (341)—she feels embedded in the land, with the land now embedded in her:

> She had dreamed of this day, this moment. For the first time she saw the true connection, saw the chainlike links of iron between herself, her father, and grandmother, and their fathers' fathers before that. She was bound to this place, this small patch of earth; it was she and she was it. She thought of Ernest, who must have died praying—believing, crazily—that his daughter could do this.[38] (341)

Charley hears the "siren song" at last, and feels the land as the natural calling for blacks. The necessarily negative connotative value of chains—as manifesting violence against and abuse of black bodies under the so-called peculiar institution of slavery—has transformed into a very positive, constructive symbol of sturdy, lasting links that can be forged. The chain image now suggests that she finally knows where she has come from, and that she feels anchored.[39] Those iron-like links allude to the destiny she shares in the South with black farmers who came before her. She has gained a fuller understanding of who she is, of her potential, of her place in her family and in the broad community of farmers. In so doing, Charley demonstrates that "[c]ollective black self-recovery takes place when we begin to renew our relationship to the earth, when we remember the way of our ancestors" (hooks 40).

In Conclusion

In an interview with Elise Proulux, Natalie Baszile explained that her most recent book's title, *We Are Each Other's Harvest*, captures "the sense of moving forward together and taking care of each other" that encapsulates the essence of black farming. Baszile further unpacks this meaning, saying that it alludes to the "sense of history, community, legacy" (Proulx) that the planter elite attempted to erase through pathologizing blacks' natural affinity with land. That communal sense helps define the hard commitment

of farming everywhere, while Baszile's allusion specifies what blacks have faced in the agrarian South, complications and adversities that this chapter has explored.

Baszile's South is no bastion of an uncontested and utopian pastoral imaginary, nor is it "an alternative to capitalist agriculture" (McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies" 30). It is a troubled region with a long history of what Alice Walker identified as "silent bitterness and hate but also of neighborly kindness and sustaining love" (21). Though the South still tends to frustrate black farmers' dreams, it also retains the potential to nourish their sense of belonging—even when their processes of revising identity must entail the painful re-wounding process.[40] The practice of farming while black bears similarities to the artistic concept of *Kintsugi*. In Japan, an artist puts pieces of broken pottery back together. Imperfections and flaws of those shards are transformed with gold glue into the form's métier. Once black farmers have exposed adversities and constraints they face, the land can make them more resilient and will reveal their fuller potentials, as occurs with Charley Bordelon.

When it seems that Landry and Baron have beaten her in their bid for her farm, Charley is reminded, both by the story of her father's childhood trauma on this farm and by the sight of *The Cane Cutter*, that she has the potential with support and cooperation from within her family and community to "revise buried histories of racial dispossession" and of the violence inherent to plantation history (McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies" 2). That cooperation makes it possible for her to transform what had been another site of "black dispossession, antiblack violence, racial encounter" into a site of effective resistance and possibility (McKittrick, "Plantation Futures" 8). And to turn the imposed, pathologized connection blacks have long felt to agricultural labor—the ongoing legacy of broken promises, dispossession and systemic racism—into rehumanizing experience.

Leah Penniman has said in an interview with Mark Bittman that "[a]s black people, we are yearning for dignified narratives of our relationship to the land that reach across 400 years of enslavement, sharecropping, and dispossession to access thousands of years of belonging, innovation, and leadership in the agrarian space." With *Queen Sugar*, Natalie Baszile offers one such dignified if thorny present-day narrative of African Americans depathologizing their connection with that space, and gaining access across history to their deeper heritage.

Notes

1 Baszile's novel was adapted for the television series directed by Ava DuVernay, who expands on the original in many ways. This thematic expansion is achieved through introducing Nova, a third sibling in the Bordelon family, along with Charley and Ralph Angel, and by making Louisiana's historic reality explicit, for example by connecting plantations and prisons (the prison-industrial complex),

and by introducing social issues through the LGBTQ community and strong black female entrepreneurs.

2 The TV series offers a more tangible and direct connection with the traumatic racial past. That the Bordelons' ancestors were once property of the Landry family makes the three siblings even more determined to keep their farm running against all odds.

3 The threat of whipping facilitated sugar-production rates along with various reward structures based on incentives (Follett 135). Apart from violence and implicit threats, planters also used such incentives (sometimes termed "benevolent paternalism") in motivating the labors of their human chattel (Follett 139–141).

4 Black men taken from prison to work on plantations is a theme that appears in many Southern narratives. For instance, Marcus in Ernest Gaines's *Of Love and Dust* (1967), once bonded by a planter, is caught up in the gears of the exploitative economy as it operates on Herbert Plantation.

5 This crucial role of land to identity formation among African Americans was accentuated especially during the civil rights movement, and was brilliantly encapsulated in Malcolm X's declaration that "land is the basis of all independence. Land is the basis of freedom, justice, and equality" ("Message to the Grass Roots" 9). This point is reflected in Curtis Hays Muhammad's comments that open this chapter.

6 Among the ruling elite, this human fact was met with "surprise and ridicule" (Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction* 538).

7 For more specific reasons behind farmland loss among blacks, see Tyler & Moore 2.

8 A glimpse into the Jim Crow peonage system, from the perspective of the illiterate Black sharecropper "Nate Shaw," whose real name was Ned Cobb, is offered in *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* (1974). In this work of oral history published as an autobiography, Cobb, interviewed by the historian Theodore Rosengarten, narrates how he managed to stand up to racists attempting to cheat him and chase him off his land.

9 In Du Bois's novel, according to former slaveholders, property in the hands of a Negro "belonged of right to the master, if the master needed it; and since ridiculous laws safeguarded the property, it was perfectly permissible to circumvent such laws. No Negro starved on the Cresswell place, neither did any accumulate property. Colonel Cresswell saw to both matters" (*The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, ch. 33).

10 This section's title was inspired by Dick Gregory's final book, *Defining Moments in Black History: Reading Between the Lies*. Gregory's thematic concerns in it—mischaracterizing African Americans in history—do not converge with those presented in this chapter.

11 In the present century, the broken promise of 40 acres and a mule is so widely recognized that it remains a point of reference in other pipe dreams for African Americans. In Kendrick Lamar's song "Alright" (2015), he raps, "What you want you, a house? You, a car? / 40 acres and a mule? A piano, a guitar? / … / We been hurt, been down before, nigga."

12 "A million acres among a million farmers meant nothing, and from the beginning there was need of from 25 to 50 million acres more if the Negroes were to be installed as peasant farmers" (Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction* 537).

13 The location of Lincoln's Heaven in Pennsylvania, in the fictitious Montour County, underscores the fact that black farmers faced herculean challenges whether in the South, in the North or the expanding West.

14 Macon's murder could discourage other less successful black farmers from pursuing their dreams.

15 Homestead Act of 1862, Pub. L. No. 37-64 (1862).

16 These are the "expressions of allochronic discourses that inform 'ontological blackness,' or the blackness that whiteness created as Western civilization began to emerge as a prominent force in the world" (Duncan 67).
17 "The assistance that the federal government provided to white elite and yeomen farmers did not readily extend to black farmers" (Grim 271).
18 A profound distrust in institutions such as the judicial system deterred black farmers from officially willing their property to their heirs (Presser). "By one estimate, 81 percent of these early black landowners didn't make wills, largely due to a lack of access to legal resources. Their descendants then inherited the land without a clear title, and it thereby became designated as heirs' property" (Douglas). In turn, such situations lead to divided ownership of land that enabled forced acquisition through partition sales and heirs' property.
19 Discriminatory practices were and are clearly not the sole domain of the USDA, but rather of federal agencies in general. Schell brilliantly explains "a synecdochal relationship [that] is formed around the USDA's treatment of black farmers. [… the] USDA employee's disrespect, dismissal, and discriminatory practices against black farmers becomes a matter of national disrespect and scandal, one worthy of a class action lawsuit whereby the injured parties sue for redress. […] At the same time, the synecdochal relationship around the loss of black farms is much larger" (5).
20 "A 1982 report from the USDA Civil Rights Commission found that the department played a direct role in 'the decline of the black farmer,' finding that black farmers received only '1% of all farm ownership loans, only 2.5% of all farm operating loans, and only 1% of all soil and water conservation loans'" (Schell 8). Statistics proffered in the 1982 report were the foundation of a landmark class-action lawsuit against then USDA Secretary Dan Glickman, known as *Pigford v. Glickman*. In 1997, nearly 15,000 African American farmers accused department employees of racially discriminatory practices (Grim 280), such as delaying, frustrating and denial of black loan applications between 1981 and 1996 (Daniel 259). The 1999 ruling against the USDA allowed more black farmers to sue the department. Additional claimants were heard in 2008 for compensation within *Pigford II* (as part of the 2008 Farm Bill). These *Pigford* hearings resulted in settlement of both cases and payouts amounting to $2.3 billion. While "a typical disbursement of $50,000 to an individual farmer [was …] significant, it still fell far short of reparations. The amount did not come close to the calculations of what is owed and was not enough to buy back the lost acres or pay off the crushing debt farmers had accumulated in their bids for survival" (Penniman, "A New Generation").
21 The numbers vary depending on the source; see Grim 272; Gilbert et al. 55; Tyler & Moore 1.
22 The statistics come from, respectively: Wood & Gilbert 45; Douglas; and Grim 272; and United States Census Bureau report at https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1920/volume-3/41084484v3ch01.pdf.
23 Thadious Davis also used de Certeau's theories about overlapping layers of history in his analysis of Ernest Gaines's fictional Pointe Coupée Parish. Davis analyzes "a tense equilibrium of two complementary surfaces, the plantation and the quarters" in order to see how these heterogeneous strata function together in Gaines's fiction (*Southscapes* 262). I am, on the other hand, more interested in how theories of de Certeau and Foucault can be used to explore Baszile's transposition of the pastoral idyll of yore onto the contemporary politics of land.
24 Heterotopias are also linked "to time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect" (Foucault). As such, the Sugarcane Festival in Baszile's novel, organized annually in October, is a heterotopia per excellence; the boat parade on

the bayou is a temporal counter-site in which the reality is represented, inverted and contested all at the same time. The last boat parading "Queen Sugar and her court—all young white women dressed in heels and baby-doll dresses, their legs perfectly tanned—smiling their biggest debutante smiles and waving giddily from the deck" (310) synecdochally represents the mythos of the agricultural South: namely the erasure of black presence. When Charley thinks indignantly, "Couldn't there have been at last *one* black girl on the boat?" it's surely not an isolated opinion among black farmers (311). And when on the festival's second day Micah, her daughter, is invited as an honorary member of the court to sit beside the Queen (316), it certainly constitutes a challenge to the South's ever-present whiteness.

25 Slave-quarter gardens served as counter-sites. A discourse of resistance can be attached to garden cultivation, in terms of the history of blacks' relations with land. For enslaved Africans and then for their descendants, these small plots were a source of nourishment and of ownership. In post-emancipation times, cultivating gardens remained an act of resistance. Blacks rewrote "violent histories of slavery and dispossession rooted in a black farming imaginary, and […] re-envision[ed] this imaginary to one of power and transformation" (Ramírez 748). Aunt Violet warned Micah, for that very reason, that "folks down here take their gardens very seriously" (*Queen Sugar* 66). Even today, blacks can reclaim and renew ancestral relations to the land through gardening (Gripper). Micah chooses to grow vegetables rather than flowers in an empty lot next to Miss Honey's (66). She needs to rediscover herself much like Charley needs to rebuild her life: Micah is recovering from a scalding that literally and metaphorically scarred her. This she can do through photographing nature and cultivating her vegetable garden, which may function as a site of restoration.

26 That Charley falls in love with a landscape that is both scenic and a workplace (cane fields) indicates her inherent connectedness with the land and agriculture.

27 Charley can be taken as a fictionalized member of a "new wave, part of the 'returning generation' of Black farmers whose grandparents and great-grandparents fled the racial violence of the South, are now finding their way back to the land" (Penniman, "A New Generation of Black Farmers"). Seen as an exemplar of this "return migration," Charley returns to claim her ancestral inheritance but also, maybe more importantly, "in search of a spiritual nourishment, a healing, that was fundamentally connected to reaffirming one's connection to nature, to a contemplative life where one could take time, sit on the porch, walk, fish, and catch lightning bugs" (hooks 39).

28 Lewis Simpson noted that "ultimate irreconcilability of the Southern slavery system to the pastoral mode […] would reveal that the African chattel had come into the Southern garden of paradise as an intruder, dispossessing the garden of the Western pastoral imagination, transforming it into a garden of the chattel" (61).

29 Plantations were heterotopic spaces for African Americans for yet another reason: they functioned like mirrors in a Foucaultian sense. The pastoral idyll, much like a mirror that "makes this place that I occupy […] at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there" (24), refracts white supremacy that rendered black experience invisible, if not unreal. Enslaved people in the plantation economy were both real and unreal: A real workforce whose visual presence was distorted or erased through the aggressive sentimentalism and nostalgia of pastoral mythology. These heterogeneous layers of temporalities are starkly evident in blacks' strained, ambiguous attitude toward land ever since the antebellum era. This adverse effect on African Americans of the pastoral's propensity for "an idealisation that obscures social and economic reality"

(Templeton 5) left them with abidingly complicated relations to land—that same land that according to Du Bois "curiously mingled hope and pain" (*Souls of Black Folk* 86), and which indicated "ancient years of pain and pleasure" (Angelou 46).

30 Charley's sentimental expectations about the cane fields seem to have left out the black subjugation and coercion on which the plantation economy relied. However, though her experience of running a cane farm will persistently remind her of racial exploitation and forced displacement, Charley cannot disassociate herself from Louisiana's alluring beauty. The landscape had a similar allure for her half-brother: "The night smelled of tea olive, swamp lily, and magnolia—the smells of his childhood—and for a moment, Ralph Angel understood why people loved it here, why no one ever left" (296). In a like vein, Toni Morrison depicted the same pull and push between enthrallment with the southern pastoral landscape and its racist economy in *Beloved*, with Sethe's attitude toward Sweet Home, the Kentucky plantation from which she had escaped.

31 The racist legacy at the beginning of the new millennium of land theft and exploitation of agricultural workers (illegal immigrants) is explored in *The Cutting Season* (2012), Attica Locke's murder mystery, which takes place between Groveland Corporation, a corporate sugar-cane operation, and Belle Vie, an antebellum sugar plantation converted into a tourist attraction.

32 The term "racial capitalism" was coined by Cedric Robinson in his seminal *Black Marxism: The Making of a Black Radical Tradition*. In that book, Robinson writes that "[t]he development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force […] racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism. I have used the term 'racial capitalism' to refer […] to the subsequent structure as a historical agency" (37).

33 In *Queen Sugar*, many small-scale farmers go out of business due, as Denton explains, to "interest-rate hikes for production and equipment loans" (158), and because "labor done doubled. Insurance done tripled, fuel done tripled. Meanwhile, the price of cane's been the same for the last seven years" (132).

34 Resolute through her uphill battle with what bell hooks identified as the "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (43), Charley challenges a pathologized image of black people. It is an image hooks describes in writing about Black farmers: "[t]heir legacy of self-determination and hard work was a living challenge to the racist stereotype that claimed blacks were lazy and unwilling to work independently without white supervision" (43).

35 The rural landscape's beauty and physical violence are both reflected in *The Cane Cutter*. In the physical body of the figure, the pastoral idyll is inverted: his muscular physique is shaped by and thus draws our attention to suffering and to herculean labor at once, which pastoral myths were intended to exclude.

36 Though Ashanté M. Reese has coined the term "geographies of self-reliance" in describing the foodscape in Washington, D.C., I believe her concept is similarly effective in describing rural landscapes and land ownership.

37 Aunt Violet asks Charley rhetorically if Ralph Angel is "Combative? Erratic? Manipulative? Has an inflated sense of his own worth?" (333). Charley would come to realize that he was a "broken and desperate" man (357).

38 Ernest, acutely aware of the constraints and possibilities of Black farming, wanted to pass to his descendants the sacred legacy of the land. This potential was conveyed by the land when it "spoke" to African Americans, as Toni Morrison has rendered:

"You see?" the farm said to them. "See? See what you can do? Never mind you can't tell one letter from another, never mind you born a slave, […] never mind nothing. […] Take advantage, and if you can't take advantage, take disadvantage. […] Grab it. Grab this land! Take it, hold it, my brothers, […] dig it, plow

it, seed it, reap it, rent it, buy it, sell it, own it, build it, multiply it, and pass it on—can you hear me? Pass it on!" (*Song of Solomon* ch. 10)

39 In Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), the eponymous character in "Kabnis" is a teacher in a Georgia school who is detached from his racial identity. Ralph Kabnis, transplanted there from the North, is alienated from and frustrated by the reality of the Jim Crow South and feels "uprooted, thinning out" (section 3). He is "[s]uspended a few feet above the soil whose touch would resurrect him" (section 3). Dangling in the air he remains disconnected from a racial rootedness that would come from embracing agrarian tradition among other traditions.

40 I share McInnis's assessment of the southern landscape as a site of recovery, "resuturing," reconciliation and rewounding ("Black Women's Geographies" 4).

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