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'My Name Is Peaches': Black Women's Affect in the Blues Biomyth

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‘MY NAME IS PEACHES’: BLACK WOMEN’S AFFECT IN THE BLUES BIOMYTH

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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B.A., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2015

M.A., Louisiana State University, 2018

August 2022

If I had my way, I'd've been a killer.
--Nina Simone
Nina Simone: La Légende

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ABSTRACT

For this project, I am interested in the study of nuanced self-representations of Black rage that appear within African American literary traditions, specifically the blues aesthetic, wherein artists narrativize a wide spectrum of intelligent and specific emotion--not just melancholy. Blues narratives in which Black people self-represent are in direct opposition to flattened narratives of certain affective modes such as anger as a useless, backwards, pathologized, and flat feeling that appear within dominant U.S. and global iconographies. What I see in the blues aesthetic is the capacity for a multichromatic approach to studying rage and Black authorship in America. By using works from a miscellany of Black women (and some Black men) artists, I argue there are characteristics that identify performances of Black women's rage as its own category and color, as opposed to monochromatism or colorblindness. I use Black rage as an umbrella term to describe the myriad of ways that Black folks respond to the pervasiveness of White supremacy in the U.S. Rage is described here as not only as a survival mechanism for Black writers, but an affect best suited for understanding themes within Black creative production during and after slavery.

CHAPTER 1. DEFINING RAGE

Once upon this planet earth
Lived a man of humble birth
Preaching love and freedom for his fellow man
He was dreaming of a day
Peace would come to earth to stay
And he spread this message all across the land
Turn the other cheek he'd plead
Love thy neighbor was his creed
Pain humiliation death, he did not dread
With his Bible at his side
From his foes he did not hide
It's hard to think that this great man is dead.
--Nina Simone,
“Why? (The King of Love is Dead)”

On April 4, 1968, just hours after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, Robert Kennedy (November 20, 1925 – June 6, 1968), a New York senator and presidential candidate at the time, delivered an impromptu address to a majority African American crowd in Indianapolis, Indiana. He spoke, “For those of you who are Black--considering the evidence there evidently is that there were white people who were responsible--you can be filled with bitterness, with hatred, and a desire for revenge” (para. 3). He continued his ultimatum stating, “Or we can make an effort, as Martin Luther King did, to understand and to comprehend, and to replace that violence, that stain of bloodshed that has spread across our land, with an effort to understand with compassion and love” (para. 4). Kennedy’s speech was the first time, with many more examples to follow, in which King’s martyrdom was used against Black people as an attempt to hopefully alter their affect and to dampen the so-called negative emotions of bitterness, hatred, and vengefulness. However, Dr. King’s death would literally mark the end of the nonviolent era. Some scholars estimate that during the Holy Week Uprising that as many as 196 cities and 36 states (plus DC) participated in one of the largest social uprisings in American history since the Civil War. On the one hand, there were White politicians such as Robert Kennedy trying their

best to restrain Black affect and, on the other, African American leaders who understood--if not outright encouraged--and openly questioned the possible role of violence in achieving equality. One such leader was Nina Simone (February 21, 1933 – April 21, 2003), a Civil Rights activist and singer who arguably created the soundtrack to the movement with songs like “Mississippi Goddam,” “Backlash Blues,” “Ain’t Got No, I Got Life,” and “Young, Gifted, and Black.”

Three days after King’s death, Simone and her band performed in Long Island, N.Y. at the Westbury Music Festival. The band only had one day to learn the musical eulogy, “Why? (The King of Love is Dead),” which was written by the group’s bassist, Gene Taylor, in response to the beloved reverend’s death. The social unrest following King’s death, which lasted nearly two months, was anticipated by this performance wherein Simone affirmed the people’s feelings of existing “on the brink” (Simone line 23). It is “on the brink” where both Kennedy and Simone made their appeals--the major difference being that Simone knew firsthand how insoluble and inconsolable her own rage had been (Simone line 23).

By directly addressing the raw emotions that so many at the time were experiencing, the vocalist allowed her Black audience to experience collective catharsis, or release from those repressed emotions; she artfully storied King’s good deeds alongside necessary questions about the ongoing aftermath of his death. Through questioning, she determined hope is only possible *through* rage. Simone provocatively asked, “What will happen now that the king of love is dead?” and “Don't you know how we gotta react? Don't you know what it will bring?” (line 24, 34, 35). Simone and her contemporaries in the Black Power movement saw violence as an inevitable part of surviving America post- King. Aida Levy-Hussen’s article, “‘Black Rage’ and ‘Useless Pain’: Affect, Ambivalence, and Identity after King,” examines Black nationalist responses to Dr. King’s assassination within literary works and how Dr. King’s brand of

nonviolent rhetoric is directly linked to Black nationalism, and that the two are not mutually exclusive. Black nationalists took up King's death as a teachable moment wherein nonviolence disastrously did not work. By linking King, a synecdoche for Black incorporation and other pacifist rhetoric, directly to the Black nationalist movement, Levy-Hussen dispels the myth of rage being a definitive spectrum of violence versus nonviolence. For those "on the brink," Black rage and retribution was a natural response and any answer to that question of what happens next, for Simone especially, would have been acceptable (Simone line 23).

Rage

Rage is refusal. It is a visceral reaction to perceived wrongdoing. Since it is an affect, it is readily observable through psycho-physiological means. Rage presents itself as a bodily response to conscious feeling, yet, most importantly, it is marked by its inability to control. Rage is defined as "madness; overpowering passion of any kind, such as desire or anger; inspired frenzy; ardor; a fit of any of these; a mania or craze (for something); a vogue; something in vogue; violence, stormy or furious activity; a flood; (in combination) uncontrolled anger or aggression arising from a particular situation or environment, as in *road rage*, *air rage*" ("rage"). This definition of *rage* is of interest because it resonates with themes and connotations of rage that are within the archive I have curated here (more on that later).

Although I am incorporating sources that use *rage* and *anger* interchangeably, there are some significant differences between the two. In his article, "The Development of Anger and Rage," Michael Lewis differentiates anger and narcissistic rage through a developmental perspective. Lewis posits that anger is a "goal-directed" act that can be observed as early as the first few months of life. Lewis' definition of anger involves a basic emotion that functions "to provide the organism with motivated capacities to overcome obstacles" (150). Here, the concept

of *will* is an important characteristic of an organism's actions in an environment that presents barriers. On the other hand, rage coincides with objective consciousness which occurs at the end of age two; there is no rage without the development of a self-system (narcissism). Rage is triggered by "personal insult...being taken advantage of, and being compelled to do something against one's wishes" (Izard 330). Rage is less about a desired goal, but rather a direct response to an injury of the self or shame (Lewis 159). Lastly, the relationship between shame and rage is cyclically reinforced because one fuels the other. *The Edinburgh International Encyclopedia of Psychoanalysis* states, "Chronic narcissistic rage refers to the persistence of the fury, either as a painful memory or in a latent state, even long after the event or person who inspired it has gone" ("narcissistic rage").

Within affect studies, scholars observe the differences between *emotion*, *feeling*, and *affect*. *Feelings* are mostly related to specific terminology to describe more subtle or specific emotions such as ecstasy, remorse, fatigue, and panic. Meanwhile, *emotions* are categorically marked; they include broader descriptions like anger, sadness, and happiness. Within the container of emotions are feelings, and within the container of affect, are both emotions and feelings, in that order. Because there are many chemicals and hormones involved with emotions, affect describes the physiological response (i.e., noradrenaline, serotonin, and dopamine).

If rage is the overall container (or affect) for psychophysiological responses, anger would be a specific emotion relating to rage; furthermore, differentiated modes of emotions such as fury, madness, killing rage, melancholy, exasperation, blues, and mad grief are all feelings. According to Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "The concept of 'affect' has gradually accrued a sweeping assortment of philosophical/psychological/ physiological underpinnings, critical vocabularies, and ontological pathways, and, thus, can be (and has been) turned toward

all manner of political/pragmatic/ performative ends” (5). Black rage can be utilized as a unifying concept to contextualize the experiences of African Americans under the structures of White supremacy while also making room for the spaciousness of affect and the endless expressions it produces, including violence on the part of Blacks. Black rage is not monolithic and scholars of Black affect reject essentialization and appreciate how varied its expression may be at the individual level (McCann).

As I am delving deeper into the archive of writers, activists, image-makers, and performers, I like to think of Black rage’s idiosyncrasies similarly to how Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes queerness in *Tendencies*, which is “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (7). In Alexis Pauline Gumbs’ connotation of queerness from *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*, she states: “That which fundamentally transforms our state of being and the possibilities for life. That which is queer is that which does not reproduce the status quo” (115). Black women’s rage operating within the “open mesh of possibilities” or within a queered space explains the wide range of texts.

White Rage

As scholars attest, it is imperative to historicize Black rage--even its most furious iterations--as being catalyzed by White rage (Anderson; Kendi). Cyclically, at every turn of American history, at every instance of Black advancement, lurks White rage and backlash (Anderson). Given this, the study of Black rage requires attention to White rage. In *White Rage*, Carol Anderson states, “The real rage smolders in meetings where officials redraw precincts to dilute African-American voting strength or seek to slash the government payrolls that have long

served as sources of Black employment” (Anderson 83). The concept of institutional racism considers the ways in which anti-Blackness functions throughout many facets of society, from healthcare to the legal system. Institutional racism, also known as systemic racism, refers to “a form or type of racism that originates in and is practiced by institutions in the society rather than by individuals. It is observed when the practices or patterns of institutions have the effect, result, or consequence of discriminating against or subordinating an individual or group on the basis of race” (Smith para. 1). Institutional racism is pervasive exactly because of its cumulative presence in politics, education, healthcare, housing, employment, and policing.

Black Rage

The term *Black rage* was first coined by two Black male psychologists, William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, in 1968 to describe the hopelessness African Americans felt in the wake of Dr. King’s death. They argued Black rage, even in the form of violence, is a valid response to White rage. *Black Rage* famously concluded,

For there are no psychological tricks Blacks can play upon themselves to make it possible to exist in dreadful circumstances. No more lies can they tell themselves, No more dreams to fix on. No more opiates to dull the pain. No more patience. No more thought. No more reason. Only a welling tide risen out of all those terrible years of grief, now at a tidal wave of fury and rage, and all Black, Black as night (213).

I use *Black rage* as an umbrella term to describe the various ways that Black folks respond to the pervasiveness of White supremacy in the United States. I see Black rage not only as a survival mechanism for Black performers and writers, but as a theoretical framework well-suited to understanding themes within their creative production. In my research, I intend to show how narratives in which Black women position their rage and related emotions as productive, necessary responses to a White patriarchal culture. Rage on the part of African Americans

inherently and unequivocally draws attention; however, it is negligible compared to the violence of White supremacist rage and its pervasiveness within America culture (Anderson).

In *Black Rage*, Grier and Cobbs claim that they sought to “reveal the full dimensions of the inner conflicts and the desperation of the Black man’s life in America post Dr. King’s death.” Nonetheless, I am skeptical about their ability to critically portray Black women’s inner lives. Besides the popular quotations from *Black Rage* and critiques of its pathologizing of Black affectivity, many scholars do not directly address the overt sexism that occurs within the text. Grier and Cobbs’ writings on Black men’s experiences reflect their internal struggles with the White power structure in a relatively humane way. Meanwhile, Black women are essentialized regarding their supposed abject appearances and sexual appetites.

There are chapters in *Black Rage* that discuss how rage is gendered, but they do not predicate sexism as playing a role in how Black women enact their rage. Not only that, but the authors themselves participate in the dehumanization of Black women within a clinical setting. Wendy Ashley argues the racial and gendered stereotype of Black women as innately angry has “implications for diagnosis, treatment, and therapeutic outcomes for Blacks and women” (Ashley). According to Ashley, “The “angry Black woman” mythology presumes all Black women to be irate, irrational, hostile, and negative despite the circumstances” (27). Ashley continues, “The stereotype is well known in informal settings but has a lack of representation in professional literature. Angry Black women are typically described as aggressive, unfeminine, undesirable, overbearing, attitudinal, bitter, mean, and hell raising” (27).

In one chapter, “Achieving Womanhood,” Grier and Cobbs assert, “The softly seductive, essentially feminine quality of women is at its height during adolescence... the effort clearly is to extend them and make it possible for a woman to appear more feminine for a longer period of

her life” (47). They go on to state, “For a great many Black women, however, the process is reversed.” Grier and Cobbs emphasized that many Black girls and women were on the trajectory to lose their femininity over time, resigning “themselves to a relatively asexual maternal role in which work and a hovering concern for the family occupies them entirely” (47). Reduced to their labor function, Black women’s affective docility exists within the iconography of the mammy archetype: the cartoonishly-ideal nurturer who embodies all the characteristics colonizers deemed exploitable.¹ Additionally, the stereotype that Black women are inherently masculine has been historically perpetuated in the media; fictional characters such as Wanda (Jamie Foxx), Madea (Tyler Perry), Rasputia Latimore (Eddie Murphy), Big Momma and Sheneneh (Martin Lawrence) are all played by male actors who also happen to be comedians. There is no denying that these representations are particularly dangerous as they are in the realm of the visual and effectively limit the range of Black women’s voices to comedic relief. Within a Black feminist framework, hooks established a way of thinking about affect at the intersections of gender and race. This way of thinking is important because Black male affectivity often trumps that of Black women’s affect.

Positioning the Project

For this project, I am interested in the study of nuanced self-representations of Black rage that appear within Afro American literary traditions, specifically the blues aesthetic, wherein authors write about a wide spectrum of intelligent and specific emotion--not just melancholy. The history of Black life in America through slavery and citizenship has been carefully narrativized by Black people over the centuries through provocative performances of affect, a lot of which can be categorized as operating within the blues aesthetic. In defining the blues

¹ The mammy caricature is the subservient Black woman who is the nurturer towards the White family; there is the belief that she would put the needs of the White family she cares for before that of her own family.

aesthetic, Amiri Baraka observes, “The Blues Aesthetic must emotionally and historically carry the heart and soul of the African antiquity, but it is also a Western Aesthetic, i.e., expressing a western people, though an African-American one” (102). Blues narratives in which Black people represent themselves are in direct opposition to flattened narratives of certain affective modes such as anger as a useless, backwards, pathologized, and flat feeling that appear within dominant US and global iconographies. What I see in the blues aesthetic is the capacity for a multichromatic approach to studying rage and Black authorship in America. By using works from a miscellany of Black women (and some Black men) artists, I argue there are characteristics that identify performances of Black women’s rage as its own category and color, as opposed to monochromatism or colorblindness.

This dissertation, *‘My Name Is Peaches’: Black Women’s Affect in the Blues Biomyth*, examines the autoethnographic and literary performances of several artists, including Nina Simone, Bessie Smith, Zora Neale Hurston, Lauryn Hill, and Rihanna to understand how their texts coalesce to demonstrate that there is futurity in Black rage. The title, *‘My Name Is Peaches,’* is a lyric from another Nina Simone song, “Four Women,” which was released on her *Wild Is the Wind* album in 1966. Within “Four Women,” Simone skillfully moves through four distinct personas: Aunt Sarah, Saffronia, Sweet Thing, and Peaches, all of whom are representative of archetypes specific to Black women. In the final verse, Simone sings,

My skin is brown
my manner is tough
I'll kill the first mother I see
my life has been too rough
I'm awfully bitter these days
because my parents were slaves
What do they call me
My name is PEACHES (line 29-36).

The archetype of the angry or evil Black woman is fully expressed within the blues aesthetic, and Simone's *Peaches* is unequivocally a reproduction of themes around violence and pleasure as performed by earlier blueswomen. In my investigation of Black women's literary practices, I argue that the affective performances of these artists offer insight into the productive functions of rage as well as its excesses. Thinking about the concept of rage challenges us to confront the tension between the very real drivers of rage and the stereotype of Black women as innately angry. Taking this into consideration, this project responds to the following questions: How do we define and delineate Black rage as a social force? How might we productively define and categorize rage itself? What is specific about the ways Black people experience and express rage? How is rage contextualized by artists and theorists? What is the relationship between gender, sexuality, race, class, and rage? What kinds of intersections of identity generate what forms or expressions of rage?

While rage has been extensively written about in various fields, including mad studies (Ward et al.; Bruce), cultural studies (Lloyd; McCann), psychology (Grier & Cobbs), affect studies (McCann), and performance studies (Colbert), this project focuses on blueswomen and rage-related characteristics of affect specific to their art. I argue Black rage performs several major functions that carve into being the role of authorship in the creation of the Black woman's body as a text. While destabilizing long-standing, globalized iconographies that scrutinize Black women's sexuality and affectivity, my research calls into focus the importance of authorship in an era when representations of our rage are in high demand.

My work is responsive to the culture of anti-Blackness which scapegoats Black rage even in the wake of insurmountable Black death. In this country, the continual killings of unarmed Black men, women, and children by the police with little to no penalty have affirmed the terrible

suspicion that Black lives are and have always been considered disposable. Today, in a time when the declaration of Black Lives Matter is becoming increasingly popular, some have used this Black-positive mantra as a case-in-point to double down on racist attitudes. The widespread Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 erupted in response to the death of George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man who lost his life while being accosted by Minneapolis police in late May for allegedly using a counterfeit bill. The outrage following the event was almost certainly evoked by the video evidence of the murder. Officer Derek Chauvin is seen kneeling on Floyd's neck for nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds after Floyd is already handcuffed and lying face-down. There are also three other officers—Tou Thao, Thomasz Lane, and J. Alexander Kueng—present, who assisted Chauvin in restraining Mr. Floyd and warding off bystanders from interfering. To add, on February 23, 2020, Ahmaud Arbery died at the hands of White vigilantes while exercising in Glynn County, Georgia. On March 13th, Breonna Taylor, a healthcare worker, was shot and killed in her Louisville, Kentucky apartment during a botched police raid. While most BLM demonstrations remained peaceful, there were some reports of rioting, property destruction, and looting. In several cities, gun violence involving police and civilians had also been reported. When incidents such as these take place, the focus is shifted from the problem of police violence to the imagery of looting, burning, and vandalization of property. This proves the foremost problem of Black affectivity is not its outward expression, but how it is perceived, packaged, and disseminated to the masses as spectacle.

White supremacy seems to thrive regardless, and it has an undeniable reliance on real and fabricated images of Black upset. In "Recognizing Racism in the Era of Neoliberalism," Angela Davis says, "When obvious examples of racism appear to the public, they are considered to be isolated aberrations, to be addressed as anachronistic attributes of individual behavior (169)."

Meanwhile, African Americans are seen by the state and its law enforcers as criminals in need of surveillance. Longstanding myths about Blackness and its relation to criminality, inferior intellect, and animalistic tendencies are still used to justify the extreme forms of violence utilized by the state. Though African Americans only make up roughly 13% of the US population, they make up 1 million of the 2.3 million people behind bars; more Black men are behind bars today than were enslaved in 1850 (Alexander). Despite these facts, America still promulgates that it is a post-race society; neoliberal myths also legitimate that personal responsibility and education are the keys to Blacks uplifting themselves--not fundamental change. It also allows people to emphasize class struggles over struggles of race as those that create divides within society. This creates a silencing effect, for people of color no longer have the discursive space to express the racism they face.

Chapter Outline

In the next chapter, I explain key terms and methodologies such as killing rage (hooks), biomythography (Lorde), eroticism (Lorde), Afro-pessimism (Hartman; Moten; Sexton; Wilderson), affect studies (Ahmed; Garcia-Roja; Gregg and Seigworth; McCann), and performance studies (Hurstun; Madison; Wilderson). This dissertation strategically centers three Black woman-authored texts: Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984), and bell hook's *Killing Rage* (1995). The interdisciplinary nature of this work allows me to creatively approach the topic of Black women's rage; I refine the concept of *killing rage* by placing it in conversation with Audre Lorde's *biomythography* and *eroticism* for my later analysis of how patricide is "pleasurized" within the tradition of blueswomen. I also take cues from contemporary scholars Brittany Cooper, Angela Davis, Jennifer Ward, Jennifer

Sharpe, La Marr Jurelle Bruce, Rachel Alicia Griffin, Taryn Jordan, and Therí Alyce Pickens, all of whom are doing relevant and remarkable work in the study of Black affectivity.

In chapter three, “Afterimages of Black Women’s Sexuality and Affectivity in the U.S. Imagination,” I describe the distinct images of Black women within the dominant visual economy. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a historical background for which all Black women are visually subjected to in ordinary circumstances. The United States of America *is* an image nation, and we consciously build our ideas about groups of people from images. Longstanding myths in globalized iconographies of Black women’s supposed hypersexuality, ugliness, ability to withstand pain, and anger are all transplanted/transported/read/seared onto real bodies in real time. The White, paternalistic gaze posits Black women exist only to be read as tragic spectacles; the gaze also posits that Black women are relics of historical circumstances (Quashie). The purpose of this chapter is to supplement the aim of the following chapter, which demonstrates how objects stare back to produce—in their own eyes—visions of an Afro-pessimistic future (Elkin; Hartman). I explore the myths of the Freak, Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire/Peaches in particular.

Chapter four, “The Hauntology of Killing Rage in the Blues Biomyth,” traces the recurring leitmotif of hooks’ *killing rage* throughout the blues tradition; I explore the discourse surrounding Black women’s affectual lives as they tell it, which is against the backdrop of powerful representational imagery that dehumanizes. In her essay, “Teaching Resistance,” hooks advances the importance of authoring one’s own images and positions Black women’s authorship as a special responsibility in both national and global visual cultures, arguing, “*Daughters of the Dust* portrayed Black folks in ways that were radically different from Hollywood conventions...Radical representations of race in television and movies demand that

we be resisting viewers and break our attachment to conventional representations” (116). The discourse of “sameness” distinguishes low or base emotions from perceived positive or high ones. Meanwhile, self-representing iconographies of Black affect remain adamant in celebrating and valuing--not extorting-- its most violent aberrations. When talking about the impact of conventional representations of Black affectivity on the “free market,” it is Black women’s affectivity that is repeatedly exploited and telling one’s own narrative remains the foremost popular mode of non-violent resistance for Black women.

Chapter five, “Modernity’s Beast: Mad Weather, Rage and Rabies in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” investigates the supposedly paradoxical relationship between modernity and Blackness, the latter functioning in this novel as a synecdoche for madness. I argue Tea Cake and Janie’s separate but interrelated descents into madness are indeed raced and gendered, which resonates with Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of *intersectionality*, which describes the interconnectedness of identities of race, class, gender, and sexuality that contribute to discrimination or disadvantage. For this analysis, it is important to note that the term *rage* can be traced back to the Medieval Latin words *rabia* and *rabies*, the latter being a fatal, infectious disease that causes madness in mammals. I argue the etymological relationship between rage and rabies is particularly productive for a reading of these blues characters especially since the pathogenesis of the disease can be traced throughout the events of the novel.

In the concluding chapter, in “Self-Portraits of Mad Grief,” I self-reflect on the process of writing and theorize how this dissertation project contributes to the archive. As an artist-scholar, this kind of entry into the archive bridges the divide I often feel between the academy and the arts. In my theorizing of Black rage and resistance, I offer a study of Black affectivity that is practical, humane, and from the perspective of a fellow artist. Besides, artistic

practice is vital to the study of performance (Schechner). Music--especially the blues-- has always been at the core of my artistic career, and I return to it time and time again. Perhaps this is because I've been inundated with grief since the start of my academic career, which began nearly 10 years ago. Those of us performing rage work must remember to do what Rebecca Walker describes as "leaving the institutional plantation," which is to leave the machine of institutionalism that was created to devour us. The quality of rage in the academy is work that "tells it like it is." It is work that certainly feels like work. But it is also deeply cathartic. Within the disappearance, I sought a homeplace with my radical literary foremothers, other rage workers in the academy, and within myself. According to Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, it is in the *undercommons of enlightenment*, or in disappearance, that the work of the academy gets subverted. Moten and Harney maintain that *the undercommons of enlightenment* is located in "the downlow low-down maroon community of the university" and that "subversive intellectual" exists in the condition of being both necessary and unwelcome, stating, "The university needs what she bears but cannot bear what she brings" (Moten et. al 26).

Black, Afro-American, and African American are all used interchangeably to describe many of the authors whose works I have curated from the archives. Even though the focus of this project is reflective of my worldview as a Black woman from the American South, I hope my work inspires the need to investigate affect archives across the diaspora since the discrimination of Black women is a global, highly profitable phenomenon. In response, Black and Brown women all over the globe have been documenting or authoring their own experiences through performance, academic research, image-making, and other literary traditions.

CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Killing Rage

bell hooks' works have been instrumental to this research, and I want to acknowledge her recent death in December of 2021. Losing hooks while writing this project has made it clear that attention to our rage how we tell it is all the more necessary moving forward. In *Killing Rage* (1995), the carrier of White supremacist rage is the "anonymous White male" who sat next to hooks on an airplane, taking the seat of her fellow Black woman travel buddy (8). Her opening paragraph begins, "I am writing this essay sitting beside an anonymous white male that I long to murder" (8). hooks reframes the story of the stolen seat to show the external and internal dialogues reacting to the multiple levels of dehumanization. hooks is denying neoliberal imaginaries of racial unity, Black incorporation, and forgiveness in her writing. Despite hooks not having a say in the plane incident as it happened in real time, the act of writing out how the incident ought of gone has given her power over the situation as she revels in the possibility of murder as she retells it. This type of expression is not benign. Non-violent expressions of rage such as authoring one's own narrative still participate in the act of patricide or killing the father because "murder begins with the intent to kill" (Derrida 65).

Critiquing the work of Grier and Cobbs, bell hooks' *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, claims, "[They] named it pathological, explained it away. They did not urge the larger culture to see it as a potentially healthy, potentially healing response to oppression and exploitation" (12). Insisting on the consideration of rage positivity, bell hooks' *killing rage* resonates with my research. *Killing Rage* is a critical response to the overwhelming silence that exists within *Black Rage*. Embodying what bell hooks thought earlier definitions of rage lacked, *Killing Rage* urges us to consider rage as a healthy response to oppression and exploitation (12).

With harmful notions about gender being carried into Black nationalism and other movements meant to humanize Black men, it is important to attend to Black women's rage as they tell it, marking their iterations of rage differently from that of Black men. Though I can't overstate the value of what thinkers such as Franz Fanon, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael (also known as Kwame Ture), and James Baldwin have added to my overarching ideas about radical Black affectivity, they never fully grasped the robustness of Black women's experiences in America (hooks). Black women are and have always been reclaiming anger as a powerful response to an anti-Black society, meanwhile refusing essentializing interpretations of their rage as sass, pointlessness, silence, and unproductivity.

Professor Anita Hill's accusations against Clarence Thomas in 1991 are a prime example of patriarchy's effect on Black nationalism (hooks). The committee who heard Hill's testimony was made up of 14 White males, including the likes of then-Senator, President Joe Biden (D-DE), Strom Thurmond (R-SC), Orin Hatch (R-UT), and Ted Kennedy (D-MA). This public debacle affirmed the harmful ideas that Black women are welcoming of sexual attacks, are not credible in the retelling of their own lived experiences and are not "team players" if they spoke up about issues such as these at the expense of racial progress. The dream of Black nationalism did not support the voice of a woman who was verbally harassed in a professional setting, proving "that the 'death' of strong Black women—whether literal or symbolic—is needed for the redemption of Black masculinity, which is synonymous with redemption of the race" (hooks 81). Attempting to save his image, Judge Clarence Thomas spoke with the utmost authority in the Senate Judiciary Committee's hearing after Ms. Hill had testified against him. Clarence Thomas declared, "This is a circus. It is a national disgrace. And from my standpoint, as a black American, as far as I am concerned, it is a high-tech lynching for uppity blacks who in any way

design to think for themselves, to do for themselves, to have different ideas” (Totenburg 118). In his own words, Thomas likened the process of the hearing to being “lynched, destroyed, caricatured by a committee of the U.S. senate, rather than hung from a tree” (Totenburg 118). Rhetorically, Thomas used both his Blackness and his masculinity to persuade the committee, and, in the end, Black male anger was privileged, and Hill’s experiences were invalidated further when Thomas was inducted into the Supreme Court as Thurgood Marshall’s replacement. Since the position of Supreme Court Justice is a lifetime appointment, the public debate regarding his abhorrent behavior towards Hill had no major impact on his career thereafter.

hooks, when referencing the personal and intellectual impact of figures of Black radicalism who are male, states, “Feminist thinking demanded that I move beyond patriarchy, beyond the body of the father. Initially, to do this I needed to forget: to repress the father’s words and be born again in the memory of the mother’s body” (81). Killing rage, simply put, is the “moving beyond” both patriarchy *and* White supremacy by embracing the literary traditions of our foremothers.

Affect Studies

When scholars study affect, we are doing so by observation since affect is a visceral, bodily response. Affect is ascertained by outward expressions, which might be signaled, for example, through tone, facial expression, and modulation of voice. In “An Inventory of Shimmers,” Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg offer a working nomenclature of affect and its uses within affect studies. Of the eight named uses of affect clearly identified in “An Inventory of Shimmers,” two modes resonate with what I am endeavoring here. The first mode is a cultural studies approach, and it is often employed by “subaltern peoples living under the thumb of a normativizing power” (7). The “hard and fast materialities” of my study are

representative of the “official” archives I intend to outline as an environment for the “fleeting and flowing ephemera” or “unofficial” archives of rage workers who dare resist institutions. These epistemologies of the “unofficial” category are deeply felt and are vitally important to resistance and liberation. The persistent normalizing of [White] patriarchy as *the* source of intellectual, moral, and emotional authority signals the need for marginalized communities to develop epistemologies that are experiential and deeply cultivated. Studying the archive of Black affectivity not only involves contextualizing its linkages to institutionalism, but also requires scholars to identify performances that turn objects into subjects.

Secondly, my research resonates with Seigworth and Gregg’s identification of affect scholarship that “appears in critical discourses of the emotions (and histories of the emotions) that have progressively left behind the interiorized self or subjectivity” (Seigworth et. al 8). Autoethnographic accounts (slave narratives, memoirs, blues songs, poems, and biomythographies) are one such source for the archive that allows for a reading of affect that is against the grain of sweeping institutions, including those of slavery, the law, politics, science, media, religion, and philosophy. Seigworth and Gregg posit that narratives offer a wealth of affective knowledge, which functions to “unfold regimes of expressivity that are tied much more to resonant worldings and diffusions of feeling/passions,” and include,

atmospheres of sociality, crowd behaviors, contagions of feeling, matters of belonging...and a range of postcolonial, hybridized, and migrant voices that forcefully question the privilege and stability of individualized actants possessing self-derived agency and solely private emotions within a scene or environment (Seigworth et. al 8).

Within the genre of autoethnography, private feeling translates to public knowledge, linking the personal experiences of the individual to the audience. When the marginalized individuals take to the role of authorship, they can reemerge as disidentified subjects (Garcia-Rojas). It is the language of self that emerges from “the embodied and experiential self and operates as a lens

through which women of color feminists examine and explore systems of power and oppression, hegemonic knowledge structures, and dominant economies of affect” (Garcia-Rojas 255).

Therefore, authorship is a critical process by which marginalized groups produce for themselves an understanding of dominant discourses that surround their affect and respond by creating new, self-representing affects (Garcia-Rojas).

Biomythography

Audre Lorde, a writer who wrote from her experiences as a Black woman, lesbian, poet, activist, and mother, theorized her own affective modes in a collection of groundbreaking essays entitled *Sister Outsider*. Audre Lorde characterized her relationship to anger as one that constantly shapeshifted over the course of her life, and her passage through these complicated emotions—written for others to witness—is a blueprint for how to process racial and gendered trauma. Lorde’s writing about her emotions plays a crucial role in her agency. Rather than remaining silent about experiencing displeasure at the whims of institutional racism, it is vital for Black women to use their voices because, alternatively, dominant discourses misrepresent the cause of their rage. The multivocality of writing affect—both individually and socially—transcends the singular narrative, and its performance revolts against gaslighting, learned helplessness, and forced reticence. In “The Uses of Anger,” Lorde recalls, “My response to racism is anger. I have lived with that anger, ignoring it, feeding upon it, learning to use it before it laid my visions to waste, for most of my life. Once I did it in silence, afraid of the weight” (120).

In opposition to epistemologies that have historically been used to demean, Lorde’s writing fundamentally centers our personal experiences and feelings as modes of knowing. In “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” Lorde states, “The white fathers told us, I think therefore I am; and the

Black mother in each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams, I feel therefore I can be free” (33). In other words, feelings are the birthplace of ideas, and it is indispensable that we re/member who we are amid corporeal, emotional, and psychological pain caused by an external, male-dominated world. The pilothouse of “unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling” in each of us that Lorde describes informs the writing process as it undergoes the transmogrification from an interior experience to the wielding of a pen to becoming a public text before an audience that also feels (32). Lorde asserts, “Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives” (32). The act of writing is a way for those of us who come from marginalized identities to heal and resist; writing itself is an act of dispossession. Of course, the power of creativity has its limits; nonetheless, the fact of the matter is art or craft is one of the most liberatory spaces for Black people in terms of its ability to transmute or even transcend the everyday structures of violence into cathartic release. It is also a fertile landscape for the development of Black power imaginaries that transgress Whiteness and its privilege regarding both violence and affect.

Lorde’s brand of autoethnography, the *biomythography*, was first coined in *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, which is a quasi-autobiographical narrative that takes readers on a linear journey from when Lorde was struggling to get into a proper school as a legally blind child to her completing her librarian degree in her late thirties. *Zami* is unique because it is upfront about its hybridity as a text that is grounded in personal history (which is political history according to Lorde), fact, and mythmaking. The biomythography challenges the reverence around “official” histories while blurring the lines between nonfiction and fiction. The biomythography reminds us that history—no matter how factual it appears—is rooted in myth; the biomyth’s tendency to center

myth-making within history-making, ironically, produces a more accurate approach to history because it is accepting that human memory is flawed and so is the singular story. In María Pilar Sánchez Calle's essay, "Audre Lorde's *Zami* and Black Women's Autobiography: Tradition and Innovation," she defines biomythography as "a method of self-exploration, and not a limited genre whose validity depends on the authenticity of the content of the narration" (163). Calle continues, "Lorde does not hide herself in her writing, on the contrary, her intention is to define her life experience in her own words. In doing so, Lorde gains the power of naming without waiting for other people's judgements about her existence" (163).

Eroticism

Also from *Sister Outsider*, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" argues pornographic imagery creates sexual oppression while maintaining that the erotic is the source of women's power. Lorde's purpose is to allow women to recognize the power of the erotic within their lives in order to give them the energy to pursue genuine change within the world, rather than settling for a patriarchal and emotionless society. Lorde defines *eroticism* as "a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (49). Lorde notes that "it has become fashionable to separate the spiritual (psychic and emotional) from the political, to see them as contradictory or antithetical" (51). She counters this belief by reminding us that the erotic (spiritual) and political (natural) are dependent on each other. Further, she explains that the erotic has been perverted by the West as simply a perverse, sexual hunger that should be confined to the bedroom and the pornography industry for enjoyment based in exploitation rather than liberation. She also defines pornography as a "direct denial of the power of the erotic" (Lorde 49). I intend to read "Uses of the Erotic" paired with other scholarship on the politics of pleasure to demonstrate the many

benefits of bringing an analysis of eroticism to rage and vice versa. In *Black Cool: One Thousand Streams of Blackness*, Rebecca Walker states, “As artists, we seem to *desire* like no one else—a desire that often pushes us to the point of madness. We don’t just feel a range of intense emotions; we feel the need to express them to others. Express as in expel. Rant. Rage. Purge. Get them out of our heads and bodies and into the real world” (24). I argue that Black rage and eroticism are enriched by their side-by-side reading when it pertains to the lives and performances of blueswomen.

Blues

Semantically, *blues* and *melancholia* are intimately connected to each other. The word *melancholia* is derived “from the Greek words *melas*, meaning black, and *chole*, meaning bile” (“melancholia” para 1). Key factors in experiencing melancholy are that it is marked by “unremitting sadness” and the absence of pleasure or “greatly reduced sensitivity overall to pleasure” (“melancholia” para 1). *Blues* was born out of the aesthetics of Black affectivity, and was first described as a feeling, “a troublesome emotion” (“blues”). Amiri Baraka states, “But Blues is first a feeling, a sense--knowledge. A being not a theory--the feeling is the form and vice versa” (106). The *blues* refers to a “body of 20th-century black American poetry; also a verse form in that poetry. Poems range from coherent, composed stories to discontinuous, improvised stanzas drawn from a common pool of formulas” (“blues”). The blues represents the resiliency of everyday people who persevere through suffering and transmute it. It is difficult to ascertain between the lived experiences of blues performers and the alter egos they embodied. In *Blues and Evil*, Jon Michael Spencer terms this the *mythologies of the blues*, which incorporates “both the lyricizing of lore about traditional black tragic heroes and the embodiment of the tragic personality by living blues singers” (4). The *blues biomyth* is an autobiographical encounter of

history as myth, and it is within this tradition of displaying blue moods, Black women have named and represented themselves in a humanizing light.

In this research, I discuss the lives of blueswomen alongside their provocative creative production. Within blues music, Black women sang of relationships and with multiple sexual partners, some of which were queer and extramarital (Davis). Resistance inherently exists within this dynamic of refusing being labeled property, especially through the expression of individual sexuality and desire. According to Angela Davis, “The birth of the blues was aesthetic evidence of new psychological realities within the black population” (Davis 5). Davis also illuminates that, “Themes of individual sexual love rarely appear in the musical forms produced during slavery...Sexuality after emancipation could not be adequately expressed or addressed through the musical forms existing under slavery” (4). Female blues singers in particular went against the grain of Euro-centric values in music by creating identities or personas outside of the norm for African American women in everyday society who were often criticized by the larger, patriarchal culture for their sexual and sensual desires.

Emerging alongside the reality of self-selected partnerships in the post-emancipation South, the blues materialized as a culture that celebrated the profane, and heroes—ones written into lyrics that promoted violence against Whites and unfaithful intimate partners—emerged from these songs (Gussow). According to Adam Gussow’s *Seems Like Murder Here*, “Blueswomen, considerably more mobile than the women they sang to and for but equally inclined to live out their pressured freedom as a search for fulfilling sexual love, sang of empty beds, vanished lovers, haunted houses, ‘bone orchards,’ and fantasies of revenge against a cold and heartless world” (3). Gussow also argues that, momentarily, these heroes displace their feelings of victimhood through these fantastical performances of retributive violence. My interest

lies in the performative struggle of the flesh that responds to violence from oppressors with scenes of retribution. By studying performances of impossibility, we unveil a manner out.

Afro-pessimism

Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* focuses on the experiences of anti-Blackness in the quotidian to "defamiliarize the familiar" (4). The spectacular nature of the violated Black body has been repeatedly reproduced in literature and in visual culture to the point of dehumanization. Hartman asks, "Are we witnesses who confirm the truth of what happened in the face of world-destroying capacities of pain, the distortions of torture, the sheer unrepresentability of terror, and the repression of dominant accounts?" (3). She continues, "Or are we voyeurs fascinated with and repelled by exhibitions of terror and sufferance? What does the exposure of the violated yield?" (3). Not sold on the purpose of reiterating certain cultural traumas, Hartman chose not to reproduce the account of Aunt Hester's beating in Frederick Douglass' autobiography because such scenes of the slave's ravaged body are read onto real bodies due to the routineness of the display (3). *Scenes of Subjection* is a grounding text for the field of Afro-pessimism, which argues that anti-Blackness is crucial in the formation of the human subject (Wilderson). After Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection*, scholars Frank Wilderson and Jared Sexton theorized *Afro-pessimism* as a field of thought that clarifies contemporary, everyday circumstances and scenes as reinforcing anti-Blackness (Sexton 2009; Wilderson 2003). The core principle of Afro-pessimistic thought is the reality that *Blackness* politically, historically, and ontologically means "slaveness" (Sexton). Furthermore, Afro-pessimism posits that *civility* has one meaning as "not Black." While discourses about Blackness and civility stem from before colonial times, many specific myths of Black people can be traced back to the

colonial era during which the widespread biological and affective fallacies about Africans were used to justify the institution of slavery.

The Enlightenment (1685-1815), or the Age of Reason, had a leading role in the documenting and proving of Western superiority and the dehumanization of others. The collective project of modernity involved taxonomizing humankind based on mental and physiological differences. For example, Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) anthropological research characterized Whiteness as having a special quality unavailable to other races of people. Kant argued, "Humanity exists in its greatest perfection in the white race... The yellow Indians have a smaller amount of Talent. The Negroes are lower and the lowest are a part of the American peoples" (Eze 118). Kant asserted that "[Whites] contain all the impulses (*Triebfedern*) of nature in affects and passions, all talents, all dispositions to culture and civilization and can as readily obey as govern. They are the only ones who always advance to perfection" (Bernasconi 147-48). In America, founding fathers Thomas Paine, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin, alongside other Enlightenment thinkers, emphasized liberty and equality as human rights, ultimately spelling out the need for an American Revolution. Ironically, their revolution for liberty and equality was rooted in the exclusion of others.

Black pleasure (and pain) told from the lens of the establishment was (and still is) systematically conflated and altogether infiltrated with ideologies of paternalism and property. Paternalism refers to "the interference of a state or an individual with another person, against their will, and defended or motivated by a claim that the person interfered with will be better off or protected from harm" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). The slave holder-slave relation mimics the behavior of a father towards his children, except that it extends to persons outside the biological lineage. In this relationship, the father's law cannot be compromised since

disobedience of any kind does not serve the purpose of capitalist production. Paternalism in its most extreme iterations enacts constant surveillance paired with brutal violence, which functions to stymie any attempt at resistance by the surveilled. When it comes to the Transatlantic Slave Trade and de jure/de facto practices including Jim Crow, Black Codes, “Stop and Frisk,” “and “No Knock,” this problem of paternalism for its wards is vast. It is through the [White] father’s gaze that benevolent pleasure exists in servitude, and it is also through his scrutiny that Black pain is deemed fundamentally impossible.

In many ways, the act of misnaming the emotional needs of the enslaved reinforced the dominance of Whiteness and the conditions of Black enslavement. Saidiya Hartman observes the logic championed by 19th century physicians, scientists, and slave owners: “No, the slave is not in pain. Pain isn’t really pain for the enslaved, because of their limited sentience, tendency to forget, and easily consolable grief. Lastly, the slave is happy and, in fact, his happiness exceeds ‘our’ own” (36). Hartman states, “As a consequence of this operation, the initial revulsion and horror induced by the sight of shackled and marauded bodies gives way to reassurance about Black pleasure” (36). Autonomy for the enslaved in the colonial context laid solely with the oppressor, who reigned supreme over Black affectivity and its propagation. The idea that happiness or pleasure existed within the slave economy insisted that Africans both needed the system of slavery and enjoyed it (Hartman 49). In a racist dichotomy, it was only when the savagery of those living in alterity could be proven that the draconian punishments, scientific experimentation, rape, and other acts were deemed “permissible.” The idea that Africans bypassed pain and were happy with their lot was used to further distance the people fulfilling insurmountable labor functions from their rightful self-governing state.

The normalization of human trafficking and all its horrors is in part due to the labor of U.S. medical professionals at the behest of the economic, moral, and social arguments for sustaining a system based in racial superiority. Decades prior to the Civil War, Southern nationalism was informed by propaganda-based pseudoscience aimed at delineating “ignorant” Northern doctors, who knew nothing of Negro diseases, from the medical community of the South who positioned themselves as the experts on a population of Blacks with whom they had first-hand knowledge. However, as Christopher D. E. Willoughby surmises, this split was also theoretically fluid in nature, meaning that early conclusions about race and medicine did not necessarily depend on geographical locale. Willoughby states, “Antebellum northern and southern scientists of race were on the cutting edge of a developing discourse that culminated in the early twentieth century in eugenics” (583). Shifting the blame from the South to a more national--even global--scene, puts into perspective how pervasive the medical discourse was in sustaining the institution of slavery.

Historians underline Samuel Cartwright’s philosophies, among others, to demonstrate how White male physicians viewed the institution of slavery as a “socio-environmental cure for Black inferiority in the United States” (Willoughby 583). Born in Fairfax County, Virginia, Samuel A. Cartwright (1783-1863) was the leading medical authority on the so-called specific and peculiar conditions of slaves. Cartwright had several theories pathologizing the inner workings of Black emotions through fabricated diseases, including *dysaesthesia aethiopica*, which caused fatigue, carelessness, or laziness despite the threat of punishment. *Dysaesthesia aethiopica* was also referred to by overseers as ‘rascality,’ responsible for the petty crimes committed by slaves. Cartwright, however, was most infamous for “A Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro,” in which he coined the term *drapetomania*, a

classification reserved for runaway slaves whom he diagnosed as mentally ill. Prevention of the disease, according to Cartwright, would include beatings and cutting off the offenders' halluces (big toes) so that running away became physically impossible. Physical coercion was Cartwright's prescriptive solution to the diseases that plagued Black people in captivity (Willoughby). Although *drapetomania* is recognized today as a pseudoscientific theory based in scientific racism, this concept speaks to the longstanding misperceptions held by White culture about Black affect, as claims of such ailments characterized the Black mind as incapable of the agency which makes up the human experience. Beneficiaries of institutionalism, such as Cartwright, failed to scrutinize the system of slavery, shifting the blame onto the morality of the captive.

Afro-pessimism is a relevant theory that connects past concerns surrounding Blackness to contemporary ones and posits White supremacy seems to thrive regardless of how Black people act out their grief. Furthermore, it asserts that victories such as the acquisition of Civil Rights laws and Barack Obama's presidency can happen concurrent to state violence (Weier). Tracing a politics of emotion as it appears within an "official" archive is imperative to understanding the present-day stigma of Black affect. This research emphasizes historical continuity and posits that there is a clear lineage of anti-Black discourses from colonial times to the present in terms of how Black women are perceived expressing their emotions in ordinary circumstances. Understanding the institutional and historical markings of Black alterity grounds my discussion of themes that appear within the texts I have curated from the archive in valuable ways. Paired with the methodologies from the fields of affect studies and performance studies, I seek to explore the invigorating relationship between Black subjectivity, artistic expression, psychology, and history. In this research, my aim for discussing dominant iconographies is not to engage with

the pitfalls of dramatizing those images that have spectacle appeal, but to lay the groundwork to later explore how these iconographies are reclaimed in the everyday lives of Black women.

Performance Studies

“To be able to use the range of one’s voice, to attempt to express the totality of self, is a recurring struggle in the tradition of [Black women] writers.”

--Barbara Christian

Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers.

“As much as and more than a thing of the past, before such a thing, the archive should call into question the coming of the future.”

--Jacques Derrida

Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression

The field of performance studies is vast and open, stipulating that anything and everything can be considered a text; however, that is not to say that there aren’t values, theories, and practices that make up the field (Schechner). Richard Schechner’s description of what makes performance studies stand out is of particular interest here; performances are actions, and Schechner observes that there are distinct ways in which performance studies “takes actions very seriously” (1). Schechner establishes, “Although performance studies scholars use the ‘archive’ extensively—what’s in books, photographs, the archaeological record, historical remains, etc.—their dedicated focus is on the ‘repertory,’ namely what people do in the activity of their doing it” (1). Studying Black rage from an archival lens helps me to draw upon unusual linkages between texts, authors, historical events, and performances. I ask, what does Black rage *do*? How are Black women artists authoring narratives that complicate and resist dominant iconographies around their bodies and affectivity?

For the marginalized, the anxiety to document one’s role as subject is exacerbated by the lack of representation within “official” archives. Nonetheless, there are alternative ways to document affective modes felt by marginalized individuals whose histories are palimpsestuous,

contradictory, and prone to erasure. In an attempt to document unconventional traumas, or traumas that cannot be contained within “official” archives, the methods must also be unconventional (Cvetkovich). In addition to what Schechner outlines as “archival,” Diana Taylor’s renderings of the repertoire and the archive are also relevant to my research. For Taylor, the archival memory is made up of “documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, cds, all those items supposedly resistant to change” (Taylor 19). In opposition to “official” histories, often contrived by the so-called “victors,” the repertoire is all about enacting embodied memories, which include singing, dance, orality, performances, and gestures, which are all thought of as “ephemeral, non reproducible knowledge” (Taylor, 20). This approach to the archive honors the Black, Brown, female, trans, and subaltern voiceless within it, and graciously seeks out quiet responses to the historical moments in which *they* lived and were a part of. This study is a purposeful darkening of the archive. We must re/member *them*, no matter how trivial the trace or mark might appear in the archive of Black rage. In the summation of such epistemologies, we are left with newer, subaltern, and “darker” perspectives on transnational histories.

Black Performance Studies (Ontology)

Zora Neale Hurston was one of the earliest cultural theorists who sought to define the aesthetic qualities of Black performance and to establish how various texts were in dialogue with each other (Madison). In “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” written in 1934, Hurston pioneered a system for identifying modes of African American performativity by interweaving the writings of other artists from the Harlem Renaissance with her own, effectively crafting the groundwork for our understanding of African performances across the diaspora. In contrast to Western aesthetics, Hurston sketched out a new way of looking at Black cultural production. The

prominent characteristics of Black art Hurston outlines in her essay include drama, the will to adorn, angularity, asymmetry, originality, imitation, and dialect. As an artist and as someone who studied the culture, Zora Neale Hurston demonstrated through her work that performance and the everyday are vital in the understandings of Black life and subjectivity (Moten; Wilderson; Hartman). Subjectivity is about the feelings, tastes, or opinions that contribute to the quality of being and the quality of existing in the mind above the external world. My interest for this project is exploring exactly how objects resist and escape structural violence, effectively mapping a history of Blackness that is chronicled by artistic expression. According to Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, "The history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist" (Moten 1). However, even in what Moten refers to as "radical performativity," is the dilemma of being embedded in the very structure one is seeking to subvert (2).

In "Grammar and Ghosts: The Performative Limits of African Freedom," Frank Wilderson theorizes that when those of African descent "gather at the intersection of performance and subjectivity," there exists "a palpable structure of feeling, a shared sense that violence and captivity are the grammar and ghosts of our every gesture" (119). Even the artist who wants to be defined by their art and not their Blackness is still seen through a "structure of feeling," that connects them to the past (Wilderson 119). Wilderson further states, "There was something in the force of the performance artists' cry just to be artists that resonated with the force that first turned subjects into cargo" (122). There is no escaping Blackness and its implications on one's art. Wilderson establishes that while the demand for autonomy is political, so is "the context of its enunciation: the structural violence of a life positioned, paradigmatically, as an object in a world of subjects—a Blackened life" (123).

The Black body itself is a text. Because they are marked, Black bodies and other marked bodies cannot be co-opted into “official” archives and are thereby excluded. Black bodies--due to slavery--have a certain narrative quality that consistently labels them “operationalized” and “marked,” only to be “written on and inscribed with the desires of the master” (Walcott 89). Black “imagistic landscapes” are constantly influenced by ideas that reinforce Black people as relating to “nature, labour, and savagery” (90). Similarly, Hortense Spillers describes the *flesh* as a site of high crime and clarifies its performativity; the traumas of “eyes beaten out, arms, backs, skulls branded, a left jaw, a right ankle, punctured; teeth missing, as the calculated work of iron, whips, chains, knives, the canine patrol and the bullet,” are all descriptors of the flesh and its violent attributes (206). Spillers suggests trauma may pass down like a family heirloom, transferring from one generation to the next, which is why marginalized writers have long grappled with the burden of creating archives from disenfranchised or marked histories.

This anxiety to make up for grave silences within the archive may be expressed as resentment for one’s positionality. Langston Hughes’ 1926 essay, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” highlights resentful thinking amongst African American artists; he suggests that one can’t– and shouldn’t want to–separate their artistry from their Blackness. As a creator, Hughes viewed his identity as a flowing wellspring of rhetorical wealth as opposed to lacking inspiration. Hughes details the conundrum of existing as a Black writer in an anti-Black world by stating:

One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, ‘I want to be a poet—not a Negro poet,’ meaning, I believe, ‘I want to write like a white poet’; meaning subconsciously, ‘I would like to be a white poet’; meaning behind that, ‘I would like to be white.’ And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet. But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America—this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to

pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible (para. 1).

Hughes clarifies Blackness as critical to the poet's existential self. Unlike Blackness, Whiteness has the tendency to remain "neutral." Ruth Frankenberg, a leading White studies scholar, argues this lack of positionality *is* a marker of Whiteness. White studies scholars Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica, and Matt Wray also claim that Whiteness is not invisible to everyone and those who insist on not seeing Whiteness "suffer from some kind of spiritual and social blindness" (Rasmussen et. al 15). This conceptualization of Whiteness problematizes texts that imply the absence of body and corrects the notion of Whiteness as an invisible social norm.

Rage is both history-making and subject-making. James Baldwin's theorization of Black rage and consciousness via artistic expression encompasses the belief that one's level of rage, meaning its intensity and duration, is almost always adjacent to one's level of consciousness; the excess of this conscious fury would therefore appear within an artist's work. In "Stranger in the Village," published in 1953, Baldwin establishes the ramifications of exclusionary structures on Black affectivity. He contextualizes, "The rage of the disesteemed is personally fruitless, but it is also absolutely inevitable: the rage, so generally discounted, so little understood even among the people whose daily bread it is, is one of the things that makes history" (Baldwin para. 10).

Whether Black rage is understood or appreciated for its usefulness, it is the force that one must reckon with because of its inescapability. Baldwin also claims that "rage cannot be hidden, it can only be dissembled" (para. 10). He continues, "This dissembling deludes the thoughtless, and strengthens rage and adds, to rage, contempt" (para. 10). To dissemble rage, one must disguise or "conceal one's true motives, feelings, or beliefs" (para. 10). Dissemblance requires a certain

mastery over rage, which makes an exploration of rage in the personal by nonsubjects an effective (and necessary) pathway to subjectivity.

Conclusion

There is a necessity for the personal narrative in public discourse as it re-centers questions of identity, culture, and history. Following in the tradition of blueswomen such as Nina Simone, Lauryn Hill's 2014 song, "Black Rage," speaks to the experiences of Black Americans and offers an alternative to what the mainstream disseminates about their affectivity. Her blues aesthetic is modernized through hip hop. Hill released her song "Black Rage" to mobilize support for the Hands Up, Don't Shoot movement that followed the death of Michael Brown, an unarmed Black teen, at the hands of Darren Wilson, a White police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Via "Black Rage," Hill is teaching other African Americans how to reject a system that has historically rejected them, strategically creating a public pedagogy of rage through song. As long as there are movements or issues to overcome, there will always be artists like Hill and Simone who expose the hidden transcripts and narratives of a people unheard. In her defining rage, she sings,

Black Rage is founded on two-thirds a person
Rapings and beatings and suffering that worsens
Black human packages tied up in strings
Black rage can come from all these kinds of things (line 1-4).

The melody "Black Rage" was fashioned after "My Favorite Things" made famous by Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music* (1965). In the context of the movie, Maria (the main character) is telling the Von Trapp children to just remember the little things, or the things that make them happy, in hard times; its chorus reads:

When the dog bites
When the bee stings
When I'm feeling sad
I simply remember my favorite things

And then I don't feel so bad (stanza 5).

The original song describes positive imagery such as “raindrops on roses,” “cream-colored ponies,” “girls in white dresses,” and “silver-white winters that melt into springs” (line 1, 6, 11, 13). The song was flipped by Hill to signify the various levels of violence perpetrated against Black people in this country, which has resulted in the culmination of rage. The insertion of Hill’s narrativizing of Black history is favored over the peaceful and beautiful scenery produced in the original. Hill replaces the idyllic (and “ultra-White”) scenes of “My Favorite Things” to portray a Blackened life and describes her world as one of “blatant denial,” “squeezed economics,” “deafening silence,” “self-hatred” and declares that “Black rage is founded on these kinds of things” (line 5, 6, 7, 13, 27). On Hill’s website she notes: “Much of my music, if not all of it, is about Love, a therapeutic resolve created in response to the lack of messages encouraging people like me toward free moral agency. Helping to ameliorate this condition has never been addressed through the political arena alone” (para. 13).” She believes she must take songs like “Black Rage” to the people. Songs like “Black Rage,” “Why? (The King of Love Is Dead),” and “Four Women,” are useful in that they help to organize *theories of the flesh* that challenge dominant iconographies. Critical race scholars use Spiller’s *theory of the flesh* to talk about the realities of our day to day lives as experienced because of our backgrounds, which become a catalyst that transforms silence into language and action (Spillers; Moraga et al.; Lorde). According to Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, “A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives – our skin colour, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity (23).”

CHAPTER 3. AFTERIMAGES OF BLACK WOMEN'S SEXUALITY AND AFFECTIVITY IN THE U.S. IMAGINATION

She does not know
her beauty,
she thinks her brown body
has no glory.

If she could dance
naked
under palm trees
and see her image in the river,
she would know.

But there are no palm trees
on the street,
and dish water gives back
no images.
--Waring Cuney
"No Images"

William Waring Cuney (1906-1976), who was born in Washington, D.C., wrote "No Images" in 1926, which contributed a great deal to the Harlem Renaissance although he is considered a minor poet of the New Negro Movement. Cuney's award-winning poem, "No Images," has three distinct stanzas that represent the murkiness of witnessing one's beauty in mundane circumstances, if you are a Black woman that is. I first happened upon "No Images" years ago when I heard Nina Simone's a cappella singing of it on her album *Let It All Out* (1965). While this poem was written by a Black man, Simone's performance of the ballad—nearly four decades later—affirms the author's success in telling a story about Black women's agency with which they can identify. The "glory" of the "brown" woman in the poem can only be accentuated by "palm trees" and accurately rendered by the reflection offered by the natural landscape. "No Images" suggests that the subject's inability to perceive her own beauty is an environmental issue, meaning her self-perception is conditional to scene changes. The poem affirms the everydayness of racial and gendered trauma while also critically highlighting that

representational imagery matters. To this day, the images of Black women that persist reinforce notions of Western superiority. An understanding of this history is important as it contextualizes self-representations of their rage and sexuality as reclamations of their bodies from the proverbial gaze. I discuss four mythological iconographies, namely Freak, Jezebel, Mammy, and Sapphire, all of whom have existed comfortably within the dominant visual economy of the United States and the global West for centuries.

The rhetorical functions of the stereotypes attributed to Black women around the globe are crucial building blocks to the development of the modern world's taxonomic order and its preferences augmented for the White male gaze. The plight of Black women in the United States has been well documented by scholars (Bennett et al.; Harris-Perry; Hine; Spillers; Stephens et al.). Historically, Black women have long grappled with the consequences of this systematic visual assault on their affectivity, beauty, sexuality, and intellect. The dominant visual economy is largely responsible for generating misogynist and anti-Black propaganda, the phenomena critical race scholars Moya Bailey and Trudy collaboratively coined *misogynoir*, a term that describes a type of discrimination reserved for Black women for their multiple, intersecting identities on a global scale. Bailey and Trudy state, "Misogynoir describes the co-constitutive, anti-Black, and misogynistic racism directed at Black women, particularly in visual and digital culture. The term is a combination of misogyny, 'the hatred of women,' and noir, which means 'black' but also carries film and media connotations" (2). Black women's bodies are perpetually haunted, marked, and *made* by the ideologies presented in dominant visual culture, increasingly expanding with and alongside the advent of technology.

The commercialization of the imagery that represents Black women's bodies as abject is so commonplace, it has become the discourse that justifies the institutionalized blockages

impacting Black women on a quotidian basis. Much like Cuney does in “No Images,” scholars acknowledge the harmful effects associated with the unremarkable and desensitized consumption of negative, Manichean imagery about Black women. Melissa Harris-Perry states, “An individual who is seen primarily as a part of a despised group loses the experience of public recognition for which the human self strives” (Harris-Perry 38). Indeed, Black women must pay for how they are viewed, which is an ontological concern. Lorraine Fuller points out that images impact Black children’s formative years and deny them the ability “to develop positive selfimages” (121). Popular culture is a conduit by which negative perceptions or stereotypes of others are formed and then made into reality (Sewell). According to symbolic interaction theory, pictures normalize and guide behaviors, becoming scripts for those portrayed and those who ascribe to the belief system that compose an image (Stephens et al. 5). In other words, sexuality is socially scripted, and the implications of these scripts are far-reaching as they have been used to justify heinous acts against Black girls and women.

Defining the Afterimage

In 1981, Lorde wrote “Afterimages” to bear witness to the 1955 lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till and attend to the pervasiveness of his open casket photograph in her memory and the American imagination. Emmett Till was visiting relatives in the Mississippi Delta when accused of whistling at a shopkeeper’s wife, Carolyn Bryant. Her husband, Roy Bryant, and his brother, J.W. Milam, abducted Till in the early hours of August 28, 1955. Days later, Till’s body was found by searchers in the Tallahatchie River with signs of torture and a single bullet through his skull. Till’s mother, Mamie, decided to have her son in a glass casket to “let the people see what I’ve seen” (Till-Mobley et al. 3). Over the span of a few days, over 100,000 people viewed his open casket inside the Roberts Temple Church of God in Christ in utter horror. To add, his

photograph was widely distributed thereafter, and hundreds of thousands more will continue to view the body—in one way or another—onward into the future.

In “Afterimages,” the first movement reads,

However the image enters
its force remains within
my eyes
rockstrewn caves where dragonfish evolve
wild for life, relentless and acquisitive
learning to survive
where there is no food
my eyes are always hungry
and remembering
however the image enters
its force remains.
A white woman stands bereft and empty
a black boy hacked into a murderous lesson
recalled in me forever
like a lurch of earth on the edge of sleep
etched into my visions
food for dragonfish that learn
to live upon whatever they must eat
fused images beneath my pain (1-19).

Telling Till’s story, for many Black writers, is a part of a longstanding literary tradition that humanizes the young boy from Chicago (Baldwin; Brooks; Eady; Hughes; Reeves). The reiterations of Emmett Till’s narrative or image by Black writers also function as a cautionary tale that signals Black boyhood as culpable in the wake of intense White racism. More specifically, lynching (and the acquittal of its perpetrators) affirms the beliefs that Black males no matter their age are lascivious, hypersexual, and pose a threat to the chastity of White women, giving way for White men to control the bodies of Black men during and post slavery. Steve Edwin posits, “Lorde intends not only to articulate her rage and pain but to critique a dominant visual economy that amplifies the terrorizing effects of racist and sexist violation” (711). The images of Black people in the “dominant visual economy” that Edwin refers to are images of

Black bodies that are, due to extreme violence, seared into the nation's imaginative and literary memories (711). The image of Till is a palimpsestuous lens by which Audre Lorde views the world. Further, the violence of lynching extends beyond the moment itself wherein "the making of a *text* of white power based on the spectacle of black suffering" (Priest 55). Emmett Till's murder, like many other lynchings of Black males in the U.S., including his father, Louis Till,² is an act of White rage meant to maintain White male supremacy. In the section to follow, I use Lorde's metaphor of the afterimage to discuss dehumanizing images of Black women and how they haunt real bodies. The phenomenon of the *afterimage* is relevant to understanding how spectacle iconographies, especially those concerning Black sexuality, domesticity, and anger reverberate throughout history. An *afterimage* is a lasting visual sensation that occurs after stimulation by its external cause has ceased (Merriam-Webster); an *afterimage* may be either physiological or pathological.

Freak

Saartje Baartman (Fig. 1) is a synecdoche for Black female sexuality in the Western imagination; her exhibition across Europe as a "freak" was a form of violence perpetrated to also maintain White supremacy. Saartje Baartman (1789-1815) was born in South Africa in 1789, and she belonged to the Khoikhoi's Gonaquasub cattle-herding group. Before Baartman was exhibited for amusement as an unusual species of human to European crowds in London and Paris for five years as "Hottentot Venus," she grew up on a colonial farm in South Africa where her family were servants. She was one of the first publicized Black women who was a victim of sexual trafficking. Beverly Guy-Sheftall points out that the most prevalent example of European

² Just ten years prior to his son's murder, in 1945, Louis Till and another African American soldier, Fred McMurray, were lynched for an alleged rape of two Italian women while serving overseas in the Transportation Corps of the U.S. Army during World War II.

racism came with the interactions between Europeans and the San, Khoikhoi, and Xhosa tribes in the Cape Colony of South Africa, who the Europeans disparagingly renamed Bushman, Hottentots, and Kaffirs.

European travelers used sexually descriptive language to describe the South African tribal people, which functioned to exclude them from the human species. Many of the descriptions were based on the physical attributes of their genitals. For example, “The males were said to only have one testicle and the females a large vaginal flap called tablier and a fatty enlargement of the buttocks called steatopygia...They were relegated to the lowest place on the scale of human life in the great chain of being, only one rung above the ape” (Guy-Sheftall 17). This system of classification—using genitalia—establishes an essentialized Black existence, one that is solely for the purpose of reproducing more property. Georges Leopold Cuvier (1769-1832), a Eurocentric anatomist, scientifically examined Baartman’s genitalia and buttocks to essentially prove that the “Hottentots” were a different species. After her death in 1815 at age 26 from an undetermined inflammatory disease, Cuvier dissected her, took casts of her body parts, and preserved her genitalia under a bell jar in the Musee de l’Homme in Paris (Guy-Sheftall). Baartman remained a “freak show” even after her death. Up until the 1980s, Baartman’s remains and a cast of her body could be found on display at the museum. It was not until 2002 that her remains were repatriated and buried in South Africa. Certain iconographies surrounding Black gender—such as those of Saartje Baartman—have reverberated throughout history, and still function as “evidence” of Black people’s structural position as nonhumans (Collins). Patricia Hill Collins’ *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* states, “The black gender ideology draws upon widespread cultural beliefs concerning the sexual practices of people of African descent. Sexuality is not simply a biological function; rather it is a

system of ideas and social practices that is deeply implicated in shaping American social inequalities” (6). The sexual voyeurism of the West’s most significant male scholars shaped beauty ideals, which polarized the very best and worst attributes along racial lines (Painter). These Euro-centric texts authored by the likes of Chardin, Johann Gottfried von Herder, Immanuel Kant, among others, exalted White supremacist thinking within academic settings, and ultimately legitimized the categorization of other races of people as subhuman far into the future (Painter).



Figure 1. Illustration of Sarah Baartman by Frederick Christian Lewis (1810).

Western Beauty Standards

White slave women of the Circassians, Georgians, and Caucasians were highly sexualized for their features which reverberated throughout the aesthetics of Western art.

Aesthetics refer to a set of principles in philosophical thought concerned with “the study of the beautiful” (“aesthetics”). Nell Irvin Painter argues, “The relationship between slavery and racial classification brings the beauty ideal squarely into the history of whiteness” (43). Painter also observes that the “image of the powerless, young, disrobed female slave on the Black Sea acquired eugenical power” (47). Painter further acknowledges, “As this slavery faded, so did its iconography, but ideals of white beauty endured. They had become firmly embedded in the science of race” (58). Painter supposes that with the passage of time, the negative characteristics (hypersexuality, poor hygiene, etc.) associated with White servants from this region were overshadowed by the implications of their symbolic positioning as figures of beauty to behold; the concept of beauty in the European imagination privileges White phenotypic features (i.e., thin lips, pale skin, youthfulness, and skinniness).

Jean-Baptiste Chardin’s *Journal du Voyage du Chevalier Chardin en Perse & aux Indes Orientales, par la Mer Noire & par la Colchide* (*The Travels of Sir John Chardin into Persia and the East Indies*) (1689)—as a singular account of racism in imperialist travel writing among many—gives descriptive encounters he had whilst deviating from his typical route to Persia and India during which he sought prized possessions on behalf of Louis XIV’s court. In a lengthy, two-volume account of his travel, Chardin lamented traversing through the Caucasus (Chechnya) and Georgia because the people of this stretch of Black Sea were thought of as savages compared to the rest of Europe. Nonetheless, Chardin declares the “blood of *Georgia*” as “the most beautiful in the Orient” (Painter 47). These kinds of descriptions of the White servants from the Caucasus and Georgia were not at all uncommon.

Jezebel

Black women are not *seen* yet the White gaze is fixed on their bodies, producing historical misrepresentations that have been superimposed and scripted since their arrival to the Americas through the transatlantic slave trade (Harris-Perry). According to *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Resonance in the Contemporary* by Kimberly Juanita Brown, "The residue of sexual exploitation on slave women's bodies is the afterimage of the black diaspora, the puncture of the past materializing in the present." To this day, there are numerous stereotypical scripts attributed to Black women to be wary of, including Jezebel, for example, who is a "young, exotic, promiscuous, over-sexed woman who uses sexuality to get attention, love, and material goods"; she typically has lighter skin with long hair, and her hyperbolized sexuality was grounds for slave masters to sexually violate her (Stephens et al. 8). In the Biblical context, Jezebel was a queen who was known for her wickedness, which included seduction, chaos, and destruction. The "Jezebel Spirit" is a demonic spirit that possess a person, causing them to have high sexual appetites.

During the colonial era, Black women of all complexions were objectified as hypersexual nonbeings. There is little agency within this dynamic of the spectacle, the spectator, and the specter. For a moment, I want to locate this dynamic of Black women's hypervisibility and invisibility as it appeared in Louisiana in the eighteenth century, where Black women's beauty was viewed as a threat to the social order. There lived a sizable population of freed Blacks in the area when it was controlled by the French. Socially, freed Black people were denied the same freedoms as Whites. However, at the same time, freed Black people did not live under the strict laws that governed enslaved Blacks. Under Spanish rule, an enslaved person was able to buy their manumission from slave owners. While the majority of the enslaved could not buy their

freedom, this possibility did increase the freed Black population and allowed them to grow in economic wealth.

Marie Thérèse *dite* Coincoin, for example, was a historical figure whose life exemplifies the hallmarks of both American slavery and the Creole culture of Louisiana. In French Colonial Louisiana, Marie Thérèse Coincoin (1742-1816) was born a slave but died a rich freed woman. In 1767, she was leased out by her mistress, Madam de Soto, to a French bachelor who descended from a wealthy merchant family, Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer (1744-1815). When the two met, Coincoin already had five children, and she went on to bear with Metoyer another ten children, who were born unfree by law (Mills). Eventually, Metoyer bought Coincoin's freedom and their children's. Coincoin became a planter of tobacco herself and was later prosperous enough to purchase her own slaves. Her freed children were also notable in the Isle Brevelle region known for its free people of color who were affluent. At any rate, under the system of slavery, this "relationship" was by no means situated in an equal power dynamic. According to Hortense Spillers, "Under these circumstances, the customary aspects of sexuality, including 'reproduction,' 'motherhood,' 'pleasure,' and 'desire' are all thrown in crisis" (221).

In colonial Louisiana (1699-1803), there was a shortage of White female settlers, and this meant women were viewed as a "valuable, yet scarce, asset" (Smith para. 1). Louisiana was a military outpost and there were large numbers of "soldiers administrators, and support personnel, *not* (emphasis added) families" (Smith para 2). As the result, during French rule, there were multiple organized attempts at solving the issue of gender underrepresentation with the import of White women to Louisiana and to encourage natural reproduction between White people. As a case in point, in July of 1704, the Company of the Indies brought over the initial group of White women aboard the *Le Pélican* ship; yet, despite their best attempts, the company could not keep

up with the demands to provide enough women for the purpose of marriage to White men (Smith; Ze Winters). Ze Winters writes, “Charles III of Spain demanded that the colonial governor of Louisiana ‘establish public order and proper standards of morality,’ with specific reference to a ‘large class of ‘mulattos’ and particularly ‘mulatto’ women who were ‘given over to vice’” (77). Consequently, in 1786, to dampen these relationships between White men and women of African descent, Governor Esteban Rodriguez Miró conceded to the demands and responded by enforcing Tignon Laws that prohibited “creole women of color from displaying excessive attention to dress in the streets of New Orleans” (“NPS Ethnography: African American Heritage & Ethnography” para. 46). The *tignon* was a type of head scarf that slave women wore as they worked; it signaled a lower-class status and was meant to discourage interracial relationships that were not socially acceptable. Tignon Laws, which lasted for nearly twenty years, policed women of African descent's public appearance for fear of challenging the status quo of what beauty entailed, essentially barring freed women of African descent, who were known to wear their hair in regal hairstyles, from showing their hair, and forced them to wear scarves to cover their tresses. Instead of being classified alongside or with White women, freed Black women were closely associated with enslaved women and the tignon was supposed to symbolize that link (Clinton et al.). Freed women of African descent who were subjugated to these rules did comply, but they did so by incorporating bright colored fabrics and jewels, in turn, marking them as *something else*—different from both White women with whom they were in competition and enslaved Black women. These laws are but one example of how Black women's bodies were policed—even when they were considered freed—to dampen competition with White women. The Tignon Laws illustrate the relationship between beauty ideals, gender, sexuality, and race in the dominant culture of the colonial era (Clinton et al.).

Winthrop Jordan's 1550-1812 study of White attitudes towards Blacks traces a history of racial identity from first English contact with Africans during the Elizabethan era; Jordan argues that White men rationalized their own passions by shifting the blame to Negro women and calling them "passionate," promoting the logic of: "If she was that lascivious—well, a man could scarcely be blamed for succumbing against overwhelming odds" (Jordan 151). Unfortunately, due to this rationale, Black women are not recognized for their victimhood, but rather viewed as instigators to an unfair power dynamic such as the master-slave dynamic. Even in the case of extreme sexual violence perpetrated against them, Black women are still seen as willing participants to their own suffering.

The discourse surrounding miscegenation was alluded to in various paintings depicting Black women. For example, in 1840, a French artist by the name of Jacques Lucien Amans painted a young, nameless, and mixed-race woman in *Creole in a Red Headdress* (Fig. 2). Jacques Guillaume Lucien Amans (1801–1888) was a French neoclassical portraitist working in New Orleans in the 1840s and 50s. Amans, a literal White male gazer, materializes a woman who may or may not have historically existed. It is important to mention that Amans' typical subjects are White sitters, and so *Creole in a Red Headdress* deviated from his typical portraits. The elegance of the woman in the photo, draped in red scarf, is concentrated in her alluring eyes and sly smirk. The excess of Black women's perceived hypersexuality is exemplified by her blouse which hangs loosely below her shoulder (opposed to the modest dress of White women in Amans' other portraits). *Creole in a Red Headdress* is representative of the social anxieties of antebellum New Orleans. Amans' painting was based in the ideas about mixed race women who were viewed as inherently sexual, provocative objects of beauty (Gates; McAlear). Furthermore,

the anonymity and ambiguity of the image's sitter is why it is so powerful as a hegemonic text; the subject/object is a projection of the desires of the gazer.

Gender and racial ideologies from the colonial era are also exemplified in Marie-Guillemine Benoist's painting, *Portrait d'une négresse* (1800), which was the first painting of a Black woman by a European female (Fig. 3). As some scholars point out, the painting represents a great deal about perceived notions of Black women and their sexuality in the dominant culture. Guy-Sheftall states, "The image of a presumably African servant woman with her chest partially bare and breast exposed, though sensitively rendered, is nevertheless suggestive of the connection in the European mind during the nineteenth century between Black womanhood and sexuality" (Guy-Sheftall 15). Unambiguously, the subject in the painting is marked as different (with her headdress and partial nudity) than White women. The stark contrast between her black skin and the white cloth drives this point home further (Guy-Sheftall 15).



Figure 2. *Creole in a Red Headdress* by Jacques Guillaume Lucien Amans (1840).



Figure 3. *Portrait of a Negress* by Marie-Guillemine Benoist (1800).

Mammy

There are two types of mammy representations: the faithful slave and paid domestic laborers. Since the institution of slavery had ended, new images such as the mammy figure emerged, and the once free domestic labor of caregiving had been altered into a “for-pay domestic service” (Stephens et al. 9). James Elkin points out the haunting nature of these familiar tropes, stating, “We prefer to have bodies in front of us or in our hands, and if we cannot have them, we continue to see them, as afterimages or ghosts” (132). In other words, these relics of colonialism have long outlived their original performative purpose, which was to provide domestic order to the White family long after slavery had ended. Mammy prepares whole meals that she herself won’t ever taste, looks after children other than her own, and cleans a bathroom that she herself is not permitted to use. However, she still manages to do her work effortlessly, and with a familiar smile that is grateful for the opportunity to nurture and serve the needs of

another, worthier, family unit. Providing unrequited care to Whites was her prerogative, her *choice*, placing her as an object of domestic labor, which also meant she needed the White family for purpose. In contrast to the hypersexualization of the Jezebel trope, the de-sexualization is a key factor in visually identifying the mammy trope. Due to her homely appearance, she does not pose a threat to the White family unit, specifically to the role of the [White] mother. Mammy Two Shoes from *Tom and Jerry*, for example, represents the dominant visual culture's ideas about labor and identity; the Black woman domestic laborer as nameless and faceless reveals the dominant culture's fixation on the Black woman as anonymous. The trope of the Mammy represented in this way reanimates the racist belief that all Black people resemble each other. In this cartoon, Black women are denied being named and seen. Yet, they are represented as perpetual anonymous vectors of labor and reproduction.

In recent years, the trope of Black domesticity was challenged during the upheaval caused by the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. In 2020, Quaker Oats decided to retire the Aunt Jemima persona who is based in a racial stereotype that posits Black women are pleased to serve their White masters. Nancy Green, a former slave, was the official face of the product in 1890. In 2021, however, the Quaker Oats brand announced the pancake and syrup will be known as Pearl Milling Company. The Black Lives Matter movement forced White liberal society to reckon with the fact that symbols are powerful tools of conditioning, and our societal norms are shaped by such misrepresentations. The advertisement of Aunt Jemima (Fig. 4) is particularly interesting because of its focus on the Jemima's family; it describes rag doll pillows that the company sold alongside its infamous breakfast food. Not only is the Black woman represented as a totem of Black domesticity via Jemima, but tangible representations of her family were also eerily for sale. Presumably, the rag dolls represent her parents and her children. However, the father of her

children is not present, marking him perpetually absent as if not to take the place of the White father figure. The older parents in the advertisement paired with the smiling youth represent generational domestication by way of nurture.

“Mrs. Butterworth, Uncle Ben, & Aunt Jemima,” a poem written by Frank X. Walker, is in response to this cultural shift and its implications for these relics. In the poem, the joke is that the three Black culinary icons for White America’s most recognizable comfort foods “walk into a bar.” The bartender in the poem is presumably former President Donald Trump, who is praised for what he says and how he says it; it alludes to a Trump quote in 2016 when he bombastically declared, “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn’t lose voters.” This poem articulates the reality that Black people—even after performing docility—are still perceived violent enough to warrant confrontation, public debasement, and death. Subservience—like coolness, gender, complexion, respectability, age, and wealth—will not fully protect or shield Black people from the structures of White supremacy. Walker writes,

The headlines said Well-Loved American
Foods Resisted Arrest, Failed,
to Comply, and Were Delicious While Black.
Butterworth’s daughter said here’s to progress
We might finally get an anti-lynching bill.
Ben’s son said I’d rather they abolish
qualified immunity. Jemima’s kid said you know
they abolished slavery once,
then they hung my mama on that box (line 19-27).

The modernized mammy figure is also observable within *The Help* (2011), a novel written by Kathryn Stockett and later directed in a screen adaptation by Tate Taylor starring Octavia Spencer (Minny Jackson), Viola Davis (Aibileen Clark), Emma Stone (Skeeter Phelan), and Bryce Dallas Howard (Hilly Holbrook). The film was set 1960s Mississippi where it was common for Black women to find work as domestic workers within the homes of White women.

In the film, we see the dehumanization of Black women through this type of labor; Black women in the film are subjected to constant ridicule and abuse at the hands of their bosses. However, fear of lynching and other punishment created a culture of silence. A Southern society girl by the name of Skeeter returns home from college and has ambition to become a famous journalist. To Skeeter, the perfect story is in her hometown, and she views the Black women as gatekeepers of valuable knowledge that the rest of the world must have insight to. Skeeter successfully convinces many of the maids to come forth with their stories shaped by the grueling environment of the Jim Crow South.

In one scene from *The Help* (Fig. 5), Minny delivers a pie to her former employer, Hilly Holbrook, who fired her for no good reason. In the infamous scene, Hilly enjoys an irresistible chocolate pie in front of Minny while belittling her as a former employee. Meanwhile, Minny has added her own feces to the “peace offering” as part of her vengeance towards Hilly for lying about her stealing. The added ingredient is a detail Hilly is horrified to learn after indulging in one of her favorite desserts from her former maid. The scene illustrates the power maids held over their employees; Whites were accustomed to the carefree lifestyle of having Black maids and were at their whims for the very food they consumed even after mistreating their low-wage workers. It also illustrates—in an exaggerated manner—that Black people are not vectors of racially-specific diseases, which was a point of contention within the film’s plot; Black people were expected to use different bathrooms than the families they served as to not contaminate Whites with their excrements.

During the protests of 2020, *The Help* received renewed interest, and many people watched the film with hopes of understanding current-day racial disparities. However, years prior, in a 2018 New York Times interview, actress Viola Davis publicly stated that she regretted

this role because of its failure to tell the full truth of the Jim Crow South and its effects on Black life. This film's origin is particularly contentious as Stockett, a White woman, and Tate Taylor, a White man, are responsible for contriving and disseminating the narratives of African American women under the heel of an exploitative system. Not to mention, within the storyline itself, it is only through a White woman journalist that the maids' stories are permitted to being told. *The Help* demonstrates that it not only matters who is portrayed and how, but the identity of the narrator, illustrator, painter, or author matters.

Ma (2019), a film that Octavia Spencer also starred in, and Tate Taylor directed, represents an even more problematic dialectic between Black women's docility and their perverseness. Sue Ann (Butler) goes on a killing spree because—decades prior--she could not get her racist classmates to accept her. In a series of flashbacks, we learn Sue Ann's high school love interest, Ben, gets her to perform a sex act in a darkened janitor's closet, which immediately becomes public knowledge at her school, triggering feelings of humiliation. Years later, Sue Ann goes after the children of her classmates to exact revenge, but first she befriends them by providing alcohol and wild parties. In one scene of *Ma*, Sue Ann poses for a self-portrait with the unconscious teens who are posed to be read as spectacles. All the teens in this still (Fig. 6) have chains or restraints around their necks. The White female to the left has her mouth sewn shut because she talks too much for Sue Ann's liking and the Black male to the right has a white mask on to portray his perceived cultural ignorance. The overt sexual nature of this still is undeniable; it retains elements associated with BDSM, torture, and sexual powerplay/humiliation activities. (Not to mention Ma's sexual attraction to Ben's teenage son.) This "orgy of death" as portrayed by *Ma* demonstrates yet again the perceived and specific entanglements of Black women's sexuality, pleasure, grief, and rage. In the final scene (Fig. 7), a twisted relationship

between eros, anger, and gender emerges as Sue Ann cuddles in her bed with the now dead Ben, the White guy she liked in high school, as her house is hellishly set ablaze with fire. This scene gives the audience a taste of necrophilia, that she finally “had” Ben in death, instilling the idea that Black women would go to extreme lengths just to get the attention and affection of a White man. This film calls into focus the importance of authorship in an age where representations of Black rage are in high demand. We must consider the impact of the “free market” on representations wherein misrepresentations of Black women’s eros, sexuality, and rage occur unremarkably.

I' SE IN TOWN HONEY!

Aunt Jemima's Pancake Flour

Made of Wheat, Corn and Rice.
Can you imagine anything more delicious for breakfast than golden brown Cakes, smoking hot, right off the griddle?

No Increase in the Cost of Living

Aunt Jemima's Pancake Flour is made just as it was years ago and is sold at just the same price. It is no trouble to prepare—just mix and put on a hot griddle. Simple directions on every package. Also recipes for making Muffins and the best Waffles you ever tasted.

Buy a package to-day—Serve hot Waffles for tea. Your family will be pleased, delighted, and compliment you on your cooking.

Davis Milling Company
St. Joseph, Mo.

Manufacturers of the celebrated
Aunt Jemima's Special Cake and Pastry Flour, Davis' Golden Sheaf, Kansas Hard Wheat Flour.

Aunt Jemima's Family
The funny rag dolls—Auntie and Uncle, each 15 inches high, and two comical pickaninies, each 12 inches high, all ready to eat and stuff, will be sent you for 4 coupons and 16 cents in stamps, or we will send you any ONE of the Rag Dolls for one coupon and 4 cents in stamps. Give address.
Davis Milling Company, St. Joseph, Mo.

Aunt Jemima's Climbing Doll
A coupon from a package of A. J. Pancake Flour, A. J. Buckwheat Flour or A. J. Special C. & P. Flour with 10 cents in stamps or silver will bring you post-paid one of these clever, Imported A. J. Climbing Dolls. Give address.
Davis Milling Company, St. Joseph, Mo.

Figure 4. “I’s e in Town Honey!” Aunt Jemima Advertisement, Davis Milling Company (1910).



Figure 5. Octavia Spencer plays the role of Minny Jackson in *The Help* (2011).



Figure 6. Still of Sue Ann poses for a self-portrait with victims in *Ma* (2019).



Figure 7. Still of Final Scene of *Ma* (2019)

Sapphire/Peaches

Mammy's foil is arguably Sapphire or Peaches, who are considered pathologically angry and domestically unfit. By Sara Ahmed's definition, the ABW archetype is considered an "affect alien," which is someone who resists the moral and affective economies of the family. The structure of the family is designed to police Black women's affectivity into sameness. Ahmed explains, "...the family sustains its place as a 'happy object' by identifying those who do not reproduce its line as the cause of unhappiness" (30). Perhaps Sapphire/Peaches is also deemed the "matriarch" because she displaces—by any means necessary—the dominance once granted only to the father figure. Sapphire/Peaches, like other tropes, was invented to police Black women's affect and, in turn, their agency. The imagery of Black women throwing tantrums with disproportionately large mouths further infantilizes them; it imposes the belief that Black women lack control over their emotions.

From the onset of 19th century into the mid-20th century, in print media, dark skinned Black women were portrayed as “Sassy Mammies.” An example of this is in a Jim Crow era postcard with the caption “I’s ‘gwine back to Dixie” (Fig. 8). The postcard’s caption is an allusion to a song with the same title, which is about an old, freed slave who romanticizes the “good old days” of slavery and the simple life of picking cotton. It is a song that attempts to reconcile the evils of slavery from the perspective of the formerly enslaved as if to argue that slavery must not have been so bad. In the context of this image, however, it signals that slavery is better than domestic life with a nagging Black woman. The man in the satirical image would rather relive the toils of slavery than live under the unforgiving whims of a Black woman who has no sense of emotional control. In a sense, the Black man is a victim in this dynamic despite his gender. If Black women are viewed as evil or as demon possessed, according to bell hooks, “White men could justify their dehumanization and sexual exploitation...Black men could claim that they could not get along with Black women...and white women could use the image of the evil sinful Black woman to emphasize their own innocence and purity” (hooks 85).



Figure 8. “I’s ‘gwine back to Dixie!” postcard for European distribution (1910).

Hughes's 1927 poem, "Evil Woman," is a quintessential example of the evil or angry Black woman trope in the blues aesthetic and as promulgated by Black men. He writes,

I ain't gonna mistreat ma
Good gal any more.
I'm just gonna kill her
Next time she makes me sore.

I treats her kind but
She don't do me right.
She fights an' quarrels most
Ever night.

I can't have no woman's
Got such low-down ways,
Cause a blue-gummed woman
Ain't de style now days.

I brought her from de South
An' she's goin' on back
Else I'll use her head
For a carpet tack (line 1-16).

With the appalling imagery of beheading a Black woman, Hughes writes from the perspective of a Black male who has been emasculated by his relation to the Black woman. Within the blues, the angry Black woman ethos justifies such a vile response. The speaker in this poem must avenge his own masculinity by killing the matriarchal figure. Further, the phrase "I'm just gonna kill her" refers to the unsalvageable nature of the Black woman (line 3); it is suggestive that any attempt to rationalize with her would be both in vain and unwise. The "blue-gummed" dark-skinned woman "from de South" Hughes describes is poisonous to the family unit and therefore poisonous to Black America (line 11, 13). The speaker also professes the common belief that darker skinned Black women "ain't de style now days" (line 12). In the blues, it was not uncommon to encourage colorist discourses as such that uphold lighter skinned women as objects of a higher value, a sure sign of status, which is traced back to colonial era; house slaves

were typically the products of a sexual relationship between the master and a female slave; enslaved people with fairer skin were treated better than the darker skinned slaves who worked outdoors and exposed to the elements. I am not inferring that Hughes himself was a colorist, but as a participant in the blues tradition, he is observing its most tasteless characteristic of Black secular music to this day: the hatred of Black women, especially those of darker complexions. In other words, it is another instance of art imitating life. Nonetheless, the poem, among other writings and performances in the early blues tradition, certainly contributed to the solidification of tropes that still fester to this day by way of hip hop. To “use her head/ for a carpet tack” is a dethroning of the matriarch because it is her mouth that is the most masculine attribute. The soreness (“she makes me sore”) Hughes refers to is a double entendre, it could mean that the speaker’s sore from her demanding sexual appetites; it could also mean that the Black woman has enough strength or masculinity to will the speaker into submission (line 4).

In 2018, misogynoir—vis-à-vis the angry Black woman trope—was used against Serena Williams when she was depicted by cartoonist Mark Knight following her US Open tennis tournament against Naomi Osaka. During the tennis match, Williams received three code violations in her match with Naomi Osaka. Before things escalated to the point where she busted her racket, yelled, and lost points, Williams calmly contested the scrutiny to Carlos Ramos (chair umpire). Moments after their initial reconciliation, the umpire insisted again that Williams cheated, which turned the racket abuse penalty into a point deduction and not a warning. This move by Ramos escalated things on the court to where Williams called him “a liar” and “a thief” who was “stealing” points from her. Along the way, she received yet another point penalty for verbal abuse, which cost her the title 6-2 and 6-4 to Osaka. Such point deductions within a grand slam final were deemed unprecedented. Williams’ outburst on the US Open tennis court was

used against her in the most harmful of ways and is an example of how emotional regulation is weaponized against Black women. Reactions from notable White tennis players suggest that these deductions were not only unprecedented, but that they were not justified.

Her expression of anger was sealed with a single image from Australia's *Herald Sun* newspaper, drawn by Knight, who depicts the world-renowned tennis player as big-lipped, muscular, irrationally angry, and with an unusually small head. In contrast, Naomi Osaka, who is of Japanese-Haitian descent, is depicted as a White woman with blonde hair without any exaggerated features. The choice for Knight to represent Osaka in such a fashion deserves its own analysis; she is caricatured in a different way, involving racial discourse surrounding light skin and Asian heritage and their supposed proximity to Whiteness. This serves an ideological purpose in that the representation of Osaka, in turn, makes Williams' figure appear to be even more monstrous.

While I will not include Knight's image, Williams' likeness in the cartoon is visually comparable to the images of Angelfood McSpade (Fig. 9), who, from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, was a fixture in Robert Crumb's art. McSpade is depicted as a bare-breasted tribal woman with a palm-leaf skirt and serves as a satirical representation of Black women's sexuality. Crumb's hypersexual depictions of women—regardless of race—are significant enough to warrant an entire study; however, it is Crumb's grotesque caricatures of Black women that are of interest here. Brandon Nelson indicates that Crumb's reproduction of anti-Black American imagery from the comics of the early twentieth century is without "any obvious attempt to condemn or interrogate them," and remains the most nonredemptive and criticized characteristic of his work within the confines of the counterculture movement (140). The most provocative aspect of Crumb's imagery, however, is that McSpade is characterized as a nymphomaniac who

is constantly sexually abused by horny men but remains unbothered by ill treatment, which is a debasement of Black women's sexuality and affectivity that predates Crumb's work by centuries. The caricatures of both Williams and McSpade (as with most images of our rage in popular culture) are a part of an antiquated discourse—dating back to European contact with Africans—about Black women's affect, sexuality, intelligence, and physicality. At the same time, the pervasive traumas caused by the combination of White supremacy and patriarchy are seldom scrutinized, giving Black women a lack of affective exigency.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss the sexual and affectual iconographies that appear in dominant culture and their brief descriptions. The images in this chapter represent a fraction of the possible avenues for analyses in a lengthier project. For the remainder of this dissertation project, however, I will turn my attention to the transfiguration of these images within Black women's self-representing literature, which is my main endeavor here. Saidiya Hartman posits, "The remembering of the violated body must be considered in relation to the dismembered body of the slave--that is the segmentation and organization of the captive body for purposes of work, reproduction, and punishment" (77). Because of the relationship between Black bodies and insurmountable labor function, according to Hartman, "re-membering" occurs at the "site of attending to the body as a site of pleasure, eros, and sociality and articulating its violated condition" (77). Many Black women artists do the work of re-membering the violated body, and, by performing their own affectivity, they are complicating and resisting dominant iconographies.

The blues biomyth is an autobiographical encounter of history as myth. Further, it is within this tradition of displaying blue moods, Black women have named and represented themselves in a humanizing light. I ask: How are Black women authoring narratives that

complicate and resist dominant iconographies around pleasure, paternalism, and property? How does the concept of *killing rage* move towards frameworking a more coherent relationship between rage, gender, and eros? I argue Black women's blues narratives that evoke the angry Black woman archetype are symbolic reclamations of the self through the ritual death of the father figure.

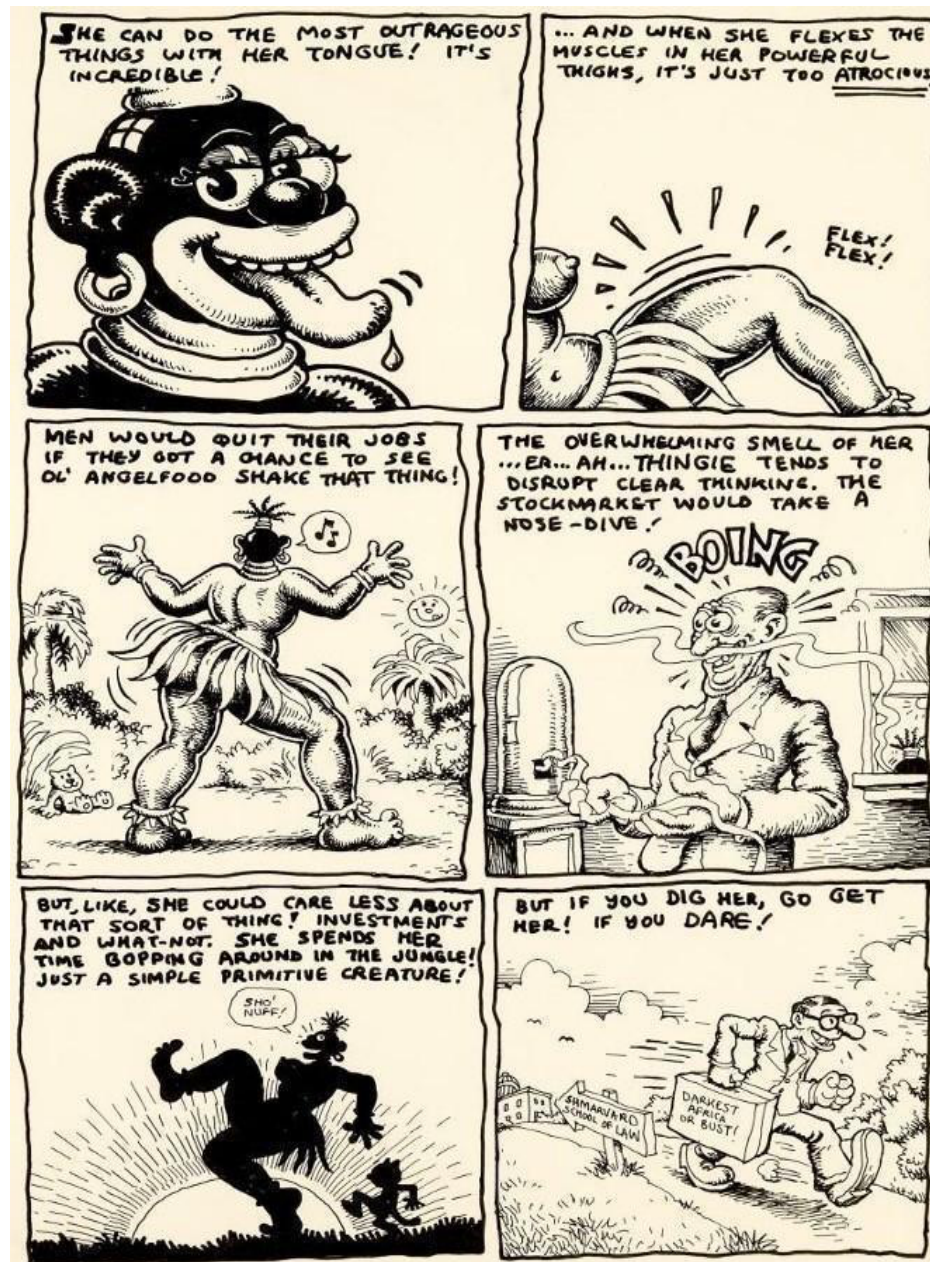


Figure 9. Angelfood McSpade by Robert Crumb in *Zap Comix* #2 (1968).

CHAPTER 4. THE HAUNTOLOGY OF KILLING RAGE IN THE BLUES BIOMYTH

Actually *claiming* the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to ‘name’), which her culture imposes in blindness, ‘Sapphire’ might rewrite after all a radically different text for female empowerment.

--Hortense Spillers
“Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe”

This is about a phonograph record which has obsessed me for two days. It is called ‘Strange Fruit’ and it will, even after the tenth hearing, make you blink and hold to your chair. Even now, as I think of it, the short hair on the back of my neck tightens and I want to hit somebody. I know who, too. If the anger of the exploited ever mounts high enough in the South, it now has its ‘Marseillaise.’

--Samuel Grafton
New York Post

Dear Langston... Thank you--thank you for the books (your autobiographies) you gave us--I’m reading *The Big Sea*, right now and it gives me such pleasure--you have no idea!... Then too, if I’m in a negative mood and want to get more negative (about the racial problem, I mean) if I want to get downright mean and violent I go straight to this book and there is also material for that.

--Nina Simone
“Letter to Langston Hughes”

I dove straight into the erased, the unspoken, the blank spaces in the documents, I felt compelled to uncover the stories of other Black women who fought for justice. Those women warriors who fought their enslavement.

--Rebecca Hall
Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Revolts

Hortense Spillers’ “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” is a landmark contribution to discussions on race, psychopathology, gender, and the Black family; it speaks to the importance of naming oneself to survive epistemological erasure. For Spillers, the stereotype of Sapphire, or the angry Black woman, is perhaps representative of the performative possibilities of the Black female subject. Naming rituals—as performed by Black women—disorder the hierarchy of the male as wholly capable of wielding power over the material world. Black women creators develop epistemologies that challenge heterosexist structures that privilege history’s victors, and, in doing so, they are participating in the act of making *something*

from nothing, also known as conjuration. According to Spillers and Pryse, African American women writers are “metaphorical conjure women” who have the tools to “make it possible for their readers and for each other to recognize their common literary ancestors (gardeners, quilt makers, grandmothers, rootworkers, and women who wrote autobiography) and to name each other as a community of inheritors” (5). Conjuration, in Spillers and in Pryse’s view, is a metaphor that clarifies spaces, community, literature, and whole archives created out of necessity and desire. When Zora Neale Hurston declared “anything may be conjure, nothing may be conjure,” she spoke to the elusive nature of a tradition that relied heavily on the resourcefulness of its creators. Conjure was a symbol of hope, protection, and change to the enslaved so much they swore by the efficacy of its results (Chireau).

Samuel Grafton (1907-1997) was an American writer widely known for his syndicated column “I’d Rather Be Right” (1939-1948). Samuel Grafton’s account of his psychophysiological reaction to Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit,” in 1939, gives insight into the infectious nature of grief and anger as performed by a Black woman. Though it was performed by Holiday, it was first a poem published in 1937 by Abel Meeropol, a Jewish high school teacher that lived in New York City. For centuries, art has been both a supplement and vital component to movements led by African Americans. “Strange Fruit” was born as a protest to White violence, depicting the grotesque lynchings of Black bodies. With emotional power, her voice tapped into the heart of America, shattering the walls between being a performer and protester. “Strange Fruit” and Grafton’s reaction to it demonstrate that Black rage is highly communicable. Grafton speaks to the potency of the performance to incite more rage with each listen; he also describes the haunting nature of the song even beyond the listening; he reports that when he thinks of Holiday’s famous song, he is moved to desiring violence.

Nina Simone (1933-2003) was an activist, classical pianist, and singer who left us an archive that is almost exclusively driven by rage. I return to her work throughout this dissertation--including this chapter--for this reason precisely. Simone firmly believed that artists should reflect the times. As Simone signals in her 1966 letter to Langston Hughes, there are pieces of art such as Hughes' *Big Sea* that serve pedagogical purposes; Simone admits to using Hughes' work to channel her inner anger and to create with it her own works. The music was an opportunity to enact justice for herself and others. There was no "off switch" to the singer speaking her mind, and, of course, she was not praised by critics for her expressions for its provocation of the angry Black woman script (Brooks). As scholar Daphne Brooks eloquently puts it,

Stories of Nina Simone's notoriously 'hostile' and 'difficult' relationship with her audiences are well known. The tales of a 'temperamental' and 'angry' artist have circulated and received their fair due critique from feminist scholars and journalists who have exposed the gender biases in, for instance, the pathologizing representations of Simone versus the laudatory fetishization of Miles Davis's back-turning solos (180).

As a woman in the Black Power movement, Simone faced many constraints. Many Americans, White or Black, associated men with the Black Power movement and not women. Simone's "Go Limp," which is an adaptation of an original song by Alex Comfort during his protest with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, was released in 1964 on *Nina Simone in Concert* and it was a satirical response to the masculine impulses in Black activism and the sexual violence associated with existing as a woman in a male-dominant arena (Feldstein). Simone sings,

Oh Daughter, dear Daughter
Take warning from me
And don't you go marching
With the N-A-A-C-P

For they'll rock you and roll you
And shove you into bed

And if they steal your nuclear secret
You'll wish you were dead

(refrain:)
Singin too roo li, too roo li, too roo li ay
Singin too roo li, too roo li, too roo li ay

Oh Mother, dear Mother
No, I'm not afraid
For I'll go on that march
And I'll return a virgin maid
With a brick in my handbag
And a smile on my face
And barbed wire in my underwear
To shed off disgrace (line 1-18).

According to Ruth Feldstein, Simone “claimed power of sexuality from a Black woman’s point of view” as integral “to her vision of black political liberation” (101). Instead of fearing the realities of existing as a woman within the movement, Simone satirically responds “I’m not afraid/ For I’ll go on that march/ And I’ll return a virgin maid,” which insists that the violence she enacts on Whites will be the same violence she enacts on the Black man who attempts to victimize her because of her gender (line 12-14). It is important to note that, in 1964, Black Power activist Stokely Carmichael (1941-1998) infamously commented on the role of women in the movement, stating, “The only position for women in the SNCC³ is prone.” Which means they have no other purpose other than for the sexual gratification of its male leaders. It was said as a joke; however, it represented the sentiment among the dominant male voices. His statement boldly affirms the myth that women are not meant to lead movements, especially violent ones, in the same ways Black men are.

³ SNCC is an acronym for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which is a student-led civil rights organization in the U.S. that was active in the 1960s.

According to Rebecca Hall, gender is the “historically contingent ideological construct which serves to place women and men in specific frameworks as part of an ongoing system of male dominance” (Hall 3). Hall is invested in the ways in which gender “creates and defines” race and vice versa through the concept of *racialized gender*, which is a sociological concept that critically engages with the simultaneous impacts of gender and race on social environments such as the family (3). The scholarship concerning the topic of slave insurrection and revolt tends to indicate Black women’s participation as forbearing (Hall). Racialized gender posits Black women’s revolt is moderate and stops short of its fantasy of killing the object of their rage. Hall’s research states,

Feminist historians, faced with the widespread denial of women as actors in slave revolt, seek to reclaim gender-specific acts of resistance. These historians see certain individual violent acts, such as the destruction of property, suicide or infanticide as female resistance, contributing, perhaps inadvertently, to the idea that coordinated acts of violence which aim to kill slaveholders are male (3).

In modern-day representations of slave revolts, this messaging remains largely unchallenged. As observed in *Django Unchained* (2012), written and directed by Quentin Tarantino, for instance, violence is an act reserved for the Black male subject. Meanwhile, Black women remain objects who cannot escape White patriarchy without the violent will of the Black man. This is symbolized in Broomhilda von Shaft’s character (Kerry Washington), who is the wife of bounty hunter Django Freeman (Jamie Foxx). *Django Unchained* is set in the Old West and Antebellum South; it follows the escape and development of Django Freeman from a victim of chattel slavery to a gun-toting, abolitionist hero. Django’s primary aim is to free his still-enslaved wife so that she might escape the harsh punishment of Calvin Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio). Broomhilda’s peeled back and sexuality become abject features at the dinner table in the latter half of the movie before the finale. The silences of Broomhilda and other Black women in

narratives of emancipation are deafening, and my research attempts to fill in those silences within official archives through the advent of the blues biomyth.

The Blues Biomyth

My project defines the *blues biomyth* as a first-person narrative belonging to the blues aesthetic that attempts to lessen the divide between history, personal narrative, and myth; it blurs the hierarchy of so-called “high” and “low” epistemologies within the archive. More specifically, the blues biomyth serves to combat the systematic and epistemological erasures of Black women’s voices from “official” archives. Within the blues biomyth, display rules that govern Black women’s affect, specifically their anger, are displaced and new psychological realities emerge. In this chapter, I examine the spectral and phantasmagorical performances of Black women who name their rage to “move beyond” or escape the patriarchal family.

Following emancipation, the blues facilitated the development of new discursive spaces where Black women could perform alter egos that deployed radical critiques of their position as objects of domesticity, reproduction, and social cohesion. To add, early blueswomen very rarely discussed themes of marriage or children in their songs (Davis). This denial of domestic labor and reproduction is a redefining of their sexuality, which is in direct opposition to the mammy figure who was a perpetual wet nurse and nurturer to the White family during slavery. Beneath the fantastical scenes of retribution are subtexts of shame, powerlessness, and vulnerability; however, at the same time, revenge fantasies are performances of subjectivity (Apostol). The transformation of trauma through first-person storytelling is critical to the subject-making and world-making capabilities of the oppressed (Spillers).

Similar to the biomyth, bell hooks’ *killing rage* is also a feminist framework that I aim to utilize in my understanding of these mythologies of affectivity as they appear in self-authored

texts. *Killing rage* positions Black women as agents of personal and political change as opposed to voiceless receptacles of terror. It also points to a genealogy of rage as expressed by Black women in the archive. Killing rage functions to destroy the agents of White supremacy; however, the narratives of retributive violence voiced by early blueswoman often included intimate partners.

I am situating Mamie Smith (1883-1946) as one of the very first pioneers of the blues biomyth; Smith was an American vaudeville singer, dancer, pianist, and actress. In 1920, the then 28-year-old singer from Cincinnati, Ohio recorded her version of “Crazy Blues” and became the very first African American woman to release a record of the blues. “Crazy Blues” reveals the interior dialogue of a woman who is mistreated by her lover; the song is a lamentation over love, and it is doubly a passionate expression of self-preservation wherein Smith professes a fantasy of retribution and murder. What’s most striking about the lyrics is that the performer builds ethos through the relatable story of unrequited love. While women played into these tropes of murder and violence, they were attempting to come to terms with a lack of agency within their social lives as Black women. The first few stanzas are strictly about the injustices endured and the heartache that would justify what is to come next in terms of storytelling. Smith sang,

I can't sleep at night
I can't eat a bite
'Cause the man I love
He don't treat me right
He makes me feel so blue

I don't know what to do
Sometime I sit and sigh
And then begin to cry
'Cause my best friend
Said his last goodbye

Now the doctor's gonna do all that he can
But what you're gonna need is an undertaker man
I ain't had nothin' but bad news
Now I got the crazy blues (line 1-10, 24-27).

Despite its dark themes, the song's release was massively successful for its time, selling nearly 75,000 copies. Smith's powerful vocal recordings resonated with that of the lay Black person, and she paved the way for other blueswomen to do the same. According to Angela Davis, there were various commercial and minor artists, namely Ida Cox, Ethel Waters, Lucille Hegamin, Edith Wilson, and Clara Smith who could be heard in live performance venues and in the race records of the record labels Black Swan, Paramount, and Columbia (Davis xii). Besides marking the beginning of a decade-long reign of Black female performers, Mamie Smith's record debut made it easier for bluesmen such as Robert Johnson to benefit from expressing themselves in this new format.

Hauntology

Smith, as the first Black woman to popularize the blues, was also the first blueswoman to embody and document the ghosts of Sapphire and Peaches, who appear and reappear within the archive with the intent to kill. Here I employ a Black feminist reading of Jacques Derrida's *hauntology* from his 1993 book, *Specters of Marx*, to understand the presence and repetition of ghosts as they assist in the creation of the present and future. *Hauntology* is an admixture of *haunting* and *ontology* (or the philosophical study of being). Mark Fisher describes *hauntology* as "the failure of the future" when identifying cultural forms and the repetitive nature of its composition throughout the past, present, and future (16). According to Colin Davis, "Hauntology is part of an endeavour to keep raising the stakes of literary study, to make it a place where we can interrogate our relation to the dead, examine the elusive identities of the living, and explore the boundaries between the thought and the unthought" (para. 13). For this

analysis, *hauntology* is defined as a range of ideas that refer to the distinct ways in which art aesthetically evokes cultural memory and spatiotemporal disjunction (Fisher; Derrida).

According to Viviane Saleh-Hanna, *Black feminist hauntology* is “an anti-colonial analysis of time that captures the expanding and repetitive nature of structural violence, a process whereby we begin to locate a language to speak about the actual, not just symbolic or theorized violence that is racial colonialism” (para. 20). For the remainder of the essay, I will consider how Peaches—as a sociological ghost—haunts Nina Simone’s individual archive and how this haunting has persisted through modernized performances or articulations such as Rihanna’s “BBHMM” (Saleh-Hanna).

From Peaches to Pirate Jenny: Nina Simone’s Naming Rituals

Nina Simone was born Eunice Waymon in the town of Tryon, North Carolina in 1933 to a housekeeper and a handyman. By the time she reached 5-years-old, she was taking classical piano lessons—funded by both Whites and African Americans in her town (Simone). After high school, Nina continued her musical studies at the Juilliard School in New York City. However, as explicated in her autobiography, a significant amount of her rage was because she was an aspiring classical pianist and was denied entry into the Curtis Institute of Music due to alleged discriminatory admission practices. After moving to New York City, Simone renamed and reinvented herself when she started performing because she feared what might happen to her relationships back home if they found out what kind of music she performed and knew the kinds of places she frequented. Secular music was viewed as “the devil’s music” in her Christian upbringing. “Nina” (from *niña*) was a nickname given to Simone by a former boyfriend, Chico, and Simone was an allusion to Simone Signoret, who was a French actress.

Nina Simone blended jazz with blues, gospel, and classical music. Her song choice and classical background made it hard to pigeonhole her to a specific genre. Simone's autobiography, *I Put a Spell on You*, states, she was described as a "jazz-and-something-else-singer" (69). She adds, "To me 'Jazz' meant a way of thinking, a way of being, black man in America was jazz in every thing, so in that sense because I was black I was a jazz singer, but in every other way I most definitely wasn't" (69). Simone clarifies her style of music as folk, stating, "If I had to be called something, it should have been a folk singer because there was more folk and blues than jazz in my playing" (v). Brooks refers to Simone's musical belonging as confusing to most critics who compared her to Billie Holiday or called what she played jazz, often ignoring her complexity as a Black female singer.

"Mississippi Goddam"

In 1963, Years prior to Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination, Nina Simone commented on a particular series of injustices in the South during which King was arrested, Medgar Evers was killed, and a bomb exploded during Sunday morning services at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama--all in response to racial integration and a new Civil Rights Bill to Congress that would prohibit the discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. On September 15th, the blast at the Birmingham church injured twenty-two people and killed four young Black girls: Addie Mae Collins (14), Cynthia Wesley (14), Carole Robertson (14) and Carol Denise McNair (11). It was the third bombing in eleven days following the federal order for the integration of Alabama's schools. The thousands of Black protesters who visited the scene of the church bombing were met with hundreds of law enforcement officers ordered by Governor George Wallace. Later in the day, two young Black boys—Virgil Ware (13) and Johnnie Robinson (16)—were killed in the city. Ware was gunned down by Larry

Joe Sims while riding the handlebars of his brother's bike, and Robinson was shot and killed by police. In her autobiography, *I Put a Spell on You*, Simone admits she reacted violently to these events, stating,

I went down to the garage and got a load of tools and junk together and took them up to my apartment. Andy came in an hour later, saw the mess and asked me what I was doing. My explanation didn't make sense because the words tumbled out in a rush--I couldn't speak quickly enough to release the torrent inside my head. He understood, though, and was still cop enough to see I was trying to make a zip gun, a home-made pistol. I had it in my mind to go out and kill someone, I didn't know who, but someone I could identify as being in the way of my people getting some justice for the first time in three hundred years. Andy didn't try to stop me, but just stood there for a while and said, 'Nina, you don't know anything about killing. The only thing you've got is music' (89).

Simone embodies the inconsolable nature of grief born out of extreme racial oppression. After coming down from what she describes as fury and realizing the odds of carrying out what she callously wished for, she says she wrote the sheet music for "Mississippi Goddam," her first protest song. In verse three of "Mississippi Goddam," Simone sings,

Picket lines, school boycotts
They try to say it's a communist plot
All I want is equality
For my sister, my brother, my people, and me

Yes, you lied to me all these years
You told me to wash and clean my ears
And talk real fine just like a lady
And you'd stop calling me Sister Sadie

Oh but this whole country is full of lies
You're all gonna die and die like flies
I don't trust you any more
You keep on saying 'Go slow!'
'Go slow!' (line 38-51).

In the "Mississippi Goddam," Simone refuses the politics of incorporation by pointing out the hypocrisy of doing the "right" thing; in the eyes of White America, no matter how assimilated a Black woman is, she is still mocked and seen as subservient. Sister Sadie is a

fictional character in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Sadie is the wife of a runaway slave whose characteristics align her with the stereotypical strong Black woman trope; Sadie did not express her pain and anger. Simone is speaking to the power literature has in shaping day-to-day lives of Black women; in addition to that, she is also signaling that respectability politics are yet another tool of oppression. The race will not be furthered along with those politics alone. She threatens death to those who expect her to act a certain way, saying, "You're all gonna die and die like flies." Black people's patience is seen as a virtue, but Simone acknowledges that the time for patience is over. Simone wrote, "I suddenly realized what it was to be Black in America in 1963, but it wasn't an intellectual connection of the type Lorraine⁴ had been repeating to me over and over--it came as a rush of fury, hatred and determination" (89). Simone is exhibiting authority over environmental chaos in the form of singing about her rage and "infecting" others with her radicalized version of what justice should be in instances such as these. After performing "Mississippi Goddam" in 1964 at Carnegie Hall, Simone recognized that "singing for the movement" gave her the justification to sing outside of the purview of the Christian context. She states, "I could finally answer Momma's great unasked question, 'Why do you sing out in the world when you could be praising God?'" (91).

"Four Women"

Nina Simone's "Four Women" (1966) identifies and humanizes the different stereotypes of Black women, including Saffronia (tragic mulatto), Aunt Sarah (strong Black woman), Sweet Thing (hypersexual Black woman), and Peaches (evil or angry Black woman). She redeems four dominant tropes of Black women by telling their stories in the first-person perspective.

Implicitly, Simone argues Black women are so diverse there is still uniqueness and subtleties in

⁴ Simone is referencing Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965), who was a playwright, writer, and activist known for *Raisin in the Sun* (1959), the first play by an African American woman to be produced on Broadway.

what may be dismissed as sameness. The song is a symbol of hope and a celebration of the many complexities of Black women; however, it is worth noting that at the time of its release, in 1966, it was met with some hesitation because it tried to humanize dehumanizing tropes of Black women as hypersexual, tragic, strong/subservient, and angry. Soon after its release, the song was reportedly banned in several radio stations in Philadelphia and New York for this very reason.

After backlash, however, the ban was lifted (Pierpont). Simone sings:

My skin is black
My arms are long
My hair is wooly
My back is strong
Strong enough to take the pain
inflicted again and again
What do they call me
My name is Aunt Sarah
My name is Aunt Sarah

My skin is yellow
My hair is long
Between two worlds
I do belong
My father was rich and white
He forced my mother late one night
What do they call me
My name is Saffronia
My name is Saffronia

My skin is tan
My hair is fine
My hips invite you
my mouth like wine
Whose little girl am I?
Anyone who has money to buy
What do they call me
My name is Sweet Thing
My name is Sweet Thing

My skin is brown
my manner is tough
I'll kill the first mother I see
my life has been too rough

I'm awfully bitter these days
because my parents were slaves
What do they call me
My name is PEACHES (line 1-36).

In the last verse, Simone embraces the evil Black woman aesthetic within her voice to deliver a threat about Black women's affect as a potentially deadly force to be reckoned with. With the placement of Peaches as the final voice and as the cliff-hanging climax, Peaches is perhaps a voice trapped inside of the other figures in the song who do not necessarily portray their discontent. My argument here is that Peaches is the female equivalent to Bigger Thomas in terms of her hauntological placement within the psychological lives and literary works of Black women because of both racism and sexism. This reading of Peaches resonates with James Baldwin's reading of Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas from *Native Son*. Baldwin asserts, "No American Negro exists who does not have his private Bigger Thomas living in his skull" (Howe 355). Bigger, within the context of the novel, accidentally kills a young White woman and blames these actions on societal restraints placed on Black men interacting with White women. Meanwhile, Peaches appears here as a symbol of refusal for other Black women. In this performance, Simone refuses to end on a positive note, which, in turn, is also a refusal to reconcile White guilt. Instead, she appears provide strength and a possible pathway to an alternate existence for the other voices in the song who appear somewhat ontologically stagnated to the archetypes they represent. While the other voices in the song are passive to their positions as "other," through her anger, Peaches embraces the space of othering with the intent to change her circumstance. For example, in opposition to Aunt Sarah who takes "the pain inflicted again and again" or Sweet Thing who is "a little girl" for "anyone who has money to buy," Peaches responds to her situation with agency, stating, "I'll kill the first mother I see/ my life has been too rough" (line 5-6, 23-24, 31-32). The line about killing "the first mother" is not necessarily anti-

woman but could possibly mean she is willing to kill off any hopes of redemption through so-called feminine qualities such as the tendency to nurture. Lastly, Peaches' self-definition as the descendants of slaves also represents a clear connection to the past. Peaches herself is a haunting who is haunted. Thus, her anger is ancestral.

“Pirate Jenny”

Post-1963, Simone started to appropriate lyrics to songs like “Pirate Jenny” (German: “Seeräuber-Jenny”) to make them relevant to the movement. “Pirate Jenny” actually realizes her murder plot in ways that Peaches, within the structure of the song, “Four Women,” could not. While “Four Women” follows a sequence of eight to nine lines, the structure of “Pirate Jenny” is much more conversational and freer flowing.

Originally, “Pirate Jenny” appeared in *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), written by Bertolt Brecht in collaboration with Kurt Weill. The English version is by Marc Blitzstein, and, after “Mac the Knife,” “Pirate Jenny” was the second most popular song from *The Threepenny Opera*. In the plot of the opera, Low-Dive Jenny is a character who fantasizes about revenge against the townspeople; as a maid, Jenny is tired of the misuse because of her position. In the song, a pirate ship of a massive size (eight sails and 50 cannons) arrives at the harbor to destroy the city; however, the hotel in which Jenny works remains untouched. Jenny then instructs the pirates to murder everyone in the town on her behalf. At first, the song was sung in the first act by Polly Peachum, who is expressing her anger after her family denies her husband Mackie as a proper suitor. Later, the song was given to the prostitute, Jenny, in the second act, who is jealous of Polly and Mackie's relationship. Mackie and Jenny are involved to the point that she hides him from the police; however, she ends up working with the police so that she may control Mackie's fate. Lotte Lenya (1898-1981) also popularized the tune in her singing of it. In the play, before

she sings, she is asked to speak up and describe her family. Instead of replying to that specific question, Jenny (Lenya) goes into the song, “Pirate Jenny.”

Simone’s “Pirate Jenny” is a compelling performance of retribution that—when I listen to it—makes me feel utterly and exhilaratingly evil. In one performance of the tune, Simone gives it a different context and purpose, stating, “It’s the story of Jenny in a flophouse in Germany. We have transported Jenny to a flophouse in South Carolina. And Jenny has decided that she is going to kill everybody this night...and tomorrow she’s going home.” A “flophouse” is a cheap hotel or rooming house, which gives the song sexual undertones similar to its original context in *The Threepenny Opera*. With the placement of Jenny in the U.S., Simone rhetorically signals a responsibility for a diasporic community or family; it also establishes the tune within the genre of the blues biomyth since Simone was born in the Carolinas. Nina’s/Jenny’s plot to destroy the hotel and its inhabitants begins with her description of the environment where she is regarded as subservient and under constant outside scrutiny for menial tasks:

You people can watch while I'm scrubbing these floors
And I'm scrubbin' the floors while you're gawking
Maybe once ya tip me and it makes ya feel swell
In this crummy Southern town
In this crummy old hotel
But you'll never guess to who you're talkin'.
No. You couldn't ever guess to who you're talkin'

Then one night there's a scream in the night
And you'll wonder who could that have been
And you see me kinda grinnin' while I'm scrubbin'
And you say, "What's she got to grin?"

There's a ship
The Black Freighter
With a skull on its masthead
Will be coming in

Service workers in the South were mostly Black and were subjected to the mistreatment of the White upper class. “The Black Freighter” with a “skull on its masthead” takes up new meaning in Simone’s rendition; the word “Black” describes the ship, but perhaps it also describes its occupants. Jenny is prepared to welcome a large ship, “The Black Freighter,” which has the firepower to demolish everything in its wake, reserving the hotel for last. The ship reminiscent of vessels that carried slaves across the Atlantic to the new world. Perhaps this “Black Freighter” is a lost or sunken slave ship that has reemerged since it is described by the singer as “ghostly.” The occupants of the ship also behave as ghosts (i.e., “they move in the shadows/ where no one can see”) (51-52). This revenge narrative could be considered speculative wherein the protagonist and her future are preserved—not stymied--by the ghosts of her past.

You gentlemen can say: ‘Hey gal, finish them floors!
Get upstairs! What's wrong with you! Earn your keep here!’
You toss me your tips
And look out to the ships
But I'm counting your heads
As I'm making the beds
Cuz there's nobody gonna sleep here
Tonight, nobodys gonna sleep here, honey
Nobody
Nobody!

Then one night there's a scream in the night
And you say: ‘Who's that kicking up a row?’
And ya see me kinda starin' out the window
And you say: ‘What's she got to stare at now?’
I'll tell ya

There's a ship
The Black Freighter
Turns around in the harbor
Shootin' guns from her bow

Now, you gentlemen can wipe off that smile off your face
Cause every building in town is a flat one
This whole frickin' place will be down to the ground
Only this cheap hotel standing up safe and sound

And you yell: ‘Why do they spare that one?’
Yes, that's what you say: ‘Why do they spare that one?’

The pleasure that Simone displays with the telling of this narrative is noteworthy. Secrecy or dissemblance allows for the speaker to speak her uttermost thoughts. Even though she is in plain sight (hence, the “gawking”), she develops her own dialogue within perceived silence. She sings, “you’ll never guess to who you’re talking,” “see me kinda grinnin’ while I’m scrubbin,’” and “I’m counting your heads/ as I’m making the beds” (6, 10, 22-23). These moments of violent inner dialogue matched with kindly outward appearances give Jenny the element of madness or insanity. It also demonstrates the relationship between performances of revenge and performances of desire. Simone/Jenny desires for the death of her townspeople. In this narrative, Simone/Jenny wields agency over the self and power over this ghostly militia. The fantasy of murder is happening alongside her domestic labor, which means the performance is escape from mundane circumstances. The act of mythmaking is a survival mechanism. In this biomythography, Simone/Jenny is the ultimate nemesis of White supremacy as she is able to perform a rage at the level of mass destruction. She is also able to instruct on how to practice dissemblance to exact revenge through rage. This aesthetic of killing rage within the biomyth haunts to this day.

Rihanna’s Rude Girl Aesthetic

Killing rage is a spacious archive, and it extends into the current moment. Robyn ‘Rihanna’ Fenty, a self-professed “bad girl” and “rude girl” from Barbados, utilizes hip hop as a tool for which fantasies of revenge are enacted. Her blues aesthetic is modernized through hip hop; her waywardness is in the form of rudeness. Released in 2015, “Bitch Better Have My Money” (“BBHMM”) is an artistic backlash meant for her former accountant, Peter Gounis, who is the titular “bitch” Rihanna refers to in the song. In 2009, Gounis gave Rihanna poor financial

advice that left her almost bankrupt. Rihanna's performance of revenge is politicized, raced, and gendered. She takes her place within a historical context wherein Black women are valued only as sex objects and for labor they can perform (41). She is angry. She is bitter. And she is a rage that cannot be contained. She participates in boastful speech and knowingly entertains these negative tropes about Black womanhood. Nonetheless, hidden in plain sight are subtexts of vulnerability and powerlessness. I am interested in this contemporary example in particular for what it teaches about systematically killing the father through audiovisual storytelling.

In "BBHMM," the upper class, blonde-haired White female with expensive tastes is represented as the partner or spouse of the White male figure Rihanna longs to kill. The White woman is abducted first—instead of her actual target—and she systematically uses the White woman as leverage for rectification. The White woman in "BBHMM" is tied up, gagged, drugged, drowned, hanged by her feet, and stuffed in a small chest (Fig. 10). "BBHMM" dedicates a considerable amount of time to making a spectacle of White female bodies through torture and sadism. Meanwhile the White male body does not suffer physically until *after* the White woman is subject to the violence Rihanna unleashes. Therefore, torture of the White female body is death by proxy for the White father figure in this video, which reveals patricide as a process rather than a specified end goal. According to Peter Mwikisa, White women are symbols of "all that which cannot pass from whites to blacks" (Mwikisa 137). Patriarchy presents itself as gallant, however, ironically, the White patriarchal discourse constructs White women as gatekeepers "of the inner sanctum, of its power and privilege" (137). Therefore, White women are key in the racist construction of Black alterity, and, as Rihanna's fantastic visualizations depict, they function as pawns in the dismantling of White male patriarchy.



Figure 10. Still of Rihanna simulating a lynching in “BBHMM” (2015).

In Rihanna’s music video, there are two women who aid her in the killing of the accountant. Sanam, one of the women in the video, was approached by Rihanna because her aesthetic was what Rihanna had envisioned for the song’s visuals. She is the so-called “Desi henchwoman” with jet black hair, goth-like makeup, and multiple facial piercings. Dressed in all black, she and another White woman act as accomplices to Rihanna’s dirty work. The presence of other characters within the revenge plot against her object of rage is a particularly interesting note, maintaining that the death of the White father is not just a project of Black individuals.

“BBHMM” is a part of an aesthetic visual trend of revenge against White male bodies in which hip hop is engaged. The theme of patricide is observed in David Banner’s “Black Fist,” Snoop Dog’s “Lavender,” Kodak Black’s “Tunnel Vision,” N.W.A.’s “Fuck the Police,” and Dead Prez’s “Cop Shot,” all of which are songs that reference police brutality and racist jailing practices that result in the mass incarceration of young Black males. Historical accounts of slave insurrections could be useful in grounding these themes of rage and evil as linear and ever-present within the African American imaginary. Today’s patricidal revenge narratives are not to

be shied away from within the academy as I believe they appear mostly for cathartic purposes. In response to Rihanna's "BBHMM" music video, Tiana Clark, a critically acclaimed Black woman poet, writes:

I, too, want to be naked, zebra striped/ in the almost dried accountant's blood,
sticky/ and sucking a fat blunt inside a Louis Vuitton suitcase/ brimming with the
newest money. This is another way to see myself, too/ in the way Rihanna nooses
a white woman up/ by her smooth feet, a blue-blooded pendulum swaying/ as her
beautiful tits look more perfect than ever/ why did that image excite me so? No
not the tits/ but the simulated lynching (Clark, lines 1-13).

Covered in blood and money, it is a grim, but beautiful serenity Rihanna embodies in the final scene of her music video (Fig. 11). In Rihanna's fantasy of revenge, she got what she wanted, and agency was only possible through the killing of her former White male accountant. The ending of "BBHMM" demonstrates that the narrator matters. It also gives us insight into how Black women experience and incite rage in contemporary times. For Clark and me, these are not just myths about what Black women would do with power if we had it, but an awe-inspiring demonstration of agency over one's own body that only authorship of the self would allow. Clark describes a vicarious relationship between Rihanna's performance of patricide and her own feelings of rage.

Conclusion

This chapter provides a revealing snapshot into the lives and works of blueswomen in response to hegemonic discourses of their rage as pathologically evil. However, in the development of this project in the future, I do intend to take a deeper look into the inner lives of these performers as well as locate the various mentions—both obscure and overt— of the Sapphire trope within the Black literary canon. Within the discourse surrounding Black women's affectivity and their subsequent positionality in the family unit, real-life paradigms of killing rage--as they appear throughout history--ought to be read and contextualized alongside

fantastical depictions of patricide, which is the murder of one's father figure. While it is beyond the scope of this essay, I do anticipate researching the true crimes of Assata Shakur, Margaret Garner, Joanne Little, and Celia (a slave). In addition to that, I would also dedicate more space to Derrida's theory of hauntology within both Black feminist and Afro-futurist frameworks.



Figure 11. Still of Final Scene of “BBHMM” (2015).

CHAPTER 5. MODERNITY'S BEAST: MAD WEATHER, RAGE, AND RABIES IN ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*

In her 1928 essay, “How It Feels to be Colored Me,” Zora Neale Hurston discusses the external pressures, as a Black artist, to create within the confines of Euro-centric values. As a key contributor to the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston would have likely been part of W.E.B. Du Bois’ Talented Tenth, yet she often relied heavily on the knowledge she developed growing up in an all-Black township in the rural South (Eatonville), which was a great geographical distance from the Harlem Intelligentsia. Additionally, the observations she made during her many trips throughout the South as a researcher informed her way of representing dialect, belief systems (i.e., hoodoo), and folktales within her fiction. Hurston’s characters, who were superstitious, sinful, and wild, had no place in the unified push to “uplift” African Americans. In this chapter, I investigate the supposed paradoxical relationship between modernity and Blackness, the latter functioning in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a synecdoche for madness. In 1937, Hurston produced *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which is about a young Black woman by the name of Janie Crawford who discovers a strong sense of self after three marriages.

Following in the tradition of blues literature, in *TEWWG*, Janie travels from “Middle Georgy” with Joseph Starks to Eatonville, and eventually finds herself working the fields in the swampy Everglades with her younger lover named Tea Cake (35). It is “on de muck” of the Everglades that Tea Cake introduces Janie to the jook joint, where the blues, brawls, and a good time are the norm. The jook joint in Hurston’s work is symbolic of newly found freedoms of African Americans, expressed and realized through Janie who consistently sheds gender and racial politics throughout the narrative. According to Angela Davis, author of *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude ‘Ma’ Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, the blues

consciousness was shaped by certain changes in African American life brought on by emancipation. For the first time, African Americans were afforded certain rights such as education, freedom to explore sexuality through chosen relationships, and freedom to travel (8). Davis identifies travel and sexuality as the two main factors in the production of blues literature post-slavery.

The spirit of the blues may be observed in novels in a variety of ways. Novelists may write characters who are blues singers, insert lyrics, or add descriptions of live performances (124). The scholarship surrounding Hurston's engagement with blues consciousness has focused primarily on *TEWWG* (Tracy; Gussow; Johnson; Dubek; Batker). Tracy proclaims, "Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) is another quintessential African-American blues novel, rooted not only in the blues but in the female blues tradition, one that considers the ways in which women are socialized to accept certain physical and emotional limitations in their lives" (130). I would add that the female blues tradition is—with its proclivity to dispose of respectability politics and gendered norms—a genre that is decidedly equipped to speak back to power in the most provocative sense.

However, before Janie's evolution as a blueswoman, she had no agency. At sixteen years old, Janie is arranged to marry Logan Killicks, and she despises him so much that she runs off with another suitor, Joe Starks. Later in the novel, eight months after her second husband dies a painful death, the much younger Tea Cake catches the attention of Janie when they meet for the first time. Janie and Tea Cake fall in love and are a picture of domestic bliss (at least to the folk who live on de muck). Despite Tea Cake's abusive jealousy over Janie, which deserves its own analysis, the tone of the text portrays domestic violence as complicated, normalized, and expected given Janie's fair-skin beauty. Janie never escapes the trope of the fair-skinned Black

woman with long hair, also known as the tragic mulatto. Throughout the novel, readers are constantly confronted with the ways in which Janie is experiencing the privileges, fetishization, and ostracism associated with colorism. Thus, Janie's rage is not just from her experiences with White people or Black men, but from her interactions with other Black women who view her as a threat.

Starting in chapter 18, a hurricane devastates the Florida Everglades where Tea Cake and Janie are working the crop fields. During the storm, Tea Cake protects Janie from a rabid dog, and he is bitten on the cheek while saving her. Weeks later, after initially refusing medical treatment for his wound, Tea Cake endures the different stages of rabies and becomes increasingly violent and paranoid. Janie ultimately kills Tea Cake because she fears his symptoms might cause him to irrationally injure or kill her. Loving and losing Tea Cake is the cause of Janie's metamorphosis from her socially prescribed role as the mayor's faithful wife (and widow) to a murderous and rageful blueswoman. I argue Tea Cake and Janie's separate but interrelated descents into madness are indeed raced and gendered, which resonates with Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality. I argue the etymological relationship between *rage* and *rabies* is particularly productive for a reading of these blues characters especially since the pathogenesis of the disease can be traced throughout the events of the novel's final chapters. (Pathogenesis refers to the origination and development of a disease.)

Though animals are given inferior status within the cultural framework of the West, Joshua Bennett argues that Hurston, alongside other writers such as Richard Wright and Toni Morrison, renders animals in a humanizing light, which ruptures the very binary between the human and nonhuman. Bennett also posits that Black lives exist outside of this binary altogether, inferring that the position of the nonbeing is "where the kinds of extravagant violence so often

deployed against, and solely reserved for, animals is allowable, deemed necessary in order for civil society to function at peak performance” (Bennett 6). Modernity, and therefore the humanity of the Western subject, then, is defined by one’s “mastery” over the nonbeing. The metamorphoses Tea Cake and Janie undergo from human to something bestial is the very nightmare of Black modernity as it affirms modernity’s taxonomies of the human and the nonhuman by the pen of a Black author. Nonetheless, I posit Hurston’s text could be read as a critique of the position of the human as unattainable outside of Whiteness, and that the embrace of animality is an artistic choice that should not be essentialized.

Rabidity

Rage is defined as “madness; overpowering passion of any kind, such as desire or anger; violence, stormy or furious activity; a flood; uncontrolled anger or aggression arising from a particular situation or environment” (“rage”). This particular definition of *rage*, especially as it relates to weather, is of interest because it resonates with themes and connotations of rage that are within *TEWWG*, which I will elaborate more on later. For the analysis that is to follow, it is important to note that the term *rage* can be traced back to the Medieval Latin words *rabia* and *rabies*, the latter being a fatal, infectious disease that causes madness in mammals. Rabies is a terrible (yet totally preventable) virus transmitted to humans when bitten or scratched by an infected animal. There is also human-to-human transmission. Rodney E. Rohde claims rabies is feared since it “crosses the line between humanity and animal” (74). Rohde also claims a bite from a rabid animal “symbolizes the very metamorphosis of a human becoming that very rabid animal” (74).

While the threat of rabies in the U.S. remains low, with the Center for Disease Control reporting 127 human rabies cases from 1960 to 2018 (or two cases every year), in the context in

which *TEWWG* was written, the situation regarding the illness was much more dire. In 1937, according to Robert Haas, “There were fifty-eight human deaths from rabies that year in the U.S., mostly in the Southeast, and nearly 12,000 reported animal cases...Furthermore, the nature of rabies--which can in a few days turn a family pet into a monster liable to vicious, unprovoked, and deadly attack--made it terrifying even beyond the rational actuality” (Haas 205).

In 2010, *The Tyra Show* host, Tyra Banks, admitted in one segment that she was “not feeling great” after being bitten by a dog earlier in the day. Banks horrified members of her live studio audience and television viewers by presenting signs of rabies, including frothing at the mouth, extreme thirst, and barking. Though the memorable moment was a prank, it characterizes the media portrayal of rabies as a prevailing symbol of irrationality and doom (Rohde).

What Banks was exhibiting were the telltale signs of the virus as popularized in various fictional works, including Stephen King’s *Cujo*, Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and Walt Disney’s *Old Yeller* (Rohde). Many ancient writings and cultural works depict dogs as the sole carriers of the disease; however, many animal species, wild and domesticated, may act as a vector of the disease, transmitting it to humans (Rohde). Furious rabies entails the aforesaid symptoms in addition to hyperactivity, excitable behavior, hydrophobia (fear of water), and occasional aerophobia (fear of fresh air) (WHO). This change in personality is a hallmark of the virus, which travels first from the site of entry (via a bite or scratch) through the nervous system making its way to the brain. Other expressions of the disease are hardly ever in the media let alone depicted at the same frequency as furious rabies. According to the World Health Organization, paralytic or dumb rabies makes up 20 percent of all rabies cases per year and entails muscle weakness starting at the scratched or bitten area followed by gradual paralysis.

Lastly, asymptomatic rabies is characterized by its long incubation period which lasts weeks, months, or even decades.

There are five stages of the zoonotic disease in humans, including incubation, prodrome, encephalitis, coma, and death (or, very rarely, recovery). Incubation describes the period between the bite or scratch from an infected animal and the appearance of symptoms. There is no known treatment for rabies after this period, since any therapeutic medicine must be given before clinical symptoms appear and inoculation with the vaccine is the best measure against contracting the virus. The incubation period typically lasts 30 to 90 days but could range from a few days to years after exposure. The prodromal period, which lasts 2 to 10 days, is distinguished from the incubation period by the appearance of nonspecific symptoms, including general malaise, chills, fever, headache, photophobia, nausea, vomiting, sore throat, cough, and tingling around the wound. The virus spreads through nerve cells to the brain, where it quickly multiplies. Inflammation of the brain or encephalitis disrupts neurotransmitters and alters the communication between brain cells, oftentimes triggering a change of personality that might cause the infected to engage in behaviors that are hyperactive, excitable, aggressive, and erratic. Hydrophobia or the “fear of water” is caused by the infection’s ravaging of the central nervous system, triggering painful spasms in the throat while attempting to swallow. Even the thought of swallowing water causes the spasms, which is how fear factors into the disease’s symptoms. Besides, if the individual with rabies could swallow saliva with ease, it would lessen the risk of transmitting the virus to another host. Ultimately, between dehydration, psychological changes, extreme inflammation, and other symptoms, the course of disease ends in the demise of the infected.

As mentioned in chapter one, term *Black rage* was first coined by two Black male psychologists, William Grier and Price Cobb, in 1968, to describe the overwhelming sense of loss Black people felt in the wake of Dr. King's death. Black rage can be utilized as a unifying concept to contextualize the experiences of African Americans under the structures of White supremacy while also making room for the spaciousness of affect and the endless expressions it produces, including violence on the part of Blacks. However, following in the radical theory of bell hooks' *killing rage*, I have chosen to highlight the differences that exist within Black women's representations of themselves in literature. What does it mean to associate female *rage*—a normative (if often disrespected) emotion—with *rabies*, an infectious canine disease? What is Hurston doing by returning female rage to its etymological origins in epidemiology?

I am not the first scholar to suggest the reading of rage and the infectious disease rabies alongside each other in the latter half of *TEWWG*, but in recent scholarship, there is a general lack of connectivity between Black rage (a political catalyst) and rabies as it functions in Hurston's novel. This research expands upon earlier research on Hurston and modernity to explicate that there is a gendered difference in how Black women and Black men "catch" rage. The analysis of *TEWWG* that will follow applies a theory of Black rage to a fresh reading of characters Tea Cake, Janie, and Motor Boat. My reading of this novel employs rabies and its pathogenesis to gain insight into the complexity of Black rage as it appears in all three characters. While Tea Cake shows the obvious signs of furious rabies, my later arguments analyze asymptomatic rabies in Janie (who later presents as furious) and paralytic rage as it is expressed by Motor Boat during the storm. But first, I'd like to situate Hurston's work within the larger project of Black modernity. To understand why Hurston might represent Blackness as the

way she does in *TEWWG*, it is useful to be aware of her own early history and education for its impact on her writing.

Hurston's Vision of Black Modernity

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960) was born in Notasulga, Alabama. Yet, in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, the author claims her hometown as Eatonville, Florida. Established by former slaves in 1887, nearly two decades after the Civil War ended, Eatonville is the first all-Black municipality in the nation. Hurston's parents, who were formerly enslaved, migrated to Eatonville when Hurston was just a toddler. For Hurston, the importance of growing up in an all-Black township is evident in the frequent use of her hometown as the setting of her work. A member of the educated elite, Hurston held degrees from multiple institutions. After earning an associate degree at Howard University, Hurston went on to Barnard College, where she graduated with a BA in anthropology in 1928. Hurston later pursued a graduate degree at Columbia University, studying under the renowned anthropologist Franz Boaz. She left New York City to conduct field studies in the Caribbean and Florida, which culminated in her collections of folklore, *Mules and Men* (1935) and *Tell My Horse* (1938). Hurston's roots in anthropological research informed her creative works by giving her the opportunity to fully immerse herself in cultural practices. In addition to two books of folklore, Hurston published four novels, an autobiography, short stories, essays, and plays during the span of her thirty-year writing career.

Perhaps Hurston doesn't belt strong-winded notes like Bessie Smith or Ma Rainey, but she is indeed tapping into the emotional reservoirs needed to "tell it how it is," a key characteristic of the blues. *Dust Tracks on a Road* reveals elements of her personal life that would corroborate Hurston as a blueswoman. Hemenway speaks to how boldly Hurston traveled

about conducting her anthropological research in parts of the country deeply saturated with Jim Crow, stating, “She was a pioneering role model, a woman who rejected sexist roles, traveling with only a handgun, a two-dollar dress, and a suitcase full of courage through some of the roughest and remotest parts of the rural South” (xv). As a folklorist, Hurston was an authority on African American folk music. In the summer of 1935, alongside Alan Lomax and Elizabeth Barnicle, Hurston collected two hundred and twenty-seven discs of African American, Bahamian, and Haitian songs, music, stories, and church services for the Library of Congress (Hemenway 207). Additionally, according to Carol Batker, “Hurston was a friend of Ethel Waters, for example, and attempted to sell her a song on at least one occasion (Hemenway 207, 284). On a trip with Langston Hughes, she stayed with Bessie Smith (106) and was quite familiar with Harlem cabarets as well as the Southern tent-show and vaudeville tradition which showcased classic blues singers” (Batker 26-27). In her last act as a blueswoman, Hurston struggled financially in her final decade and died in poverty on January 28th, 1960. She was buried in an unmarked grave in Fort Pierce, Florida until 1973 when author Alice Walker made it her duty to purchase a headstone after rediscovering the then out-of-print literary foremother. Since her posthumous literary revival, Hurston has maintained her place as a Black cultural icon; however, for decades, her depictions of Black rurality did not please the upper echelon of Black society.

Though she was acknowledged as a talent by her peers in the Harlem Renaissance (such as Langston Hughes), Hurston’s work was not valued in the developing Black modernist movement by some of its most visible male gatekeepers. In the *New Masses*, Richard Wright, author of *Native Son*, penned a vitriolic review of *TEWWG*, writing, “The sensory sweep of her novel carries no theme, no message, no thought. In the main, her novel is not addressed to the

Negro, but to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy.” He continued, “She exploits that phase of Negro life which is ‘quaint,’ the phase which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the ‘superior’ race” (para. 5). Essentializing Hurston’s use of dialect to that of a minstrel show, Wright was not alone in his critiques. In 1938, Alain Locke, philosopher and luminary of the Harlem Renaissance, complained that the book was not advancing Negro literature enough, stating, “Progressive southern fiction has already banished the legend of these entertaining pseudo-primitives whom the reading public still loves to laugh with, weep over and envy. Having gotten rid of condescension, let us now get over oversimplification!” (para. 1). Locke viewed artistic representations of folk culture as outdated, meaning any transplanting of that aesthetic into the present-day was regressive to the image of the American Negroes as a modern people. Locke’s view also details a desired focus on urban culture over the rural, which resonates with the experience of the Great Migration.

Though Du Bois’ concept of the “Talented Tenth” is now thought of as antiquated, having been deemed prescriptive, elitist, and sexist, it was a popular position amid the Black intelligentsia and widely practiced by them. In retrospect, Du Bois’ essay on the issue of Negro education is a classist epiphany that attempted to distinguish elitist Blacks from lower class Blacks in the name of propelling Black modernism. Du Bois was in direct opposition to the ideologies of Booker T. Washington, who argued that social equality for Black people would be made possible through vocational training that would provide jobs and wealth. On the contrary, Du Bois’ concept of the Talented Tenth posits, “The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other

races” (Du Bois 33). Du Bois theorized that through education one in ten Black men had the ability to “uplift” their race, especially the “downtrodden,” which would then bring about positive social change.

Hurston’s *Black America* affirmed a different portrayal of Black modernity, one that was still heavily entangled with the past. Hurston’s brand of modernity is especially evidenced in *Tea Cake*’s decision to stay in the ‘Glades and his subsequent contracting of rabies. The paradoxical nature of the relationship between modernity and Blackness is summed up in how the storm ultimately ended for the main characters and the psychological carnage they endured afterwards. *Tea Cake* and Janie’s separate but interrelated descent into madness is indeed raced and gendered and, alongside the various stages of rabies, I offer it as a paradigm for understanding Black affectivity and its myriad expressions.

Leigh Anne Duck notes Hurston’s work has been simultaneously celebrated for representing the folk culture and traditional scenes of African Americans living in rurality and downgraded for existing in stark contrast to the modern aesthetic that the rest of the nation was dedicated to developing. Duck informs, “[Hurston] has also been widely dismissed as a writer whose representations of the ‘folk’ accommodate the racism of a nation quick to exploit ‘undeveloped’ peoples” (265). The way her work was received illuminates the polarizing impact of modernity on the works that authentically represented those who were not privileged. “But I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all but about it,” Hurston wrote (para. 6). From Hurston’s position, she did not see anything worthy of shame within her upbringing as a child of former slaves nor in the lives of those she studied. That is not

to say that her decision to represent those deemed unrepresentable in the eyes of Black modernism was not political. Focusing on artistic integrity, she allowed her writing to act as a mirror despite the scripts instructing her otherwise, and instead used her unique perspective on Black life to propel forward. In that same essay from 1928, she famously declared, “No, I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife” (para. 6). The preceding quote is a direct play on the idiom “the world is your oyster,” with Hurston reveling in the possibilities that are afforded when Black writers are true to their own narratives and free to write what they want.

Franz Fanon discerns the fundamental truth of the project of modernity, which is its validation through the nonbeingness of the other, writing, “Nobody dreams of challenging the fact that its principal inspiration is nurtured by the core of theories which represent the Black man as the missing link in the slow evolution from ape to man (1).” In the U.S. racial imaginary, the distinct characterization of Black folks as being “rabid” or “animal-like” is indeed a hallmark of modernity, and Hurston, through this racialized trope, is demonstrating how the distinct characteristics can be used as a point of humanization and possibility. According to Jennifer Poole, Sonia Meera, and Idil Abdillahi, the “rational” turn of the Enlightenment is where anti-Black sanism “has its roots,” alongside “the subsequent co-organization of colonizing systems such as slavery and psychiatry” (22). This symbiotic relationship has been the basis of anti-Black sanist studies, which situates medicine and the proverbial “ivory tower” as inherently racist systems that stood to benefit greatly from such beliefs. Anti-Black sanism “provides a framework that names the injustice, the pain, and seeks to address the historic discrimination, continued overrepresentation of Black/African-identified individuals in the mental health system” (23).

The position of Blackness as nonbeing or nonhuman is exemplified in Tea Cake's decision-making apparatus; staying "on de muck" with Janie during the storm meant they would not miss a day or two of work. Despite the Indians and animals moving to higher ground, with other signs that the impending storm is serious, Tea Cake, responding to a fellow worker who asks if he and Janie need a way out before the storm, says, "You ain't seen the bossman go up, is yuh" (156)? Reliant on the logical mind of the "bossman," Tea Cake, Janie, and the others who stay have a particular way of thinking, one that is demonstrated in the language of the text, which ultimately highlights the paradoxical nature of Black modernity. The text states, "The folks in the quarters and the people in the big house further around the shore heard the big lake and wondered. The people felt uncomfortable but safe because there were the seawalls to chain the senseless monster in his bed. The folks let the people do the thinking. If the castles thought themselves secure, the cabins needn't worry" (158). In the preceding passage, the language (i.e., "quarters," "big house," and "cabins") is specific to that of slavery, once describing the living arrangements for masters and their slaves. Though the crop workers "on de muck" are paid for their labor in the fields, the relationship remains regressive. The text differentiates between "the folks" and "the people," the latter being the decision-making apparatus for all. In thinking about survival, the modern way or the way of "the people" did not serve "the folk" since they did not have the security of the material world (represented and symbolized as "castles"). "The folk" who stayed to endure the storm found confidence in the bossman who "might have the thing stopped before morning anyway" (158). However, during the height of the storm, when Tea Cake and Janie are entertaining Motor, they realize the uncomfortable truth of the weather's unpredictability. The movement from objects to momentarily experienced subjectivity occurs when Tea Cake, Janie, and Motor all understand that they are beyond "asking the white folks

what to look for through that door” (159). This is an important turning point for the characters as they await what is to come of the forceful winds and overflowing waters of the nearby lake. The text states, “They huddled closer and stared at the door...Six eyes were questioning God” (159). Moving from objects to subjects is only possible in the context of the storm and this is proven in their collective turn to watching and “questioning God” (159).

Mad Weather

During the storm, the environment is madness personified, and Lake Okeechobee is described as a “senseless monster in his bed” (158) who becomes “madder and madder” (159) with his “raging waters” (161). The water from the sea is described as “walking the earth with a heavy heel,” and its uncontrollable demeanor provokes fear and anxiety. Symbolically speaking, the storm is rage personified and therefore inescapable (162). Even though Janie is “fighting water too hard,” she becomes submerged within it, “playing upon it in fury” as one of the things “that didn’t belong in the water” (165). Escaping rage is as impossible as escaping the weather.

Tea Cake: De lake is comin’!
Motor Boat: De lake! De lake!
Janie: It’s comin’ behind us! Us can’t fly.
Tea Cake: But we still kin run (162).

In Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, she defines the weather: “What I am calling the weather, anti-Blackness, is pervasive *as* climate. The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies” (Sharpe 106). Sharpe further clarifies that “it is not the specifics of any one event or set of events that are endlessly repeatable and repeated, but the totality of the environments in which we struggle; the machines in which we live; what I am calling the weather” (111).

What Sharpe defines as the weather resonates with the definition of institutional racism, also known as systemic racism, which is the “policies and practices that exist throughout a whole

society or organization, and that result in and support a continued unfair advantage to some people and unfair or harmful treatment of others based on race” (Cambridge Dictionary).

Institutional racism is pervasive exactly because of its cumulative presence in politics, education, healthcare, housing, employment, and policing.

In *TEWWG*, Black rage emerges as a response to the furious and unrelenting atmosphere that is anti-Blackness, which produces a rapid (and rabid) development within the affective and interior lives of the characters. Tea Cake’s exposure to rabies/Black rage by the mad dog is accompanied by the weather/anti-Blackness. In this extended metaphor, Black rage is induced by the violent scratching, biting, beating, human trafficking, raping, mass murdering, and thieving that is White rage, which denies the very existence of wrongdoing.

Tea Cake’s incubation starts in Chapter 18 with the introduction of the mad dog, which is representative of the human rage felt by Black people. Despite extreme fatigue from traveling by foot in dangerously high waters, Tea Cake sees Janie in danger after she falls into the water and is moved to solve the problem. The text states, “Janie was trying to swim but fighting water too hard. He saw a cow swimming slowly towards the fill in an oblique line. A massive built dog was sitting on her shoulders and shivering and growling” (165). Tea Cake tells Janie to swim “tuh de cow and grab a hold of her tail (165).” This was the path of least resistance. Janie’s docility (reflected in her relationship to muleness) is also solidified in this moment where she and the cow become one under the guise of survival. Economically, cows are an ideal investment for their high return, including breeding capabilities, meat, hide, manure, and milk. As a Black woman, Janie has a lot more in common with the cow she is thrown into the water with than the White women up on higher ground. Janie, desperate for direction, submits to her husband’s will—the same will that brings them to “de muck” in the first place and has held them fugitive in

the storm's wake—and grabs the cow's rump to stay afloat. The danger of the storm pushes Tea Cake into subjectivity (problem solving; responsibility for the still animal-like Janie). The storm itself does not turn Janie into a subject.

Hurston's novel, which is based in a post-slavery South, subtextually addressed antiquated medical discourse and its omnipresence in the everyday lives of the folk. In Chapter 19, Tea Cake is exhibiting madness by colonial medical standards even before the onset of his rabies symptoms. After the storm is over, Tea Cake wanders out to find work, but he is almost immediately met by two White men with rifles who kidnap and force him to bury the dead (Hurston 170).

Tea Cake found that he was part of a small army that had been pressed into service to clear the wreckage in public places and bury the dead. Bodies had to be searched out, carried to certain gathering places and buried. Corpses were not just found in wrecked houses. They were under houses, tangled in shrubbery, floating in water, hanging in trees, drifting under the wreckage (170).

Many people, both Black and White, die in the storm and their bodies are recovered by a troop of Black men who are forced into labor because they appear idle or as if they are “not doin’ nothin’,” which reinforces the stereotype that Black people are inherently “lazy” and undeserving of rest (Hurston 170). Tea Cake escapes the armed men when he thinks of how much Janie is worrying about his whereabouts. Despite the fear of being shot in his back as he runs, he escapes (much like a runaway slave away from overseers) what seemed like an endless effort to clean up the storm's carnage. Tea Cake is a victim of forced labor, there are colonial era diseases (i.e., drapetomania) that describe Tea Cake's condition as a nonbeing in captivity. Tea Cake and other Black men were thought of as incapable of managing themselves post-storm and had to be forced into labor for the so-called greater good, despite having plans to work for money or possibly seek medical treatment for injuries sustained during the storm.

Tea Cake's preliminary symptoms from rabies could have easily been confused for fatigue from working with dead bodies all day after barely surviving a storm. Nonetheless, his symptoms from the prodromal phase appear after the first major racial incident in the text, which is a clear disruption from the flow of the text for 18 chapters. Before the storm, the readers had been shielded from any account of racism, especially since Janie's earlier years are heavily influenced by her close relationship with a White family, and, from there, she moves to the all-Black township of Eatonville, a utopian getaway from the realities of the Jim Crow era.

Tea Cake's Fear

When mapping the different symptoms of rabies onto the characters of *Their Eyes*, it is obvious that Tea Cake suffers from furious rabies, which begins manifesting after his third week of work in the 'Glades post-storm. Besides fever, headache, loss of appetite, and general malaise, Tea Cake exhibits strange behaviors. He throws a glass of water to the floor after complaining to Janie "dat water is somethin' wrong wid it," a sure sign of hydrophobia that colors Janie "frantic with alarm" (174-175):

Tea Cake didn't say anything against it and Janie herself hurried off. This sickness to her was worse than the storm. As soon as she was well out of sight, Tea Cake got up and dumped the water bucket and washed it clean. Then he struggled to the irrigation pump and filled it again. He was not accusing Janie of malice and design. He was accusing her of carelessness. She ought to realize that water buckets needed washing like everything else. He'd tell her about it good and proper when she got back. What was she thinking about nohow? He found himself very angry about it. He eased the bucket on the table and sat down to rest before taking a drink.

Finally he dipped up a drink. It was so good and cool! Come to think about it, he hadn't had a drink since yesterday. That was what he needed to give him an appetite for his beans. He found himself wanting it very much, so he threw back his head as he rushed the glass to his lips. But the demon was there before him, strangling, killing him quickly. It was a great relief to expel the water from his mouth (175).

This moment in the text marks the beginning of Tea Cake's delusional thinking, and Janie is the sure target of his anger over his predicament no matter her will to help him recover. The bite from the dog is not just a physical encounter for Tea Cake, but a spiritual and deeply taboo one that haunts him beyond the initial encounter. Before the arrival of any doctor, his rabies symptoms are explained by the text as supernatural, which is the beyond the natural. Modernity devalued African American practices, especially regarding the superstitious and the use of dialect, reducing their culture to the primitive and the vernacular. Tea Cake tells Janie, "Ah tole yuh somethin' jumped on me heah last night and choked me. You come makin' out ah wuz dreamin'" (175). To which Janie responds, "Maybe it wuz uh witch ridin' yuh, honey. Ah'll see can't Ah find some mustard seed whilst Ah's out. But Ah'm shot uh fetch de doctor when Ah'm come" (175). Janie's attempt to "fetch de doctor" is an attempt to find reason in the nonsensical symptoms of Tea Cake's peculiar illness. The fear of what was haunting Tea Cake against the "logical" mind of Western medicine is a stark example of how paradoxical "Black modernity" is. What I also find striking in Janie's statement is her instinctual knowledge to also "fetch" a naturopathic medicine before heading back with the doctor. Janie thought "some mustard seed" would help Tea Cake in his fight against the "demon." This may also be a double entendre for the faith she needed to persevere the inevitable: losing Tea Cake.⁵ When the doctor finds out that Tea Cake is suffering from symptoms after being bit by a "mad dawg," Tea Cake irrationally blames the "many dead folks" who were contaminating the water and making it harder for him to recuperate from this new, unrelated illness (176-177):

Tea Cake was lying with his eyes closed and Janie hoped he was asleep. He wasn't. A great fear had took hold of him. What was this thing that set his brains afire and grabbed at his throat with iron fingers? Where did it come from and why

⁵ In the bible, Matthew 17:20, Jesus states, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

did it hang around him? He hoped it would stop before Janie noticed anything. He wanted to try to drink water again but he didn't want her to see him fail. (178)

Janie, coming back into the house from speaking with the doctor about Tea Cake's fate, is not only afraid of what the future holds but also of his increasing paranoia and the disease being transmitted to her. When Janie leaves Tea Cake to find therapeutic medicine for his condition, yet again meeting with Dr. Simmons, he accuses her of the unthinkable. "Mrs. Turner's brother was back on the muck and now he had this mysterious sickness. People didn't just take sick like this for nothing" (180). He believes that she is planning to leave him and so she must be doing something to make him ill, perhaps visiting a different kind of doctor. Janie is able to quell his fears by telling him why she left. Remembering what occurs earlier in the muck, Tea Cake strikes Janie for his suspicions about Mrs. Turner's brother snooping around:

When Mrs. Turner's brother came and she brought him over to be introduced, Tea Cake had a brainstorm. Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession (147).

Killing Tea Cake, in the end, is an act of Janie's dispossession if Tea Cake was using violence as a means of controlling Janie as property.

Janie's Dispossession/Depossession

According to Thomas Cassidy, the "dog/cow amalgam" represents the repressed rage Janie feels. Cassidy states,

She attaches herself to the cow, as far from the dog as she can. The dog, which sits on the cow's shoulders like a second head, growls, not articulating its voice into distinct barks. It is specifically the mad dog which Tea Cake attacks, as if to amputate the element of rage from this creature. He succeeds, though not before it kills him, and one paragraph after the mad dog is killed, the storm dies down as well. It is as if there is a distant rage within Janie which she has never acknowledged because she is trying to be one whole, integrated individual with no place for the type of anger which earlier forced her to split her personality in two (263).

Cassidy's analysis acknowledges the gendered dynamic of Black affectivity and how it is Janie's expression of rage that is overshadowed and quieted (perhaps until she murders Tea Cake). While Janie may not have rabies, she experiences the incubation of her rage throughout the novel as she is consistently shunned and discredited by her intimate partners. This is a gendered difference in how Black women and Black men "catch" rage. Nonetheless, Tea Cake's battle with the mad dog that bites and consumes him is welcomed by Janie as a heroic gesture. As I describe earlier, the language also subsumes Tea Cake and the rabid dog as one. Considering the title of the novel, Tea Cake's struggle with the dog can be read as an allusion to the biblical account of Jacob's wrestling with God in Genesis. Through Jacob's divine encounter at Jabbok River, he was a man who became more like God because he saw God's face, and yet his life was spared and his status as man was elevated, whereas the opposite happened for Tea Cake, whose status as man was demoted in his fight with a "lower" caste of being. Tea Cake's fight with the dog represents the everyday powerlessness, exhaustion, relentless pain, fear, and vulnerabilities that come with experiencing White rage.

Janie's Transmission

While Tea Cake's demise via rabies has been thoroughly discussed by scholars, Janie's has not. In Robert Haas' research, he explores the notion that perhaps Janie is dying of rabies. Through a close literary analysis and extensive background in microbiology and molecular biology, Haas could not miss the moment in which Janie's transmission occurs: "She broke the rifle deftly and shoved in the shell as the second click told her that Tea Cake's suffering brain was urging him on to kill" (183). As Tea Cake dies in Janie's arms, his teeth are still biting down on her arm. "She was trying to hover him as he crashed forward in her arms. They came down heavily like that. Janie struggled to a sitting position and pried the dead Tea Cake's teeth from

her arm” (185). Though this moment is the textbook definition of what transmission entails, I claim that Janie has many possible moments of “transmission” throughout the text when she is robbed of the necessary agency essential to being human, which ignites her feelings of rage.

Janie’s rage is deeply gendered in its expression and parallels an iteration of rabies that is not often seen in the mainstream media: asymptomatic rabies. Asymptomatic rabies is characterized by its long incubation period, which lasts weeks, months, or even decades. Her rabies most resembles characteristics of asymptomatic rabies since it is consistently suppressed in the face of gendered violence. Janie’s rage comes to a head, however, in her final relationship when she succumbs to the major symptoms alongside Tea Cake (i.e., fear, irrationality, and violence), whom she kills despite loving him deeply, as the result of her fear of perpetual intimate violence. This suggests the gendered nature of rabies in this text, and by extension, the gendered/intersectional nature of the effects of White rage. Men become overtly violent and angry while women carry a latent rabies/rage which they cannot/are not allowed to express except when a disease can be blamed. To understand how Janie reaches this point, it is imperative to highlight these moments in which she carried others’ perception of her like a mule.

The first moment Janie realizes her voicelessness is at sixteen-years-old, when she is on the cusp of discovering pleasure and womanhood. Janie’s inquisitiveness about pleasure is cut short by her grandmother, who refuses her autonomy over her sexual desires and longing. In Chapter Two, Hurston describes a world in which Janie’s curiosities are nourished and bountiful, a rare moment that is not commanded by anyone other than herself. At the peak of spring in Florida, a young Janie sneaks out of her grandmother’s home in search of what feels gratifying. “Oh to be a pear tree—*any* tree in bloom! With kissing bees singing of the beginning of the world! She was sixteen. She had glossy leaves and bursting buds and she wanted to struggle with

life but it seemed to elude her” (11). The shift in the text, however, occurs when her grandmother “peered out of the window and saw Johnny Taylor lacerating her Janie with a kiss” (12). Hurston captures the stigma of Black women’s sexuality when she uses the word “lacerating” to describe what Janie finds liberating. The stigma of Black women’s sexuality is present alongside the lurking violence (that the grandmother sees) in Black male sexuality. On page 13, the text states, “Nanny’s words made Janie’s kiss across the gatepost seem like a manure pile after a rain” (13). The need to control Janie’s sexuality, which is aligned with the happenings of springtime, is unnatural and marks the first time in which Janie’s sexual expression is suppressed. A few moments after the kiss, Nanny made the unilateral decision about Janie’s future, marrying her off to Joseph Killicks, and Janie’s rage surely incubated beyond Nanny’s passing.

Motor’s Paralysis

If the weather is what catalyzed furious rage/rabies in both Janie and Tea Cake, then what did the storm *do* to Motor Boat? The character referred to as Motor Boat is a colorful jook-goer and gambler who works on the muck. Motor Boat appears in Chapter 17 as one of Tea Cake’s closer friends, capable of giving Tea Cake a good game if not outlasting him in dice. Most notably, Motor Boat and Tea Cake transport themselves and onlookers into a worry-free state of mind during the storm, momentarily allowing them to forget the mounting dangers of the environment. “After a while, somebody looked out and said, ‘It ain’t gitting no fairer out dere. B’lieve Ah’ll git on over tuh mah shack.’ Motor Boat and Tea Cake were still playing so everybody left them at it” (158). In this moment, the outside world is of no consequence, and creating this space of freedom in mad weather is a radical re-imaging of Black life that is not hesitant to *just* exist. This idea of *play* in the middle of the storm is what characterizes Motor Boat as the carefree companion whose autonomy can only be disrupted by a sure sign from God.

On page 158, we learn of “A big burst of thunder and lightning that trampled over the roof of the house. So Tea Cake and Motor stopped playing. Motor looked up in his angel-looking way and said, ‘Big Massa draw him chair upstairs.’” While fear intensifies in Janie and Tea Cake as the storm worsens, Motor, who sleeps during the worst part of the storm, finds the situation more of a disruption to his sleep and refuses to keep running because resting (or dreaming) was more important. As a reader and scholar, this resistance to fear embodied by Motor stands out to me because though it is radical on the surface, the danger skulks regardless. In a sense, White rage is not something one can get rid of by ignoring it.

When thinking about the different forms of rabies, Motor’s demeanor aligns with the characteristics of paralytic or dumb rabies, which is less dramatic but longer in course than the furious iteration. With the paralytic form, the victim experiences gradual paralysis starting with the area of inoculation to full on quadriparesis. Nonetheless, Motor’s inclination to sleep during the storm symbolic of White rage is the body shutting down from *affectual transmission*.

Paralytic rage still has its critical situation in the experiencing of White supremacy. Suppression, according to bell hooks, is a mechanism of survival but not the cure. hooks observes, “We learned when we were very little that black people could die from feeling rage and expressing it to the wrong white folks. We learned to choke down our rage” (hooks, 13). Paralytic rage is more subtle than furious rage and its readability is hindered based on racialized expectations placed on affect and respectability politics. In the end, Motor survives the storm mostly undisturbed because he slept through it. In this instance, ignoring the danger played to Motor’s benefit. However, like rolling the die, it could have easily gone sour and cost him his life. To Tea Cake and Janie’s surprise, he escaped death. Tea Cake tells Janie, “Heah we nelly kill our fool

selves runnin' way from danger and him lay up dere and sleep and float on off" (173). Janie responds, "Well, you know dey say luck is uh fortune" (173).

Death

Janie's arranged marriage to Killicks symbolizes the death of self-awakening since her sexual desire is seen by her as a pathway to "seeking confirmation of the voice and vision" and the "personal answer" for herself as a part of divine creation (11). Logan Killicks, who she thinks resembled "some ole skullhead in de grave yard," is an embodiment of this inevitable death that would come from the arrangement (13). Not to mention her last name becoming Killicks; she would bear a new name with the word "kill" in it, which also carries the meaning of a heavy stone used by a small craft as an anchor. Janie learned to subdue both her curiosity and rage, for neither served her in a man's world painted to her by Nanny, who stressed, "...Ah can't die easy thinkin' maybe de menfolks white or black is makin' a spit cup outa you" (20). This metaphor is explicit and raw, but Nanny is gesturing at how gender trumps race in the way all men are likely to treat a (Black) woman. In the last sentence of Chapter 3, which outlines the essence of her relations with Logan Killicks, it reads, "She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman" (25). It was "bloom time" once again, which marks the anniversary of their union, and Janie is feeling the blues more than ever. Ironically, this marriage that was supposed to safeguard her from patriarchy is transforming her into a receptacle of hard truths learned by young girls coming of age into womanhood (25). In order to become a woman, one's dream(s) must die, including the dream of being supported or loved by a Black man. The fear of intimate and sexual violence is initially instilled by Nanny through the telling of her daughter's (Janie's mother's) tragic story of abuse. Janie's birth was the direct result of her mother's rape, a vicious attack at 17-years-old that left her "crawlin' in on her hands

and knees” after the “school teacher had done hid her in de woods all night long” (19).

Generational trauma, however, started with Nanny, who had Janie’s mother after being raped by the slave master on the plantation. With two generations ahead of her having repressed their anger towards their abusers as mechanisms of survival, Janie’s asymptomatic rage—beginning with Killicks and ending with Tea Cake—is of no astonishment. In other words, rage is intergenerationally transmitted from Nanny to her daughter and onwards to Janie, furiously coming to a head in the novel’s final chapters.

With the murder of Tea Cake also comes the death of the former Janie—who was docile and quick to agree with others even when it did not serve her. The “meanest moment of eternity” that she feels while holding Tea Cake’s dead body effectively metamorphoses her into a blueswoman. Furthermore, within the court she is not believed because of her own words but needs the account of White men to verify her lived experience. In the hyper-White space of the judicial system, Janie’s outlook on the people with power is forbidding, especially when her seemingly irrational actions stand brazenly against the coveted rationality of modernity embodied by the White jurors. The text states, “Twelve strange men who didn’t know a thing about people like Tea Cake and her were going to sit on the thing” (185). In other words, these jurors had no experiential knowledge of the intricacies in the everyday lives of working-class Black folks, and therefore could not appropriately dictate what should happen to Janie, who is seen as an unremarkable colored woman and cold-hearted perpetrator at the center of a vicious crime. This connects with Kimberlé Crenshaw’s claim about the particular vulnerability of Black women in the legal system due to their multiple, intersecting identities (Crenshaw). Janie finds hope in the possibility that class and race will not isolate the White women in the court from the emotional distress she suffered as a woman. *TEWWG* describes Janie’s inner dialogue, stating,

“What need had *they* to leave their richness to come look on Janie in her overalls? But they didn’t seem too mad, Janie thought. It would be nice if she could make *them* know how it was instead of those menfolks” (185).

At any rate, it was not Janie’s testimony that helped her to escape punishment for killing Tea Cake, nor was it the pleading of Sop-de-Bottom, who is ostracized before the court while attempting to act as an unsolicited character witness. In fact, when Sop-de-Bottom speaks out of turn, he is told by Mr. Prescott, the judge, that he “better shut his mouth up” (187). Mr. Prescott says to him, “We are handling this case. Another word out of *you*, out of any of you niggers back there, and I’ll bind you over to the big court. The only voice that is permitted to matter in the determining of Janie’s fate is that of Dr. Simmons, the “strange white man that was going to talk for her,” the White male jurors, and judge (187). Janie’s complexion as a racially ambiguous woman set her apart from any of the Black spectators. She was *different* from others throughout the novel, caught in between two worlds—encompassed by the White women and men who supported her and the Black audience who saw her as an uppity outsider who killed one of *them*. After this moment—still wearing the blood-stained overalls—she is re-embodied yet again into a woman who is not fazed by how she is seen by witnesses in her most profound grief.

Lastly, Janie’s rupturing of the limitations of Black womanhood are summed up in her return from “de muck” and back to her home in Eatonville. Just as Janie is walking back into town, a group of female porch-sitters gossip about her former whereabouts. Their attention, still, is on her unbecoming attire, asking, “What she doin coming back here in dem overalls? Can’t she find no dress to put on? --Where’s dat blue satin dress she left here in (2)”? Though Janie had just come back from “burying the dead,” she is intentionally misread by the porch sitters who represent the internalization of Black women’s affective scripts (1). However, I read this

moment as representing Janie's "becoming" as a subject. Hurston, by starting the entire novel with Janie's return to herself, firmly operating within the rupturing of gender norms, starts squarely with the afterlife of patricide. Chronologically, we are first introduced to the Janie who survived three abusive relationships, which is the Janie who could also voice her emotions without a filter or a worry about how she will be read by others.

Conclusion

Asymptomatic rage or *dormant rage* is the most elusive of the three modes and it is marked by a feeling of displeasure that has been continually suppressed and sometimes denied by the carrier. The asymptomatic carrier of Black rage may uneventfully arrive at each stage, leading to a slow and eventual death. Sometimes, these carriers of Black rage may not recognize themselves in those who are furious, which is a situation that often causes people to inflict their pain onto others. Their fury is turned inwards to themselves. Asymptomatic carriers may have race-based traumas (or sites of infection) but have not paid enough attention to the source of their pain. It could be that they may not know that they are in pain, a situation that often causes people to inflict their pain on others, like Mrs. Turner, the colorist blue-veined Negro who worshipped Janie like a god because of her lighter complexion and long tresses. Nevertheless, Black rage's expression is a critical step of the healing process, and repressed rage is a part of the colonization process (hooks). For Janie, her rage is a pathway to affective decolonization.

Therapeutics

In the middle of running from the lake, Tea Cake says, "All us is done give out...We'se goin' inside out dis weather, kill or cure," which has me pondering the ways in which we can heal ourselves from cultural and gendered traumas (162). I do recognize the many ways Janie is more than her trauma. For example, we see this in her divine connection with nature developed

at an early age. Throughout the novel, we see the flourishing sisterhood Janie has with Phoebe, with whom she still has some intimacy; she denies the world yet welcomes her friend into this enclave of emotion that has become a public spectacle. In her own words, Janie says, “Pheoby, we been kissin’-friends for twenty years, so Ah depend on you for a good thought. And Ah’m talking to you from dat standpoint” (7). Phoebe brings food to nourish Janie’s worn-down body and helps her voice her story, as she would tell it. Though it is not performed in the courtroom scene, we see an ever-better performance within the telling of the story throughout the novel. Phoebe also helps Janie in furthering her self-care, which includes things like handing her a “wash-rag” to scrub her feet so she could “soak some tiredness and de dirt” out of them (5). The text does not leave us feeling the void of Janie’s loss. Instead, it reminds the readers that there are coping mechanisms or therapeutics for Black women to heal after the affective transmission of White rage and the *escape* of patriarchy more broadly. Through holistic approaches such as sisterhood, self-care practices (i.e., nourishment, spiritual bathing) and autobiographical performances (i.e. blues biomyth), as modeled by Hurston through Janie, we can begin to express and process the rage that is within us all.

CHAPTER 6. SELF-PORTRAITURES OF MAD GRIEF

“For Those Who Have Died Recently”

Jonesha Forest

Tavine “Bo” Dorsey

*

“For Those Who Have Died in The Past”

Ronald Scott Sr.

Deloris “Me-Me” Snearl

John “Vietnam” Nguyen

Nakila Robinson

Andrew Thomas

In Christina Sharpe’s tradition of naming those of whom we have lost, I start this chapter by making room for my ancestors and friends who are no longer physically present. From Trayvon Martin’s death to the COVID-19 pandemic to the recent (and sudden) death of my niece, Jonesha, I’ve had one foot inside the wake and the other in the academy. Sharpe’s metaphor of *the wake* speaks to the perpetual nature of Black grief and institutional violence. *The wake* not only means one’s consciousness to their position as receptacles of terror, but by Sharpe’s definition, it also means “the keeping watch with the dead, the path of a ship, a consequence of something, in the line of flight and/or sight, awakening, and consciousness” (17-18)

As a Black woman who has earned degrees from predominantly White institutions, the university has been an egregious environment for my grief and has oftentimes been the source of it. The violence of being reminded that you don’t belong is an everyday experience inside and

outside of the physical space of the academy, and the consequences of foregoing self-care are grim as being “strong” can literally kill you (147). Angela Rose Black and Nadine Peacock claim, “The idea of self-neglect is a historical one, because there was never the luxury to stop, sit down, and take care of ourselves” (147). The strong Black woman (SBW) script is a myth in that it expects Black women to take care of everyone, leaving little room for themselves, their desires and needs. This emphasis on being a SBW tends to trigger stress (cortisol, catecholamines) and lead to immunosuppression, obesity, hypertension, and atherosclerosis.

In this chapter, to tell my story, I also borrow from Jennifer Ward’s and Jennifer Poole’s concept of *mad grief*, which helps uncover the trauma that informs so-called negative affective modes. In their collaborative essay entitled “Breaking Open the Bone: Storying, Sanism, and Mad Grief,” Ward and Poole use elements of personal narrative to demonstrate how grief functions in everyday situations. According to the co-authors, as opposed to “good grief,” which is grief that is “quiet, tame, dry, and controlled,” “mad grief” is a “resistance practice that allows, speaks, names, affords, welcomes, and stories the subjugated sense of loss that comes to us all” (Ward et al. 95). My responses to mad grief come in the forms of radical self-care (i.e., spiritual bathing) and artistic practice. In a sense, this chapter is the therapeutics of grief and rage. Below, I have included a curated selection of poems that I have compiled over the years to preserve who I am in the face of White supremacy and while studying the topic of rage.

There are many Black women scholars who channel their rage through their writing of the self. Alicia Rachel Griffin’s essay, “I AM an Angry Black Woman: Black Feminist Autoethnography, Voice, and Resistance,” invites other Black women academics to use Black feminist autoethnography (BFA) to challenge the failure of American society and reckon with systems of oppression. Griffin declares: “In response to this failure, I AM an angry Black

woman” (139). Griffin considers autoethnography a powerful form of resistance which grants the opportunity to “do the very things that Black women are discursively disciplined not to do” (139). Likewise, Brittney Cooper’s *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower* finds rage and related emotions as empowering. Cooper writes, “What I have is anger. Rage, actually. And that’s the place where more women should begin—with the things that make us angry” (Cooper 1).

Dalia Rodriguez’s and Afua Boahene’s essay, “The Politics of Rage: Empowering Women of Color in the Academy,” states, “Being born into a society which breeds contempt for what is Black, Brown, and female, we bear the scars, the anger, and the pain of living in a fragmented state” (450). For women of color in and outside the academy and across many different geographies, “Writing about our collective histories and experiences, or writing about ‘theory in the flesh,’ is a means of survival” (Rodriguez 451). Rodriguez and Boahene theorize silent rage as “that inside space in which women of color define the self...a place in which we make ourselves subject, determining who we are spiritually, emotionally...a space in which we refuse to concede to white dominance” (451). They also posit that silent rage is the intentional honing of our energies to figure out who we are at our human core and an act of self-preservation.

When COVID-19 caused the world to shut down, I was living alone. This period was extremely difficult and isolating, especially since at that point I was months into writing this dissertation. The news cycle was a toxic source of information as protests erupted over the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. Meanwhile, COVID-19 was ravaging communities at a rapid pace. If I could point to anything that kept me sane during this time, it would be my connection to nature, which entailed hours-long walks and plant-keeping. I lived a

stone's throw from the university lake at Louisiana State University, which has a breathtakingly beautiful landscape of oak trees decorated with Spanish moss.

Earlier in 2020, before the pandemic started, I had met a neighbor of mine, whose name is Jazz. When I walked into Jazz's studio apartment, the plants were overtaking the entire space, most notably, a goliath peace lily on the coffee table (that I had the pleasure of naming A Peace Lily Named Rose), and the most lustrous fiddle leaf (which I named Bradley). Jazz inspired me to get my first plant for that apartment and the rest is history.

There is something electrifying about consuming a strawberry you've watched develop on the vine from your own backyard. There is nothing like seeing a fig tree wake up in the early spring to bear its fruit, which grows tantalizingly slow for the mid-July ripening. The monstera plant I brought home from the nursery was weak, unhealthy, and droopy when I purchased it at a discount, but now it's the most dramatic plant I own, spending all of its energy stretching and breaking the laws of physics on its stand.



Fig. 12. Portrait of author taken by Dorthy Ray (2021)

Artist Statement

My body is the connective tissue between poems. As a Black woman in the world, my body contrives its own utterances before my mouth does. Because performance is a part of my practice as a writer, I am always hyper aware of how my body will be interpreted/interpolated as its own poem. People see my body and conflate it with history without my consent. However, for those who understand, they know I am not *just* a body, but a being who seeks to demystify my Black female existence. My main aim as a writer is to make the abstract tangible while maintaining elements of spirituality and of the sublime. My poems abbreviate multi-generational duress into sobering moments of stillness. Blackness is an existential crisis, and I write to examine my Blackness as if it were an artifact. However, because Blackness is so vast, writing while Black is expansive, too. To write a poem is to subtly witness myself through moments of grief, high ecstasy, loneliness, anger, and sedateness. I write to distill my experiences and to re/member myself.



Fig. 13. Portrait of author taken by Dorthy Ray (2021)

Selected Musings

A Poem for Women in Rage

after Audre Lorde

we labor over what to name our grief.
tension looms over our city,
and hatred has given us so many bodies to bury.
the earth does not suffer lockjaw,
for the love of melanin,
it masticates and swallows.

We give birth to perversion:
strange mangoes, strange guavas, strange papayas
to be spectacles ultimately consumed.
and there is always more room.
always a new story on repeat.
more grief.
more mothers drunk with disbelief.

it's a rite of passage to veer the other cheek
to be meek, to be prey, and pray
until we are indigo in the face.
until our bellowing rage is caught
in the throat of a canary
who's caught in a soundless chamber.

tonight, I will hold my lover
like a runaway slave.

the labels *black* and *boy*
are conflated with target practice.
the labels *black* and *woman*
are conflated with *survivors*,
the walking dead,
the carriers of all this death.

in the mourning,
all is beset with glistening drops of dew
condensed from a black woman's eye
and we do it all over again.

Trouble of the World

I asked God about myself
and cursed the mirror

can I be holy
if my hips be too wide?

can I be baptized
if the water pronounces my nipples?

I drank the blood
and tossed the flesh to be here

covered in garb
as white as an altar candle

my truth is a burnt offering
black shapes against the pulpit

the fire taught me how to dance
fact is I'm still learning

how to be a god in pleasure
how to welcome hands that only want to heal, not sculpt

yesterday, my moans recalibrated thought
I remembered how holy I must be

yesterday, I broke the god out of me
had me begging to myself for redemption

insecurity left my body in the form of water
I sweated out all the lies about my body.

Why I Bleed

In the living room,
I keep reading the morning paper
overwhelmed
all of a sudden
desperately needing to know
who died
and what kid from
what county got into
what ivy league.

The story is this:
the entire bedroom is thrifted.
right down to the linens,
a poor girl's imagination gone big
and bad.

and why am I bleeding?

The bathroom mirror
shattered at my feet
I'm still surviving luck
everyday by luck, repenting

The kitchen sink is full
of plate parts
and broken bottlenecks
it is why
the fine china
with the golden rim
sits in the attic,
collecting dander.

Mama's Blues

Katrina put a tree on top of our roof.
The flood of 2016 would soak
Parquetry walls rotten
Pictures drowned, journal entries erased
But that is not why the house stands gutted
Its front door: a jeering mouth
The electric stove one short away from
Catching fire in the middle of the night
Elements of words, tears, and misery
Shook the house worse than Rita did
The love escaped through the windows,
Inducing sleepless nights
And silent early mornings.

I got that *they-never-knew-us-while-we-studied-them-and-theirs* blues
And it's the *first-small-death-one-experiences-while-black* blues
They-stole-the-song-I-crooned-and-made-millions blues
We've-been-here-through-it-all blues
And-to-prove-it-we've-been-marked blues
Marred-yet-told-to-disappear blues
I got that *free-my-nigga* blues
Say-her-name blues
Zip-code blues
PWI blues
blues

when part of me
dies
i hold closer those i love
seance older versions
of self
& give them recipes
for healing.

-indigo

To a Woman Poet That I Know

after Dr. Pinkie Gordon Lane

in times like these
we sink
to the bottom
of ourselves
and forget
to hold our breaths
if god were a fisherman
another black woman
like you be the bait
& this poem is god
using my body to fish

imagine this poem
written years ago
in a dream
finally lucid
and conversant
words are shadows
of a time
we've already witnessed

I've seen you pose
for sorrow's lens
captured on polaroid film
with a grin
you've seen me too
bathing in enough salt
to kill an elephant
but the feeling
of cleanliness never lasts
like happiness
it depends.

Broken Column

for Frida Kahlo

Loving a man
is the hardest thing
a woman might do
Sometimes we paint ourselves
a broken column
in pools of blood
in a metal bed
birthing the man
like a dream
over and over again.

I hate calling myself a beggar
This coin purse on my hip was gifted by my mother
And it was rumored to have been sewn
on some plantation,
a slave's swan song
after the white babies
done dried up all the milk.

As an unproductive citizen
only good for milk
I can't say I have a choice to feel.
"Phantom-induced labor pains"
is what the doctor calls it
after writing a prescription
for placebos only.
I take it: a ritual of sorts
before drowning
in menstrual blood.

Lorde, When You Send the Rain, Think About Me
after Jimmy Baldwin

an array of daffodils in soil,
this is the language of the microbes
flattering the entire room,
complementing the high I get from loneliness.
dark October torrential downpours
the muse my body needed

I'm leaning into whatever
decides to call me home
for now, it is the crow by my window,
surveying my way of life
so curious about the girl
who'll skip a meal for tea
a vulture in her own right,
stealing the meat off bones
to please seldom visitors

for now, I'll let the banana spider
inch closer and closer to my domain,
if I must catch anything, it'll be the web,
learning its architecture
to devise my own prey-trappings.

Winter Blues

after bell hooks

Madison's winter
had already sucked
the sun out of me,
my beam dim as ever
as I walk alone
down University Avenue.
I step to hear
the snow-covered ground
crunch beneath me
& after 45 minutes of walking
I ponder what I will learn
in Swahili class.

with destination in sight,
I see a white man
hunched over,
but paced well for his age.
his eyes are on me,
but he doesn't *see* me.
he looks upon a girl who is black
& on her way to a class
where she may or may not be
the only one looking like
she got a mama who
over-seasons the collard greens.

we are heading straight
for each other
& like two cars
bracing for a soft crash

we brake.

a girl looking down
is forced to look up
& into the eyes of a man
who cannot see her

neither of us move
to let over the other
so we stand in silence.
the old man is visibly agitated
and I look confused
like how the fuck
does something like this happen

fear clogs my reason
and I move

I am angry
that I did not stand my ground
maybe in another reality
we are still standing there, frozen
until the sun softens us
into each other.

Home sits on the edge of our skin,
But the air here is different.
The way dirt clings to pores
Like Africa in America
Home is only porous
We absorb everything
& call our transmutations *holy*.

Afro-Futurist Vignettes

i.

in a mirror a black girl
marvels her electric curl pattern thinks
a black god struck me into creation.

ii.

relishing almost-summer a black boy
walks down the street knows full well
he is a flower worth blooming.

iii.

two black queer girls are
sweatingdancinghooting lost
at play transported
their bodies soliloquies
recited to the moon tongues
are meant for kissing tongues
find god in ungodly hours.

iv.

there is a black man at a piano
and for the first time
he doesn't know what to do with his hands
his knuckles sootblack against the worn keys
he woke and didn't have the blues the blues
didn't bite him for breakfast nor
did she sit with him at the piano
his back a bass arched by baby cherubs.

v.

a mother is supine rubbing her belly drinking tea
dreaming all the things her brown baby will be.

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I'll search for myself in everything
unlike the father
Build a whole city inspired by Her charm
It'll never not have inhabitants
It'll never be overrun with this kind of sadness.

Ways of Looking at a Black Woman
after Wallace Stevens

Black women are a masterpiece stricken by the oil of human hands
The world doesn't know how to appreciate our worth without touching us

Dear God,
Teach the world how to see us

How the sun is a queer curly-haired
Black woman with wide hips and bright hopes

When I think beauty, I think about my grandmother
Holding her chest as if to suppress a choir

Her breath, lullabies to the girls with praline colored skin
And to the girls as dark as the cup of coffee that spilled all over your Sunday dress

When I look at my best friend, I think
Maybe heaven is just a workshop of beautiful brown hands

I think Atlas, and she is as stunning as my niece,
Sporting box braids and a greased scalp

It's hard to write poems about nature without black femmes being a motif
Because nature is about survival of the fittest

And there is no one more fit to survive than black women
Which explains why the universe opposes the black woman so strongly,

Because she is the center of it
She is light

So everything I see is an extension of her beauty
And all the things the universe does to detract from it

Today, I watched the sun in agony
Tried not to think if home for a black woman is some far off galaxy

Watched the blue turn orange then red
And I thought of flames

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Thought of fleeting warmth
Tried not to think of love

Or how hard it is to find somebody
Who knows how to touch me

Tried to think of curly-haired girls
With welcoming wide hips and even wider smiles

Tried not to hear Nina Simone croon “Four Women”
And think myself Peaches or Aunt Sarah, but I couldn’t help it

Tried not to think of how the sun cracks its spine wide open
And births a moon that will always be seen as more charming

You can’t tell me life didn’t originate from black women
We are too familiar with sacrifice for it to have started any other way

When I think of black women I think of how we grow into our skin
Of how our bodies are in danger of forgetting where we come from

When I think sisterhood, I think of a symphony of giggles
How we stretch our bodies into smiles

Anywhere we gather is a fire in which everyone laughs
And dances to keep the flame

When we speak
It’s like the rhythm of young girls jumping rope

Our silences beget new language
With every eye roll, neck snap, and smack of our lips we subvert everything meant to kill us

No matter which way you see us
The universe is powered by a black woman’s imagination

No photo or poem or portrait
Can capture our essence

Crumbling World (song)

I don't need this crumbling world
I'm looking forward to my curtain call
I don't see what the fuss is for
And, if asked, I'll refuse an encore
I'm so bitter and I blame it on the war
I'm so cold and I'm sick of all the floods
Looking forward to a revolution
But who will lead if they're killing native sons?
Got my baby and I got my gun 2X
I don't need this crumbling world.

Hyperpresent

My history ate itself, bit by bit,
Gnawing at its own extremities.
My history died a well-pleasured masochist.
So many versions of myself lost to myth.
The pressure to contextualize the body ruptures the body.
This body: a mass of incoherent atoms.

I can't explain how this fact of non-history
is aging me at the cellular level.
Every day I think *I am my own ancestor*.

mangled flesh
confused exigence
burned fingertips
straightened hair/map
tightened rope/no breath/ships sink/bodies float
ash lipstick
a tongue in a specimen jar
bruisedhip
singed nipple
a detached voice box croons...

Beloved, again and again,
I've searched for you like a madwoman
To catch a glimpse of your story—forgive me,
If I die disembodied, with no memory of you
Swallowed whole by the soundwaves
Of meaningless production
Without a trace of a trace.

Conclusion

On Writing the Self

I insert my own narratives to strive towards what Christina Sharpe refers to as the “new analytic,” which refuses the discursive reproduction of the academy that stymies “our own capacities to read, think, and imagine otherwise” (13). Inserting my experience and worldview unapologetically--like so many Black women have--gives me the opportunity to invent new ways to enter and exit the so-called archives of slavery (13). The “wake work” Sharpe refers to is the process of “plotting, mapping, and collecting archives of the everyday of Black immanent and imminent death, and tracking the ways we resist, rupture, and disrupt that immanence and imminence aesthetically and materially” (Sharpe 13). The poems presented in this chapter are interruptions to the space that is the “ivory tower,” which prohibits feeling as knowing and imposes rigor.

As a member of the diaspora, I know all too well that pain and suffering is always seemingly more urgent than self-care is. And we often remain imaginatively and ontologically stuck in the position of tending to trauma alone, leaving no room for pleasure within the archive full of dense, calcified relics. Remembering, centering, and archiving self-regard and self-love in our lives is an act of preservation, which also is, in the words of Audre Lorde, “an act of political warfare” (130). These moments of self-regard give us insight into what world is possible when we break the linear, autobiographical narrative by making it circular, and in this circling, the historical past and embodied memory are excavated in confidence, but the future's not off limits, and these premonitions (or future memory) of alternate worlds (without the father) are brought to the forefront.



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