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Through a critical literary studies engagement with how terror is negotiated in literature from across periods and oceans, it becomes clear to me that a literary studies approach to expanding the historical and analytical dimensions of terrorism's configurations throughout history would entail seeing how racial terror manifests in literary works. It becomes meaningful to investigate where terror and terrorism-- even if direct usage of this term is messy—materialize in transliterary and transatlantic contexts. This is type of literary studies approach to transatlantic connections is significant when looking at works of literature that chart the progression the from New World colonialism, then to plantation slavery, and to Jim Crow racial terror. In each terrain of terror and juncture of time access to freedom and the human are being negotiated, granted, or denied highlighting the perverse nature of liberal humanism in times of exploitation, expansion, and subjection. Proceeding from nineteenth-century white British authors to twentieth-century African American authors entails witnessing how the colonial and plantation terror regimes of bygone periods remain productive in modernized capacities.

I begin by looking at the relationship between New World colonialism and the Salem witch trials in Elizabeth Gaskell's 1859 novella "Lois the Witch," as a way of situating terror not as emerging during the nineteenth-century, but of considering this Victorian author's perspective on terrorism as a key feature of New World colonialism. From this reference point, I next look to Dion Boucicault's 1859 play *The Octoroon* to address the Anglo-Irish playwright's assessment of the politics of racialization, sexualization, commodification inherent to plantation terrorism. Boucicault's play helps to establish a more concrete view of the interplay between race, gender, and finance that ground the plantation as an organized site of terror. I shift then to my analysis

of two African American authors, James Baldwin and Bebe Moore Campbell, both of which draw creative inspiration from the 1955 lynching of Emmett Till in Mississippi. Baldwin's 1964 play *Blues for Mister Charlie* is a meaningful work for exploring how extrajudicial forms of racial terror, like that of lynching, are mobilized and legitimized through state institutions like the church and courtroom. Moore's 1991 novel *Your Blues Ain't Like* Mine showcases post-emancipation racial terror as continuing the legacy of slavery through not only acts of overt physical violence like that of lynching, but through the fracturing of black families and exploiting labor for the advancement of a New Plantation. In this way, Transatlantic Terrorism traces the beginnings, pasts, and presents of terror. From Gaskell's portrait of colonial terror to Boucicault's dramatization of plantation terror, and lastly to Baldwin's and Campbell's articulations of post-emancipation racial terror, this project tracks the emergence and supposed end to a process of commercialized racialization. As Baldwin's and Campbell's works can attest to, slavery's racial, gendered, sexual, and economic exploits remain operational in a time we don't expect it to, which also remains grotesquely efficient in the present.

TRANSATLANITIC TERRORISM: BRITISH

AND AMERICA LITERATURE,

1859-1991

by

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# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

When talking about terrorism, often we aren't considering its legacy as extremist violence, with both material and etymological force existing well before the Bush administration. When conjuring images of terrorism, how often do we think of colonial expansion, the plantation, and extrajudicial racial violence like that of lynching? The emergence of the phrase *the war on terror* in the aftermath of the September 11th, 2001, attacks signaled vulnerability to the American body politic. Fiona de Londras in tracing the legacy of human rights law in detention facilities in *Detention in the 'War on Terror': Can Human Rights Fight Back?* (2011), posits how the U.S. believed itself emerging from a long history of terrorist violence; and actions like the erection of detention facilities in the Global South like Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay were essential to (re)establishing order to American liberal democracy.[1] Well before *the war on terror* the plantation for example, figured as terrain to police, surveille, and exploit labor, validating the U.S.'s subjugation of those it deemed expendable through the mobilizing force of terror. With the emergence of New World capitalism in colonial America and throughout its reign during plantation slavery and into Jim Crow, the state has used terror to produce human life and nature as capital and material waste.

Through a critical literary studies engagement with how terror is negotiated in literature from across periods and oceans, it becomes clear to me that a literary studies approach to expanding the historical and analytical dimensions of terrorism's configurations throughout history would entail seeing how racial terror manifests in literary works. It becomes meaningful

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[1]Further on this point, de Londras writes, "the US had been attacked on its own soil. It had been rocked to its core and anyone who saw the towers of the World Trade Center fall must surely have been struck by the sheer audacity of the attack; of hijacking civilian aircraft and deliberately flying them into buildings in which people were beginning their working day. How could we possibly protect ourselves from such violence? What divid ed us from those passengers, those office workers and cleaners, those police and fire officers? Nothing did – nothing more than pure luck" (2).

to investigate where terror and terrorism—even if direct usage of this term is messy—materialize in transliterary and transatlantic contexts. This type of literary studies approach to transatlantic connections is significant when looking at works of literature that chart the progression the from New World colonialism, then to plantation slavery, and to Jim Crow racial terror. In each terrain of terror and juncture of time access to freedom and the human are being negotiated, granted, or denied highlighting the perverse nature of liberal humanism in times of exploitation, expansion, and subjection. Proceeding from nineteenth-century white British authors to twentieth-century African American authors allows us to witness how the colonial and plantation terror regimes of bygone periods remain productive in modernized capacities.

It is well understood that terrorism, both the term and practice, are rooted in histories stretching back long before the limited frame suggested by *the war on terror*, or as it officially called, the Global War on Terrorism. Scholars including Barry M. Rubin and Judith C. Rubin, and Gérard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin have detailed the rise of terrorism as a phrase, concept, and practice in Europe during the French Revolution, which Chaliand and Blin note "claimed to defend it [sovereignty] through the deployment of state terror" (95), and where the Rubins witness the rise of terror coinciding with a "development of mass politics" (3). [2] Olivier Hubac-

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[2] Coined in 1793 to describe the Reign of Terror (1793-1794) during the French Revolution, where violence by the government was directed at citizens in opposition to the revolution, the moniker terrorism would enter the cultural lexicon, Chaliand and Blin conceptualize the "invention" of modern terror, writing how, "the Age of Enlightenment had bequeathed humanity the idea of popular sovereignty, and it was in the name of that sovereignty that the [French] Revolution claimed to defend it through the deployment of state terror, in which the ends justified the means, including extreme violence" (95). For the nineteenth century, a period of successive wars and revolutions throughout Europe inspired by romantic tradition, Chaliand and Blin further state, "war beca me a mass phenomenon, involving not only heads of state and armies, but entire societies" (96). The Rubins observe that during the eighteenth century, for example, a period which was marked by a growth in political consciousness and a development in mass politics, note this period as one "where relationships between ruler and oppressed were recharted and redefined by the European masses" (3). Also writing on the significance of the French Revolution and the emergence of state terror, the Rubins detail, there [during the French Revolution], for the first time, terrorism was at the core of a compressive political philosophy and strategy to gain and retain power" (4). However, of significance, is the state's response to a politically mobilized public, which the Rubins conclude, "only after the bulk of citizenry became active in determining who would rule a country and after organized revolutionary movements

Occhipinti writing on anarchist terrorism during the nineteenth-century also charts the technological progress and economic transformation occurring in Europe and the U.S. during the second half of the nineteenth-century, observing how "new machines and technical progress, along with the development of trade, boosted production to an unprecedented level. As a result, economic life was profoundly transformed" (114). What my project hopes to bring to this discourse is a tracing of how literary works negotiate terror as state sanctioned and as an arbiter of subjection. My choice of nineteenth-century British and twentieth-century American works serves as important junctures for witnessing explorations and developments of terror. This decision also allows us to observe the productive symmetries that emerge through a cross-periodization approach to an examination of terror in multiple landscapes and genres. *Transatlantic Terrorism*'s cross-fertilizations of two white British nineteenth-century authors and two African American twentieth-century authors, two women and two men, and two works of fiction and two plays, is a mirroring approach that highlights how periodization, identity positions, and genre both interact with and resist one another when engaging with the history and politics of terror.

I begin by looking at the relationship between New World colonialism and the Salem witch trials in Elizabeth Gaskell's 1859 novella "Lois the Witch," as a way not of situating terror as emerging during the nineteenth-century, but of considering this Victorian author's perspective on terrorism as a key feature of New World colonialism. From this reference point, I next look to Dion Boucicault's 1859 play *The Octoroon* to address the Anglo-Irish playwright's assessment of the politics of racialization, sexualization, commodification inherent to plantation terrorism.

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were formed to seek power through a systematic strategy did it become worthwhile to deliberately kill ordinary citizens" (3).

Boucicault's play both dramatizes and vocalizes the interplay between race, gender, and finance that ground the plantation as an organized site of terror.[3] I shift then to my analysis of two African American authors, James Baldwin and Bebe Moore Campbell, both of which draw creative inspiration from the 1955 lynching of Emmett Till in Mississippi. Baldwin's 1964 play *Blues for Mister Charlie* is a meaningful work for exploring how extrajudicial forms of racial terror, like that of lynching, are mobilized and legitimized through state institutions like the church and courtroom. Moore's 1991 novel *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* showcases post-emancipation racial terror as continuing the legacy of slavery through not only acts of overt physical violence like that of lynching, but through the fracturing of black families and exploiting labor for the advancement of a New Plantation. In this way, *Transatlantic Terrorism* traces the beginnings, pasts, and presents of terror. From Gaskell's portrait of colonial terror to Boucicault's dramatization of plantation terror, and lastly to Baldwin's and Campbell's articulations of post-emancipation racial terror, this project tracks the emergence and supposed end to a process of commercialized racialization. As Baldwin's and Campbell's works can attest to, slavery's racial, gendered, sexual, and economic exploits remain operational in a time we don't expect it to, which also remains grotesquely efficient in the present.

Terrorism is a fluid violence, not bound to time or place. However, wherever and whenever there is an intertwined relationship between state and economic authority and

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[3]My interest in exploring terror from the vantage point British authors during the nineteenth century first and to then proceed with an analysis of American authors in the twentieth century, is in part inspired by Elisa Tamarkin's assessment of the appeal and aura of British society, monarchy, culture, and empire in nineteenth -century America. Tamarkin observes, "Anglophilia —as a fetish and nostalgia that is just as much a politics and aspiration—tells a story of English culture and society that is rooted in the character of English life but, finally, an expression of the anxieties and wishes of someplace else" (xxiv). Gaskell's and Boucicault's turn to America to witness past histories however, emphasize English sentiment and literary production as pivotal to both nation building (Gaskell's depiction of America during the colonial period) and transition (Boucicault's depiction of American plantation slavery on the eve of the Civil War).

productions of the human, terror becomes a crucial mobilizing force in the maintenance of power and production of life as economic utility. In Michel Foucault's seminal work, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (1976), the French philosopher argues that in modern times "wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity; massacres have become vital" (137). Jasbir K. Puar's foundational work on neoliberalism, imperialism, racism, and homophobia produce populations of peoples as Orientalized terrorist subjects, in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2017/2007), helps to calcify Foucault's formulations of "wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity." Puar writes "for Foucault, modern biopower emerging at the end of the eighteenth century, is the management of life— the distribution of risk, possibility, quality of living—the differential investment of and in the imperative to live. In biopower, propagating death is no longer the central concern of the state; staving off death is" (32).[4] Not only "staving off" death for people, this process of maintaining life includes thwarting the death of the state and its structural appendages operating for "the management of life." A literary examination of the witch-trials, plantation slavery, and lynching will illustrate how forms of terror propagate death as a legitimate force to alleviate economic and social stresses. In essence, Salem's safety is dependent on the execution of Indigenous and Old-World English peoples; the survival of the Louisiana plantation estate Terrebonne requires the selling of mixed-race women to prevent

[4]At the center of Foucault's politics of biopower, is the state's use of power and discipline in the process of maintaining life. In part five of *The History of Sexuality*, the section titled "Right of Death and Power over Life," Foucault puts the process of the state clearly: "the principle underlying the tactics of battle—that one has to be capable of killing in order to go on living—has become the principle that defines the strategy of states. But the existence in question is no longer the juridical existence of sovereignty; at stake is the biological existence of a population" (137).

financial ruin; and the lynching of black boys and men defends white women from sexual violence and gives white men an outlet to publicly display their violent masculinity. In each literary example terror catalyzes the massacre of racialized, sexualized, and economically vulnerable "on behalf of the existence of everyone," namely those with stakes in the present and future preservation of a racial and patriarchal capitalism. By examining British authors like Gaskell and Boucicault, one sees these technological and economic "progresses" and transformations happening in the U.S. but from a distinctly British perspective, revealing the connective fibers between both nations. Gaskell's portrayal of the Salem witch trials is significant precisely because it opens up a window for contending with how British authors and Britain, an empire defined by exploitation and expansion, conceptualized terror as key to not only Britain's colonial history, but also to the future consolidation of a distinct American body politic defined by subjection and terror.

In defining the contours of terror and terrorism for this project, it is crucial to reckon with liberal humanism's construction of the monstrous and threatening Other, labelled as the terrorist subject. In their analysis of the terrorist subject, Puar and Amit S. Rui detail "the forms of power now being deployed in the war on terrorism in fact draw on processes of quarantining a racialized and sexualized other, even as western norms of the civilized subject provide the same framework through which others become subjects to be to be corrected" (117). Further, in their reading of Foucault's monstrous figure, Puar and Rai notice how "the monster is also to be differentiated from the individual to be corrected on the basis of whether power operates on it or through it. In other words, the absolute that produces and quarantines the monster finds its dispersal in techniques of normalization and discipline" (119). The Indigenous servants in Gaskell's tale, Hota and Nattee, are at one moment telling stories to the young children they

labor for, and in the next moment, imprisoned on the basis of collusion with the devil. “Lois the Witch” paints a very clear picture that just because Hota and Nattee are granted access to certain protections afforded to them through their servant status, that when the social fabric of the Salem settlement begins to crumble, their Indigeneity will remind the European colonists of their monstruous Otherness. The monstrous Other’s racialized and sexualized subjectivity not only necessitates correction but demands eradication when quarantining does not suffice.

From a conceptualization of terrorism as producing, quarantining, disciplining, and correcting the monstrous Other, it is useful to engage terror as a contagious plague. Anjuli Fatima Raza Kolb traces insurgent violence as an epidemic spreading from the nineteenth century into the contemporary moment, capturing anticolonial resistance and rebellion as sources of contagion to the West. Kolb witnesses, for example “in its current political form, the idea of ‘Islam’ that ‘we all know’ is not a religion or a culture, not a set of beliefs and practices, mot a history, not the Qur’an or the Hadith. It is a dialectical foil for the West, and a racial category stitched loosely together from the remnants of an Orientalism requisitioned in the service of resource-exploiting colonialism. It is a function of racial capital and nineteenth-century counterinsurgency” (3). The nineteenth century brings to the twenty-first century an Islam “shaped by rhetoric around poverty, disease, and revolution in the British and French holdings, by the metropolitan fear of the colonies and the Other coming home to haunt and infect the heart of whiteness” (3). The Indigenous Other, mixed-race slave, and threatening black body all possess the capacity to not only infect whiteness, but to contaminate the West to the point of ruin.

In drawing on the conceptualization of the United States as a story of migration, Michel-Rolph Trouillot observes “not only can history mean either the sociohistorical process or our

knowledge of that process, but the boundary between the two meanings is often quite fluid" (3). Taking seriously Trouillot's proposition that history is a sociohistorical process and acknowledgment of that process as a fluid one, by taking to task how we have been crafted and undone by language. To this point, to be designated as terrorist and to carry out acts of terror, are mutually bound to the domesticating forces of racialization and sexualization throughout the West. Mixed-race Zoe in Boucicault's *The Octoroon*, for instance, both troubles and sooths the terror regime of the plantation, stressing the racial and sexual (re)productivity of the plantation as a producer of cannibalized peoples for the production of slave labor as well existing as a zone of black death. In another sense, blackness comes to occupy a subject position through the forced removal of African peoples via transatlantic slavery, which Michelle M. Wright notes in writing on becoming black in the West, arguing "I say 'in the West' because Blackness only became a racial category with the forced removal of West Africans to the Western Hemisphere. From the start, Black identity has been produced in contradiction" (1). Just as Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon* struggles with what to do with the mixed-race Zoe, part Europeanized heroine and part daughter of enslaved woman, her identity is nonetheless born from the cauldron of racial slavery, and through its imposition of messy racial genealogies. Boucicault's play relishes in the push-and-pull contradictions inherent to discourses surrounding the free and enslaved, human and un-human.

Tending to the production and fragmentation of subjectivity a significant part of my project's aims, primarily in my attention Baldwin's and Campbell's works. In my close reading of Campbell's *Your Blues,* I attend to how black subjectivity is marked by fragmentation, in which the mechanics of racial terror, through dehumanization and subjection fragment black communal networks, which the white patriarchal capitalist system deems as antagonistic toward

its exploitive enterprise. Yet, as the white supremacist world order works to deny agency and subjectivity to dehumanized peoples, it is precisely through these violent encounters that black subjectivity in the Americas becomes realized. In theorizing black subjectivity, Arlene R. Keizer posits how "establishing that black identities in the Americas, from slavery to the present, has never been a fixed essence, either biological or cultural, but instead consistently marked by fragmentation and differentiation" (11). In Paul Gilroy's foundational *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), where he conceptualizes the importance of the slave ship, as "a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion "is a crucial component to conceptualizations of modern black subjectivity (4). Gilroy continues outlining the productivity of the slave ship by observing "as it were, getting on board promises a means to reconceptualise [sic] the orthodox relationship between modernity and what passes for its prehistory. It provides a sense of where modernity might itself be thought to begin in the constitutive relationships with outsiders that both found and temper self-conscious sense of western civilsation [sic]. For all these reasons, the ship is the first of the novel chronotopes presupposed by my attempts to rethink modernity via the history of the black Atlantic and the African diaspora into the western hemisphere" (17).[5]

The choice to begin this project by first dissecting white nineteenth-century British authors as they navigate colonial and plantation terror regimes, allows for a critical assessment of how white hegemonic structures, including those produced by white authors either interrogating or sensationalizing their subject matter. This methodological approach examines to how

[5] In Michelle M. Wright's assessment of Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* as well as Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *Figures in Black*, she notes how they "show us not only the overriding importance of the role of the Black Other played to (white) Western discourses of belonging, but the resulting centrality of Black counterdiscourses to the further exploration of these discourses of belonging as they intersect with questions of subjectivity, culture, modernity, and the nation" (6).

whiteness operates as a cultural and political entity reproducing the vestiges of colonial expansion and plantation logics. I begin this pivot in some ways by choosing two Victorian texts who choose America as sites for interrogation. For example, by centering Anglo-Irish playwright Dion Boucicault's inquiries on economic and social Southern plantation dynamics, which would open in New York on December 6th, 1859, before an assessment of lynching in James Baldwin's play *Blues for Mister Charlie* (1964), is a move intent on capturing the continuation of white men gathering at an auction block and white folks in a Southern town gathering on a murderer's birthday to discuss the possibility of his being arrested for the murder of a young black man, as linked in their mutual depictions of white masses coming together to either profit from or celebrate black death.

Choosing two Victorian works with similar publication dates but disparate American landscapes, highlights the myriad temporal and geographic ones of racial terror inspiring British authors in varying capacities, in turn underscoring the intertwined nature of U.S. and British cultural consciousness and literary production. I place Boucicault's play, for example, in close proximity to Baldwin's play and Campbell's novel to stress how the residue of the auction block in Boucicault's play, as well as the gendered and racialized with-trials of Gaskell's novella, remain informative to the politics of lynching, class exploitation, and familial fracturing that are integral to establishment of new plantation regimes. Central to this project's concerns is how to properly grapple with how white Victorian authors contend with New World colonial expansion in America and the extrajudicial violence that is important to conquest, and how New World settler colonialism will be reconfigured through the plantation economy's prod uction and commodification of black death. Acknowledging how these texts are written at a time in transition for the British empire, when it has 'legally' abolished slavery throughout the colonies,

as well as cusp of legal emancipation in the U.S., Baldwin and Campbell bear witness to the continued legacy of the witch-hunt and the auction block in modern times. Through a transatlantic reading, this project engages with how the post-emancipation period simply ushered in new forms of racial terror. Saidiya Hartman writes: "certainly, one must contend with the enormity of emancipation as both a breach with slavery and a point of transition to what looks more like the reorganization of the plantation system than self-possession, citizenship, or liberty for the 'freed'" (16). Taking on two narrativizations of the lynching of Emmett Till in Baldwin's play and Campbell's novel, one will regard the post-emancipation world of twentieth-century as "a point of transition" and "reorganization" of extrajudicial mob violence and the plantation logics of racial and gendered subjugation.

**Chapters**

This project begins with an analysis of Elizabeth Gaskell and Dion Boucicault that methodologically examines these authors through a blend of literary studies, Black studies, and Marxist theory. As it regards Black studies, I want to be explicit in the ways that I am attempting read these scholars and their work alongside Victorian literature, brought about by thoroughly engaging with Black studies scholars and scholarship. Chapter II, "Colonial Terrorism in Elizabeth Gaskell's 'Lois the Witch,'" takes a postcolonial and Marxist approach, engaging extensively with Silvia Federici's class analysis of the witch-hunt, and so examining how Gaskell negotiates the racial and gendered dimensions of the Salem witch-hunts of the 1690s. I engage Gayatri Spivak's theorization of the *native informant* to address how settlers in Gaskell's novella deal violently and retroactively with racial, gendered, and national Others. In Gaskell's novella, the author gives extensive space to fears about Indigenous and black presence and spirituality as English settlers work to establish economic and cultural cohesion in the New

World. Gaskell contends with the origins of the witch-hunts as deriving from the infiltration of Old-World English subjectivity, brought on by the title character Lois Barclay, and from the black servants of the township, Hota and Nattee, who are each in some capacity linked to the devil worship of the Old country or Indigenous 'heathens' outside the outposts of Salem. Chapter one thus examines, through a reading of Gaskell's novella, how New World colonialism broadly, and the American witch-hunts specifically, sought racial, gendered, and national consolidation as required for the creation of a white body politic in this newly exploited land. The novella's articulation of a threatening Indigenous presence and spiritualize, as well as Old World Englishness, exemplify how terror works to rationalize New World fears on the basis of what remained 'uncivilized' and unconquered beyond the walls of the Salem settlement.

Chapter III, "Plantation Terrorism and Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon*," considers the messy connections between the 'legal' parameters of mixed-race ancestry during the age of slavery and its economic utility on the auction block, in order to parse through the familial, gendered, and racial logics of the plantation as a zone of black death. Here, I expand upon Bridgitte Fielder's work on *relative races* as well as Saidiya Hartman's assessment of the performance of blackness in minstrelsies and melodramas, to more fully realize the intersubjective relationship between the lived experience of being black on the plantation and the theorization of blackness within the plantation zone. Zoe, a mixed-race heroine who from the outset of the play appears English in character and fair in skin, is on the cusp of being enslaved as the Louisiana plantation, the Terrebonne, is to be auctioned along with its property, because of the late owner Judge Peyton's debts, who is Zoe's father and who signed her manumission papers while still carrying this debt, which in turn would make it null and void. Zoe is a desired heroine, both on intimate and (re)productive levels, as there is cousin George Peyton who wishes

to marry her and M'Closky, former Terrebonne overseer and current owner of half the estate, who wishes to own her. With these conflicting dynamics in mind, the reader and audience will witness the possession of Zoe's mixed-race body on multiple scales, in turn presenting racialization as always intertwined with (re)production and passion on the plantation. Through a character analysis of Zoe and her family lineage, both by witnessing her white family in the Big House and the brief mentions of her enslaved mother, a character analysis of Zoe stresses how the racial terror of the plantation permeates throughout the landscape, emphasizing the plantation as always susceptible to demise and violent quandaries surrounding racial lineage and freedom.

With a transliterary and transatlantic approach to New World colonialism and plantation slavery conceptualized in the first two chapters, I turn to how these terrains of racial terror are reconceptualized in the wake of legal emancipation in works by two African American authors' depicting racial terror during the Jim Crow era. In both of the final chapters, I explore lynching through its deployment as an appendage of extrajudicial racial terror, which is transformed and modernized in order to lay waste to black life post-emancipation. In "Lynching and Post-Emancipation Terrorism in James Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie*," I analyze how the murder of Richard Henry, a young black man who has recently returned from New York to the South to live with his grandmother and father, after struggling with addiction and being incarcerated in the North, is lynched by Lyle Britten, a white shop owner who has in the past killed a black man for suspecting him of sleeping with his wife. In this section I detail the *use* of the Victorian ideology of true womanhood in the service of lynching. On trial, the State argues in favor of the ways Northern agitators like Richard have infiltrated the South, have been polluting and terrorizing white businesses and homes, as well as white women, which is supposedly the State's and Lyle's justification for killing Richard, on the basis he harassed his wife, Jo.

Richard's death serves to legitimize white mob violence and public execution as justified forms of justice, as responses to racial, sexual, and geographic tensions. In this capacity, lynching serves to do the work of surveilling and terrorizing black subjectivity in the wake of emancipation.

In the final chapter, "The Myth of Freedom: Lynching and the New Plantation in Bebe Moore Campbell's *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*," I explore the variable effects of the lynching of fifteen-year-old Armstrong Todd by Floyd Cox, who is accompanied by his father Lester and older brother John Earl, on the belief that young Armstrong was talking reckless in French to Floyd's wife Lily while in his pool hall. I examine fracturing as both a literary and social process, whereby I grapple with the ongoing process of emancipation as a source of volatility and anxiety, through which black kinship networks are severed and repurposed in order to service new forms of labor exploitation. Campbell's novel explores the myriad family dynamics connected in some capacity to Armstrong and his death, which includes the Coxes and the Todds, detailing how black death ruptures all racial, familial, gendered, and class dynamics. Central to my analysis are the Honorable Men of Hopewell, lead by Stonewall Pinochet, who are the wealthiest men in Hopewell, Mississippi and control the social and economic fabric of this Delta town. Stonewall is worried about the economic ramifications Armstrong's death will have on Hopewell, as he aspires to introduce a new industry to the Delta, catfish farming in order to mitigate the decline of cotton farming in the region. Stonewall *needs* Floyd to be arrested and tried, so as to show Northern industrialists willing to invest in the Delt that whites are willing and able to nonviolently confront racial tensions in the South. Stonewall's liberal response is equally important to maintaining a racial harmonious labor force, that exploits poor and working-class white and black people, who will work the New Plantation Catfish Farm and Processing Plant.

Ultimately, liberal responses to racial terror are motivated by the continued need for exploited and subjugated black peoples as well poor white folks, in order to maintain the continued legacy of the plantation. The New Plantation sees racial animosity as antagonistic to future capitalist production, and understands liberal humanism and progressivism as easily manipulated through capital and the supposed modernization and innovation of industry.

Each of these chapters formulates the literary interconnectedness of British and American racial terror in the service of capitalist relations. Western empire. Principally for my study, British and American evocations of U.S. hegemony, dramatize terrorism's storied history and relationship to the long emancipation, a freedom for the formerly enslaved still unrealized. Tracking terrorism in nineteenth and twentieth-century literature is only one source point for identifying where and how terror has manifested; this process is ultimately in the service of disrupting the literary archive of where the political fissures of terror can be localized and assessed.

# CHAPTER II: COLONIAL TERRORISM IN ELIZABETH GASKELL'S "LOIS THE WITCH"

Elizabeth Gaskell's 1859 novella "Lois the Witch," set in colonial Salem in 1691, investigates the indictments of women in colonial America who are persecuted and executed on the suspicion of being witches. Gaskell's historical fiction opens with the arrival of Lois Barclay from Barford, England to live with her uncle, a dissenter of the Church of England, in America at a moment in time where the Puritan community is on the cusp of being engulfed by witchcraft hysteria. The body-politic of Gaskell's Salem has not yet fully divested itself from British authority, making the early colony an appendage of the British Crown. This moment of national and political flux in the colonial New World is linked to acts of terror perpetrated against Indigenous and European Others. Gaskell's narrative distance, being a white Victorian author writing about colonial America, challenges the racial and gendered dynamics of the colonial era, in turn producing a landscape by which to explore terrorism, which Padma Rangarajan notes when writing on nineteenth-century literary forms of terrorism "that although coined to refer to Jacobinical terror, was quickly unmoored from its lexical origins" (305). I read Gaskell's witch-trials as state-sanctioned terrorism, where "Lois the Witch" addresses the complexity of false-witness and communal hysteria as necessary for the formation of a state of subalternity.

"Lois the Witch," by transporting a Victorian audience to the geography of colonial America, has the ability to modify, or to a greater degree, downplay current violences being perpetrated by the British Empire. Specifically, the British violences Gaskell's novella displaces are overtly addressed in her 1859 "An Accursed Race," an examination of the Cagot peoples, a persecuted minority in the western region of France as well as in northern Spain. Gaskell reflects at the beginning: "we have had our prejudices in England. We have tortured Jews; we have burnt Catholics and Protestants, to say nothing of a few witches and wizards" (3). Gaskell's employment of "we have had our prejudices in England" sanitizes the country's unending history

of dehumanizing and exploiting minoritized peoples, especially in the Global South. “Lois the Witch” also performs a similar revisionist approach to history in its closing remarks. Coming to terms with Lois’s death, Ralph Lucy, Lois’s initial love interest before her sojurn to America, settles on a final thought: “‘then on that day [the day of Lois’s hanging] will I, here at Barford in England, join my prayers as long as I live with the repentant judge, that his sin may be blotted out and no more had in remembrance. She [Lois] would have willed it so’” (226). Ralph Lucy claims that if alive, Lois “would have willed” that the tragedy of the witch-trials be “blotted out” of Salem’s collective memory and history. Gaskell’s literary depiction of the historical witch-trials foregrounds the stabilizing force of extra-legal forms of racial and gendered terror in the service of emerging settler occupation. To be hanged as a witch thus indicts state-terrorism as intent on routinely targeting vulnerable populations while simultaneously calling for state enactments of violence to be forgiven and forgotten.

Aardel Haefele-Thomas observes that “Lois the Witch” is “a Gothic tale rooted, more so than any of her other works of fiction, in historical facts” (50). Even if Gaskell’s novella is primarily occupied in appropriating the colonial American witch-trials to comment on the hysterical woman in Victorian society (Irina Raluca Ciobanu and Deborah Wynne), and heteronormative family and marriage structures, as well as appropriating religious fanaticism (Haefele-Thomas), it is vital to interrogate how “Lois the Witch” directly narrativizes early America’s history of racial, colonial, and imperial violence. In my analysis of Gaskell’s novella, I examine how the witch-hunt as a colonial terror regime collapses racial and national differentiations. In Gaskell’s staging of the colonial period, the simultaneity of an attempt at the stabilization of race and national boundaries draws attention to the difficulty of maintaining such lines of differentiation. Important to Gaskell’s fictionalization of the Salem witch-hunts is in the

terror regime's capacity to not only entrap exploited Indigenous laborers within its frenzied tirade, but also its willingness to persecute and murder English subjects.

What does Gaskell's novella reveal about itself and the author's conceptualization of the vulnerable state of English subjectivity and whiteness? Lois is in some ways "awakened' to the limits of liberal modernity, in that, aligning her imprisonment with that of Indigenous servants Nattee and Hota, she begins to *see* herself as a subject antagonistic to the dictates of white settler governance. It is at the threshold of difference transforming into empathy as a response to imprisonment, where an examination of colonial state exposes how differences are both legible and susceptible to dissolving on the page, that allows for a reading of transatlantic terror within Gaskell's transhistorical narrative. The order by which Indigenous peoples are surveilled in "Lois the Witch' signals the simultaneous emergence of racialization and state-terrorism during the colonial period, foregrounding the interplay between race and terror. The witch hunts justify torture, surveillance, and execution as necessary measures for maintaining national, social, and public security. In these respects, Gaskell's "Lois the Witch" provides a valuable interpretive framework for understanding terrorism's mobilization as a spatial and temporal figuration of state enacted violence, subjection, and subjugation.

**Elizabeth Gaskell and Indigenous Terror**

Elizabeth Gaskell's fictional depiction of the witch-trials in "Lois the Witch" is invested in Victorian cultural dilemmas of gendered public and private spheres, patriarchal family structures, as well as religious fanaticism, but it is the threat of the colonial Other in Gaskell's fiction that is at the center of each of these varying critiques. Dipesh Chakrabarty's discussion of the provincialization of Europe is applicable to Gaskell's treatment of colonial history: "what is effectively played down, however, in histories that either implicitly or explicitly

celebrate the advent of the modern start and the idea of citizenship is the repression and violence that are instrumental in the victory of the modern as is the persuasive power of its rhetorical strategies" (44). As Chakrabarty's commentary suggests, there are obviously explicit and implicit evasions occurring throughout Gaskell's historicization of Salem in the late seventeenth-century. The origin point of the witch-hunt in Gaskell's Salem begins with her two Indigenous servants Hota and Nattee. My analysis of these characters attends to Nattee's and Hota's subject positions as exploited colonial subjects, putting into sharp focus the ways racial violence as depicted in Gaskell's depiction of colonial America anticipates applications of state sanctioned racial terror in America's future.

Indigeneity as a potential threat emerges early on in Lois's encounters with the New World colonists, in which Indigenous peoples are figured as treacherous and deceptive. In 1691, after her parents have passed and are buried at the Bradford parsonage, where her father had preached since 1661, a small village close to Warwickshire, England, Lois Barclay is set to journey from England to New England to live with her mother's brother, Ralph Hickson and his family in Salem, Massachusetts. Lois is to board the Redemption "with store of necessities and comforts for the Puritan colonists of New England," as it "was the earliest ship that had ventured across the seas" (139). Aboard this "earliest ship," Lois will represent for the Salem settlers a reminder of British rule/life to the New World. On first landing in New England, she is to lodge with Widow Smith, who details her hostile visions of Indigenous peoples: "'I am sure, I got such a fright the first harvest-time after I came over to New England, I go on dreaming… of painted Indians, with their shaven scalps and their war-streaks, lurking behind the trees, and coming nearer and nearer with their noiseless steps'" (146). Living in the New World colony has resulted in Widow Smith's mind being haunted by images "of painted Indians." Yet Widow Smith evades

in her dreams explicitly *seeing* or *hearing* Native peoples, as they are "lurking behind trees" and are "coming nearer and nearer with their noiseless steps." Not only is the subconscious of the twenty-year resident warped by a terror implicated in lurking and invisible Indigenous peoples, Widow Smith's neighbor Elder Hawkins is explicit in regarding Native presence as a direct attack on English subjecthood: "'I myself believe these Red Indians are indeed the evil creatures of whom we read in the Holy Scripture… I have heard tell, that the French pay the Indians so much gold for every dozen scalps off Englishmen's heads'" (148). In this imagining, English occupation is of direct interest to French colonists vying for power in New World America. Not only are English capital interests threatened by European and Indigenous alliances, but the lifeblood of English capital interests as well.

For Captain Holdernesse, Lois's guardian aboard the Redemption and initial guide on the New England shores, the question of French/British allegiances is not what arouses hostilities toward Indigenous peoples. Instead, it is universal white-hatred and devil-worshipping: "'the Indians hate the white men… but it is true that it not safe to go far into the woods, for fear of the lurking painted savages; nor has it been safe to build a dwelling far from a settlement… and folk do say they Indian creatures rise up out of the very ground to waylay the English and then others affirm they are in league with Satan to affright the Christians out of the heathen country over which he has reigned so long'" (148-9). These "Indian creatures rise up out of the very ground" to impede English development and continued occupation in the New World. As the British settlers are competing for supremacy over the land, Indigenous cultural practices being associated with Satan constructs these people's relationship to colonial America as uncivilized, which also means Indigenous peoples are unfit to modernize and develop a land that they have plagued with their witchcraft and affinity for Satan. Important to British capital and land

accumulation, as well as the proliferation of a proto-English body politic, Gaskell's fictionalization of the witch-trials represents Indigenous extermination as one way for English occupation to reach the dire aims of capitalist accumulation.

Gaskell's introduction of Nattee, "the old Indian servant" to the Hickson family, is prefaced by a mystical and terror ridden depiction of Salem's surrounding forest (149). Lois, who often remains inside the Hickson home rather than venturing outside, had "once or twice" caught sight of the woods, "and from all accounts, this old forest, girdling round the settlement, was full of dreaded and mysterious beasts, and still more to be dreaded Indians, stealing in and out among the shadows, intent on bloody schemes against the Christian people" (160). Gaskell's use of "girdling" is interesting here. It is as if the New World settlement is being entrapped by the "dreaded and mysterious beasts" as well as the "bloody schemes" of Indigenous peoples. As Lois recounts, Nattee is aligned with the "evil powers' of those living in this bordering forest: "Nattee, the old Indian servant, would occasionally make Lois's blood run cold as she and Faith and Prudence [Grace Hickson's two daughters] listened to the wild stories she told them of the wizards of her race" (160). It is precisely the sensationalization of the spiritual practices of Indigenous peoples as "bloody schemes," "evil powers," and "wild stories," that ultimately justifies Salem's imprisonment of Nattee and fellow Indigenous servant Hota.

Surrounding Gaskell's narrativization of a fictional colonial America is a cataclysmic unknowability of unsettled and unconquered Indigenous land and people. For Widow Smith, Indigenous presence elicits terror upon unprotected Puritan settlers that is also an implicit threat to English sovereignty, as "evil creatures" are economically and violently in league with French authority. It is also curious that Elder Hawkins only tangible representation of Indigenous experience is through association to biblical scripture: '"these Red Indians are indeed the evil

creatures of whom we read in the Holy Scripture'" (148). Similarly characterized as operating outside the realm of the rational and moral English settler class, the Tappau family servant Hota's persecution and execution highlights that how Indigenous peoples are characterized as operating in the service of a burgeoning capitalist body politic, but cannot possess any social, political, or cultural capital within the colonial enterprise. It is worth noting initially how Gaskell's narrator characterizes Salem's views on Hota's execution: "for it was well to make an example of the first discovered witch, and it was also well that she was Indian, a heathen, whose life would be no great loss to the community" (192). Reading this acknowledgment alongside the Puritan community's vying for political and spatial supremacy in British-America, it comes as no surprise that Indigenous execution is justified in its link to a pursuit to rid settled land of "heathen" peoples. There are then no Indigenous practices, cultural mores worth valuing, as Indigenous genocide is of "no great loss to the community." Frantz Fanon's assessment of colonial attitudes is valuable here: "colonist society is not merely portrayed as a society without values. The colonist is not content with stating that the colonized world has lost its values or worse never possessed any. The 'native' is declared impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values" (6). Although Indigenous peoples as well as Lois are depicted as threatening to the colonial regime, it is the British-American state that projects terror onto Gaskell's settler landscape. This reframing undertaken by the British-American body politic that cosigns away their own explicit role in *who* conjures terror between colonizer and colonized is necessary in the state's extrajudicial violence against those deemed valueless and hostile to political, social, and economic consolidation.

**State-Terror and Gaskell's Witch-Trials**

Lois Barclay's arrival in Salem is marked by the settlement's struggle with supposedly tangible as well as illusory threats to religious order. As Lois's guide Captain Holdernesse notes,

these New Englanders "'are rare chaps for praying; down on their knees at every turn of life'" (143). The captain's depiction is in direct tension with the Old World England Lois has left. Lois's father, Reverend Barclay "had been a Jacobite, as the adherents of the Stuarts were beginning to be called… so Lois had hitherto heard little of the conversation and seen little of the ways of the Puritans" (145). In due time Lois will come to understand Salem as a regimented society, and in the narrator's characterization of Widow Smith, the text foreshadows the policing of speech and storytelling that bring about Lois's demise: "but the widow herself was a privileged person; her known goodness of heart (the effects of which had been experienced by many) gave her liberty of speech which was tacitly denied to many, under the penalty of being esteemed ungodly if they infringed certain conventional limits" (145). Little does Lois suspect that her tales of Halloween in the old country as she relays them to her young cousin Prudence, lead the young colonial subject to indict her older cousin of conjuring up "customs then and long afterwards practiced in England and that have scarcely yet died out in Scotland" (165). This threat of English witchcraft in the American colony is precisely what Gaskell's narrative proposes cannot encroach on a burgeoning social and cultural landscape (the emergence of a proto-British nation state). This with the already existing ascription of heathen to Indigenous cultural practices is a two-fold threat to nation building.

Comparable then to Lois's European Otherness is Gaskell's depiction of Indigenous Otherness as disruptive to the America-as-European project ongoing during the colonial period. Gaskell depicts this colonial tension through the accusations made against Indigenous servants Hota and Nattee which lead to their deaths by the hands of a Puritan mob. Hota, who is the

Tappau family servant, is Salem's first accused victim of witchcraft. Her claims to mysticism and heathenness frame her imprisonment and eventual death as being "no great loss to the community" (192). Initially, it was Hota who was shocked that she had been regarded as bewitching Hester and Abigail Tappau, as she was present at Salem's prejudicial council in the hopes of administering medicinal remedies to the young Hester. Hota's as well as Nattee's Indigenous servant statues merely reflect their suppressed agency to the ruling elites and the Salem majority. Their threatening identities and proximity to vulnerable Salem can and must be dealt with violently when posing a danger (an illusory one at that) to Puritanical hegemony. As Salem begins to more fully rely on the extra-judicial violence necessary for state formation, it must be able to identify who has possessed Paster Tappau's two daughters, Abigail and Hester. The judges of Salem require that Hota confess to her sins of witchcraft, and as Prudence relays: "'Manasseh says Hota was well whipped by Pastor Tappau ere she was brought to confession'" (193). In order to satiate Salem's desire to locate witches among its community, it is necessary that witches be found, regardless of how these witches come into being. Necessary to the maintenance of state terror is that the ruling elites (is this case, religious leaders) are able to mitigate those forces that could harm the ruled majority (even if this harmful presence is imaginary). It becomes important that a governed people take pleasure in the violence of the state, as it is depicted by the young colonial subject Prudence's desire to witness Salem's killing of Hota. As Gaskell's narrator imparts "Prudence was as bright as if she were listening to some merry story—curious as to her mother would tell her [of Hota's confession]—seeming to have no particular terror of witches or witchcraft, and yet to be especially desirous to accompany her mother the next morning to the hanging" (193). The hanging of Hota is in Prudence's mind a spectacle. Rather than humanizing Hota's death, the scene of racialized death renders these

bodies expendable, being characterized as integral laborers to the colonial machine in one moment, and as other worldly foes in the next.

Turning back to Lois's arrival in Salem, as the reader and Lois are among the elders at Widow Smith's home, the reader learns of twofold relationship between witchcraft in the New World as well as its legacy in the Old Country: "'they are fearful creatures, the witches! and yet I am sorry for the poor women, whilst I dread them'" (149). In Lois's mind, dread and horror are linked with sympathy and compassion for accused women. In recounting the spectacle of the drowning of "old Hannah," Lois enmeshes herself with the tortured woman: "'I hid my face, I know, as soon as I saw the fearsome sight, *for her eyes met mine* as they were glaring with fury… I used to dream that I was in that pond, all men hating me with their eyes because I was a witch'" (emphasis added 150). Here the symbolic representation of being placed within the realm of the accused reveals to Lois the collective prejudice of the "men hating me with their eyes." Lois finding fellowship with the criminalized "old Hannah" does not, however, initially extend to the "spiritual enemies" that are Indigenous peoples (148). Anxiety about Native presence in colonial America quickly takes root in Lois's psyche as she initially navigates the Salem terrain: "the cries of strange birds, the unwonted colour [sic] of some of them, all suggested to the imaginative or unaccustomed traveler the idea of war-whoops and painted deadly association" (151). A capacity to see beyond prejudices instilled by the colonial regime can only take shape in "Lois the Witch" once someone like Lois directly experiences and witnesses the harm of the terror-state. For Lois to empathize with Indigenous struggle, it would mean *unlearning* the root cause of her anxiety toward Indigenous presence and its relation to criminality.

The Salem mob's ability to imprison and execute racialized Others on the basis of witchcraft will be mobilized in the criminalization of Lois's European Otherness. The Salem

elders proceed to deliberate on whether or not to torture Lois in order to get her to confess to witchcraft, basing their due process on Prudence's testimony to her cousin being in union with the devil, which will constitute her being "accused legally and publicly," leaving her imprisoned with Nattee (213). When brought to her cell, Lois does not initially identify Nattee: "not recognizing anything but an old ragged woman lying helpless on her face on the ground, lifted her up; and lo! it was Nattee—dirty, filthy indeed, mud-pelted, stone-bruised, beaten and all astray in her wits with the treatment she had received from the mob outside" (222). Lois's death intends to represent the *true* barbarity of the witch trials. It is, however, not as easy as reading Nattee as the infantile Native and Lois as the maternal comforter. Instead, these lines of differentiation cross, and it is at this point of discontinuity that colonial terror regime lies. The paradox of the Salem witch-hunts does not hang on its prejudicial terror against Indigenous peoples, but of its capacity to ensnare English subjects within its wrath as well. Ultimately, was Lois's Englishness or even whiteness, enough to protect her from the unruly nature of the proto-English terror state? It might also be useful to characterize the scene of Lois's awakening in another way, one that sees Lois cross the line of the heathen, aligning her then to an Indigenous heathenness that criminalized both Nattee and Hota. In Lois's realization, a contemporary reader recognizes the limits of liberal modernity, how all subjects deemed antagonistic to the capitalist white settler state will be dealt with violently and swiftly. This includes white women. In order for such a system of dehumanization and domination to maintain legitimacy, its brutality once carried out, must swiftly be forgotten and forgiven. This also means access to the protections of whiteness is in flux, where the interplay between racial dehumanization and patriarchal violence sow the seeds for both individual and communal destruction.

**Defining Terrorism and the Native Informant in a Nineteenth-Century Literary Context**

Once imprisoned with Nattee, Lois takes on the role of white maternal caretaker to the tortured woman. The narrative characterizes how "for hours she tended the old Indian woman—tended her bodily woes; and as the poor scattered senses of the savage creature came slowly back, Lois gathered her infinite dread of the morrow" (222). It is *with* Nattee that Lois senses the violence to be imposed on both their lives. Notably, once Nattee is again conscious, she too will most likely realize both women's fates. As much as Gaskell's narrative doesn't directly describe Nattee's embodied and psychological trauma, it is with this scene of the two imprisoned women and through Lois's gestures of care that provides the reader with glimpses of Nattee's experiences. On the morning when the Salem men enter the gallows where Lois and Nattee are imprisoned, Lois is struck by the realization that "all she appeared to know was, that somehow or another, through some peril or another, she had to protect the poor Indian woman" (222). As the Salem men approach Nattee's body reacts, and so too does Lois's: "Nattee tightened her hold upon Lois as they drew near the gallows, and the outrageous crowd below began to hoot and yell" (223). The simultaneity of Nattee's and Lois's recognition of the terror and torture bound for them both, where lines of racial and national differentiation once sought to separate the two, now binds them together. The Salem village's willingness to imprison and execute both women on the same basis of witchcraft, exposes the colonial terror state's true intention of ridding the landscape of racial and national Others. All along Gaskell has made it apparent that Lois, Hota, and Nattee share similarities in more than one way, linking them in a communal fate wrought on by the state. These similarities can be hard to recognize as "Lois the Witch" is a tale marked by prejudicial language and descriptions throughout. The language of racial distinction is undermined throughout by the plot. In multiple ways, the fate of colonized subjects is to wade

through Empire's primary features of violent discourse, policy, and governance. In a myriad of ways, Nattee and Lois are linked by their experiences of shared abuse well before their mutual imprisonment.

The line of racialized differentiation that marks Nattee apart from Lois is not a straight one. Once Lois arrived in Salem, she was "gently let down into the midst of the Puritan peculiarities," upon which she will witness how association and prejudice orient the girl to the violent lore of the New World (196). Connecting scenes of Native presence to Biblical characterization, Elder Hawkins motions: "'the devil is painted, it hath been said so from old times; are not these Indians painted, even like unto their fathers?'" (148). Allegiance to fanaticism too will be ascribed to Lois. Her Royalist past as well as English and possible Scottish origins illicit hostile gazing among the Salem villagers: "early prejudices, and feelings, and prepossessions of the English girl were all on the side of what would now be called Church and State, what was then esteemed in that country as superstitious observance of the directions of a Popish rubric, and a servile regard for the family of an oppressing and irreligious king" (158-9). In linking Lois to the British Crown, she too is rendered "irreligious" and heathen, directly oppositional to the stability and safety of Puritan Salem. The fortification of the small town is intended to defend against the illusory danger of heathen Natives. Here, the "irreligious" in multiple instances, whether it be as Indigenous servants or Lois's dissenting presence, is a menacing threat to the religious order within Salem community walls. Lois's *alliance* to the "superstitious observance" of the Crown in similar ways links her to the Indigenous characterizations of which "Holy Scripture speaks of witches and wizards" (149). In essential terms, these "early prejudices, and feelings, and prepossessions" will be inescapable for Lois, in similar ways as the tales of Native peoples being the "'power of the Evil One'" (150). It is worth

noting how the disillusioned fear of the Salem villagers toward Native outsiderness is compelled by "cattle straying into the woods, and the consequent *danger* of reclaiming them" (emphasis added 152). Capitalist accumulation as well as the safety of the community is threatened by its own constructed horrors of racialized presence.

Lois too initially succumbs to indulging in the supposed truth of violent Native peoples, especially in its threatening aura toward white women. Lois's early relationship with the Hickson family servant Nattee is enveloped in fright: "Nattee, the old Indian servant, would occasionally make Lois's blood run cold as she and Faith and Prudence listened to the wild stories she told them of the wizards of her race" (160). The narrative here downplays the magnitude to which this mere *telling* plays significantly in structuring how the white, proto-English, Puritanical villagers view their relationship to Others. These tales too disorient the white subject's ability to traverse the settled landscape: "after such tales, it required no small effort on Lois's part to go out, at her aunt's command, into the common pasture round the town… who knew but what the double-headed snake might start up from each blackberry-bush—that wicked, cunning, accursed creature in the service of Indian wizards, that had such power over all those white maidens" (160). The white body politic *knows* Indigenous peoples have a fluid and intimate relationship with nature. Yet at this juncture, for the colonial enterprise to be able to authorize its violent methods of subjection and subjugation, it is the "accursed creature in the service of Indian wizards" that illustrates a racial threat to stable social, cultural, and political consolidation in the New World (160). Lois as well as the narrator acknowledge that the violent discourse of witchcraft also isn't specific to the colonial world. Rather, it is a core feature of European subjection abroad in England, as Gaskell's narrator points out: "but our English ancestors entertained superstitions of much the same character at the same period, and with less excuse, as

the circumstances surrounding them were better known, and consequently more explicable by common sense than the real mysteries of the deep, untrodden forests of New England" (161). What remains unknowable about the "untrodden forests of New England" is what constitutes their legibility as an excusable cause of anxiety and violent suppression on the part of settlers. Gaskell's Victorian reader too at this point would be reminded of the seventeenth-century Penal Laws that criminalized Catholicism in Britain and Ireland, as well as the fact that "by the 16th century, moreover, the charge of devil worship had become a common theme in political and religious struggle" (Federici 179). Ultimately, Lois is sullied as a vulnerable English subject, rebellious in the mind of the British Crown, as well as of "superstitious observance" by New World colonists. Lois and Nattee, as well as Hota, bear the burden of being amalgamated into the form of the witch. Lois's own fears, pressured and inculcated in her mind about Natte's threatening Indigenous existence through her whiteness and its accessibility to certain racial discourses upheld by the Puritanical community, prevent her from arriving at the too late realization that her own imprisonment and execution on the basis of her being an English Heathen, is also linked to the surveillance and subjection of Nattee's and Hota's racialized embodiment.

Lois's fretfulness toward hearing tales of the supernatural as relayed by Nattee will make her cousin Faith apprehensive toward the cultural practices of the Old Country. It is Lois telling stories that conjures apprehension among Salem residents: "Lois began to speak, to talk about England, and the dear old ways at home, without exciting much attention on Faith's part, until at length she fell upon the subject of Hallow-e'-en [sic], and told about customs then and long afterwards practised [sic] in England and that have scarcely yet died out in Scotland" (164-5). Believing these stories to only be reminiscing on and recounting English customs and history,

Lois hardly recognizes the danger this storytelling places her in. Prudence, who has been eavesdropping, articulates that danger: "'Cousin Lois may go out and meet Satan by the brook-side if she will, but if thou goest [sic], Faith, I will tell mother—ay, and I will tell Pastor Tappau, too. Hold your stories, Cousin Lois, I am afeard of my very life'" (165). It is indeed discourse that constructs ideas and feelings about *who* is a witch, and when these discursive boundaries are violated, the limits of who resides outside these discursive limits begins to collapse. In what Prudence reveals to the Salem elders, Lois is doomed to die. Intent on taking Lois's stories out into the Salem public, the little girl's testimony that her cousin is in league with Satan, seal the English Lois's fate to be imprisoned and executed alongside Nattee and Hota. Similar to Lois's bodily reception of Nattee's stories, which disorient her capacity to navigate the Salem landscape with comfort, Prudence responds viscerally to Lois's telling of Old England: "the excited girl gave a loud scream of terror at the image her fancy had conjured up" (165). In comparison, Prudence's being captivated by Lois's tales of the Old Country, reflects Widow Smith's earlier testament to "'dreaming… of painted Indians, with their shaven scalps and their war-streaks, lurking behind trees, and coming nearer and nearer with their noiseless steps'" (146). Lurking amongst the spatial terrain of the colonial landscape, racial as well as national Otherness subverts the mental framework of the colonial subject, hindering their willingness to perceive the land around them as safe, complicating one's mobility within and without the boundaries of the settlement. Movement here is spatial as well as psychological. As Prudence puts it: "'Cousin Lois may go out and meet Satan,'" projecting how important it is that the Hickson home as well as the Salem community, rid themselves of those deemed threatening to New England's Puritanical social, cultural, and domestic structures. Lois's remarks about England no longer

grant her entry into the white social body of the Salem settlement. Prudence puts it bluntly: "'Faith shall stay by me, not you, wicked English witch!'" (166).

It is important now to pay close attention to Nattee's struggle to seek refuge amongst her employers, the Hickson family. Nattee implores: "'mercy, mercy, mistress, everybody! take care of poor Indian Nattee, who never do wrong, but for mistress and the family'" (190). Nattee's framing is curious here, in that she posits herself as a '"poor Indian'" needing white protection, that without this support she cannot survive. What I also read here is Nattee's playing with the racialized body as docile and subservient, recognizing the impossibility of taking on the terror that dominates the Salem settlement as it preys upon her social fragility. Allegiance to white sympathizers in Nattee's mind may be her only chance at surviving the witch-hunts. Lois too recognizes what's at stake in keeping Nattee from being overrun by Salem's violent mass hysteria: "'because,' said Lois, not seeing Faith's glance, 'we are told to pray for them that despitefully use us, and to do good to them that persecute us. But poor Nattee is not a christened woman, I would that Mr [sic] Nolan would baptize her; it would, maybe, take her out of the power of Satan's temptations'" (187). Lois is cognizant of managing rampant religious struggle in Salem through assimilation. Hota as well as Nattee's struggles, which eventually becomes Lois's struggle too, reflect the impossibility of navigating the violent fervor of religious and racial fanaticism that predates Lois's 1691 arrival and the 1692 outset of the witch-trials themselves. What is also true in Gaskell's text is that Lois, Hota, and Nattee are never given the full potential to assimilate the customs and "conventional limits" of the Puritan community, and because of the sheer violent force of the witch-trials that is the tales nexus point, assimilation was never a tenable possibility for any of these women. Necessary to the formation of the colonial terror state is how Others (fail to) recognize and negotiate their estrangement to the

colonial state. Nattee gestures to her “poor Indian” status to illicit protection from the Hickson household, attempting to appeals to colonialist views of racial inferiority, in order to provide her with a means of survival within a violent white patriarchal landscape. Colonial compassion then ought to uplift Lois, Nattee, and Hota. However, to the colonial regime, Othered subjects like Lois, Nattee, and Hota who can be easily condemned as corrupted and dangerous, operates as a distinct feature for stabilizing the white body politic as it emerges in the service of New World capitalism.

A central feature of Gaskell’s fictions, from *North and South* to *Mary Barton*, is the centrality of gender, national, class, and ethnic antagonisms. Principally, “Lois the Witch” introduces racial antagonism into Gaskell’s oeuvre. Indigenous genocide and American colonization and imperialism are the fictional theatre upon which Gaskell’s text allows for an assessment of England’s ever-expanding interest in the exploitation of racial populations in the global capitalist world. It is through the enactment of colonial terror, and in Gaskell’s Salem, it is the witch-hunt that executes Britain’s expansionist aims. How then does terror move and operate in the context of nineteenth-century British literary production? Padma Rangarajan notes in her reading of Landy Morgan, Sydney Owenson’s 1827 novel *The O’Briens and the O’Flaherty’s*, that “the word ‘terrorism’ is rare in early-nineteenth-century fiction,” but “it is notable, however in his [Edmund Burke’s] *Fourth Letter On a Regicide Peace* (1795), Burke, one of the early English adopters of the word, uses it to refer to actions taken by the Directory (‘those Hell-Hounds called Terrorists’), the governing committee that, while revolutionary, opposed Jacobinical excesses” (304). Terrorism had been coined to “refer to Jacobinical terror,” but by 1798, “opponents of a motion to appease Irish discontent referred indignantly to ‘threats of terrorism’ employed by the United Irishmen” (305). Rangarajan defines *symbiotic terrorism* as

"that is, terrorism as a culture of reciprocal violence and not merely a series of singular catastrophic events" (306). Symbiotic terrorism in this manner functions to address the fluid, as it regards its spatial and temporal figurations, of violence, subjection, and subjugation. Reading alongside Rangarajanan an engagement with a formulation of symbiotic terrorism in nineteenth-century literature expands upon the literary contours of the *native informant*. Both theoretical frameworks operating together, open Gaskell's novella to assessments of how Western racial and ethnic discourses inform the logics of terror in a literary context.

At the outset of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* Spivak outlines that "I shall docket the encrypting name of the 'native informant *as the name of Man*—a name that carries the inaugurating affect of being human" (emphasis added 5)[6]. On the native informant, Trinh T. Minh capitulates how it functions for "the handicapped who cannot represent themselves and have to either be represented or learn how to represent themselves" (59). For Spivak, to *locate* one's agency within a capitalist society is "to find that the *only* entry is through a forgetfulness, or a museumization of national origin in the interest of class mobility" (emphasis original 398). For those occupying the peripheral, national amnesia becomes a prerequisite for racial and class mobility within capitalist society. Spivak will later theorize that the *native informant* is "generalized" as a literary trope, and "mouth[s] for us [the West] the answers that we want to hear as conformation of our view of the world" (342). Within the context of Gaskell's "Lois the

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[6] In Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) the term *native informant* appears in brief mention, as the Victorianist-trained scholar uses the term to address the incapacity of Western universities to adequately cultivate intellectual space for the study of Arab culture. Said gestures that "the predictable result is that Oriental students (and Oriental professors) still want to come and sit at the feet of American Orientalists… such a system of reproduction makes it inevitable that the Oriental scholar will use his American training to feel superior to his own people because he is able to 'manage' the Orientalist system; in his relations with his superiors, the European or American Orientalists, he will remain only a 'native informant'" (323-4). Elaborating upon Said's brief mention of the *native informant*, Gayatri Spivak's more thorough development of the term is attributes to a fuller comprehension of how the literary *native informant* feeds the colonial terror state depicted in Gaskell's novella.

Witch," the fictionalized Other, as it pertains specifically to Hota and Nattee, whose Indigeneity provokes fear to the Salem settlement, an understanding of their literary positions as *native informants* reflects the settler state's desire to deal with Other's violently and retroactively. As Spivak asserts: "I think of the 'native informant' as a mark of expulsion from the name of Man—a mark of crossing out the impossibility of the ethical relation" (6).

Reading Lois as unexpectedly a *native informant* contends with the way whiteness and Eurocentrism "mouth for us the answers that we want to hear conformation of our view of the world" (Spivak 342). Regarding Lois, she is a testament to Old World English violence, a historical context colonial America believes itself detached from. Yet, it is Old World England and its capitalist regime that takes root in colonial America, where the Salem people are merely appendages to the British Empire's worldview. Lois's first-hand experience of European witch-hunts prior to her voyage, exemplifies the transatlantic dimensions of a European, and more precisely, English terror regime. Lois tells this story of Old English persecution to Widow Smith and Elder Hawkins, to a Puritanical people soon to be brought to its knees by religious fanaticism. Yet, Lois confronting the past at this juncture only informs the reader of a violent fate foredoomed to this proto-European colonial landscape.

Lois's insider-outsider position illuminates the precariousness of such a subject positionality. Even as Nattee's stories "would occasionally make Lois's blood run cold" (160), the English girl herself is forever haunted by her origin country: "early prejudices, and feelings, and prepossessions of the English girl were on the side of what would now be called Church and State, what was then esteemed in that country a *superstitious* observance of the directions of a Popish rubric, and a servile regard for the family of an oppressing and irreligious king" (emphasis added 158-9). National and racial identity thus *inform* one's relation to capitalist

society. These identity formations project threats through “wild stories” and “superstitious observance,” counterbalancing the hegemonic vigor of New World capitalism and its Puritanical invective. The witch-hunts, then, are a product of the fissures produced from the colliding forces of capitalist accumulation, racialization, national origin, and religious hegemony.

Engaging with Spivak’s assertion that the *native informant* operates “as a mark of expulsion from the name of Man,” this formulation is essential to addressing to the persecution of Hota. As of “now, Christmas 1691,” the “ground had apparently smoothed over” in regard to talk of witchcraft, but for the Salem people, this need be freshly stirred and reckoned with (174). With the supposed bewitching of the Tappau daughter “that evening the news spread through Salem, that Hota had confessed her sin—had acknowledged that she was a witch (190). It is revealed that Hota had, “owned to signing a certain little red book with Satan,” as well as confessing to having “had ridden through the air to Newbury Falls,” so as to receive a more lenient punishment (191). Despite this “the narrator ended with saying that Hota was to be hung the next morning, in spite of her confession… for it was well to make an example of the first-discovered witch, and it was also well that she was an Indian, a heathen, whose life would be no great loss to the community” (191-2). Hota’s forced confession and eventual execution are of double significance, whereby executing her even as she confessed to witchcraft allows the Salem people to rationalize killing her on the basis of Indigeneity and heathenness. Just as important, Hota’s execution is *useful* to the Salem settlers, as it will be representative of the first *found* witch, which will relegate her corpse to the realm of artifacts, or as Spivak notes, “a museumization of national origin.” The Salem mob needs Hota killed in order to showcase to all that being impervious to the Puritanical religious order is a life-or-death matter. The fluid or *symbiotic terrorism,* which Rangarajan refers to as a “terrorism as a culture of reciprocal

violence" (306), of this first event, highlights too, the myriad beliefs of who rightfully embodies a terrorist subjectivity at the level of collective consensus as well as individual prejudice. For example, as Grace Hickson ponders: "for her part, she wished that the first-discovered witch had been a member of a godly English household, that it might be seen of all men that religious folk were willing to cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye, if tainted with this religious sin" (192). In Grace's mind, the terror regime does hold prejudice; in fact, it can willingly target those one might deem nonhostile to European and Western forces. Instead, Grace's ease by which she can imagine a "member of a godly English household" replacing Hota, highlights the disposability at which the terror regime views terrorist subjects. Ultimately, conflating Hota with members of English homes is further evidence that the terror regime manifests the terror first and locates the threat last.

Gaskell's narrative festers on the root cause of the criminalization of those represented as threats to a burgeoning bourgeois body politic in New England, and in the case of "Lois the Witch," this plays out in the persecution of Lois the Old-World European immigrant and Indigenous servants Hota and Nattee. Recognizing how Lois, Hota, and Nattee each embodies and negotiates the literary trope of the *native informant* is useful in understanding the myriad ways capital accumulation, conquest, and gendered and racial violence are essential to New World productions of selfhood and self-making, and in contrasting terms, unmaking and dehumanization. The terror regime of the witch-hunt, as my later assessment of Silvia Federici points out, is integral to the consolidation of a proto-European American body politic. An analysis of Hota's and Nattee's gendered and racialized positionalities, as well as their servant status, are integral in pointing out how the marker of witch draws attention settlers views of laboring, racialized, and gendered peoples as disposable. Indigenous genocide and American

colonization and imperialism are the fictional theatre upon which Gaskell expands an assessment of European class relations to address England's ever-expanding interest in the exploitation of racial populations in the global capitalist world.

**Capitalist Accumulation, Racial Formations, and Gaskell's Witch-Trials**

In Karl Marx and Frederick Engels *The German Ideology: Critique of Modern German Philosophy* (1845-6/1932), both note that "the division of labour [sic] inside a nation" will lead "hence to the separation of *town* and *country* and to the conflict of their interests" (emphasis original 32). Salem is a settlement separated from the wilderness, and because of this, Hota's and Nattee's laboring bodies *inside* the town carry with them the feared tendencies and cultural practices of the country. Arguably, witchcraft of the sort carried and supposedly practiced by Hota, Nattee, and Lois signifies the infiltration of the country into the town, as well marking the social and productive relations that make up the Gaskell's colonial landscape: country witches and town settlers. Marx and Engels further trace "the production of life, both of one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as twofold relation: on the one hand as a natural, and on the other hand as a social relation—social in the sense that it denotes the co-operational of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end" (43). As such, these connections, "thus presents a 'history' irrespective of the existence of any political or religious nonsense which would especially hold them together" (43). As Salem is defined through the seizure of land, division of labor, and religious order that serve in the expansion of the Salem settlement and its crusade to defeat heathen outsiders. Marx and Engels put this point succinctly: "for as soon as the division of labor comes into begin, each man has as particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape" (47). For Hota, Nattee, and Lois, this means being forced to labor and live within an

environment that every turn is eager to kill them. Edmund Morgan, writing in *American Slavery, American Freedom* (1975) about early relations between Virginia settlers and Indigenous peoples, observes that for the settlers "to be thus condescended to by heathen savages was intolerable. And when your own people started deserting in order to live with them, it was too much… so you killed the Indians, tortured them, burned their villages, burned their cornfields. It proved your superiority" (90). Bringing in "heathen savages" into the Salem home and settlement marked the settler's superiority; it signaled both the capacity to allow a person to inhabit a space not accessible on their own, as well as being swiftly and violently removed from that space at any moment. Cedric Robinson recognizes how "the violent event of colonial aggression and its corollary of 'Indian' slavery had already been transmuted… into a relationship of supplication secured by an economic rationale; indeed, the dependence of "new Comers" on natives already reversed" (77). From this historical juncture, Robinson asserts "the curtain of supremacist ideology had by now begun its descent on American thought, obscuring from the historically unconscious generations of descendants of colonists and later immigrants the oppressive violence and exploitation interwoven in the structure of the republic" (77). The colonial "new Comer" believed their faith, racialized and gendered divisions of labor, and mechanisms of surveillance, persecution, and execution made them superior, and were legitimized by the already mobilized forces of exploitation, violence, and terror.

Robinson too recognized the shared exploitation of the emigrant laborer with that of the Indigenous laborer, who "was another of the labor forces upon which the colonial settlements of the seventeenth century depended" (77). For Robinson, he acknowledges how the English emigrant laborer was excluded from the realm of the population, and in this way, the status of the human. Robinson argues how "like the slave, legally chattel to be sold at the discretion of a

master, often the subject cruel punishment and without the rights to property, to marry without the permission of the master, or to drink in a public tavern, the white servant joined the vast excluded majority from the young republic's population" (78). It comes as no surprise then, that both the English emigrant Lois and the Indigenous servant Nattee, both dwelling in the same household, of the same family whose wealth has been made by acquiring land and by exerting no physical effort, are made to labor and move conditionally within the lifeblood of the young nation, the home, and are executed at the first instance of suspicious behavior.

"Lois the Witch" posits the three-fold threat of geographical, racial, and class Otherness embodied by Old World Europeans and Indigenous laborers. Gaskell in *North and South* conversely addresses the encroachment of the Irish proletariat as a threat to "stable" English worker/master relations, as well as the criminalization of the working-class in *Mary Barton*. I also want to address how these would earlier help to produce the conditions for the emergence of colonial America as a terror state and how Gaskell's novella narrativizes this transitional period for both the British Empire and the future of America. Considering Thomas Carlyle's construction of the Black Irish[7], national as well as racial dichotomies threaten Gaskell's proto-Victorian England depicted through her fictionalization of a 1691 colonial America. The Irish Question[8] too has social relevance to Gaskell's "Lois the Witch." Deborah Wynne reads

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[7]Thomas Carlyle, *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question, Communicated by Thomas Carlyle* , 1849.
[8]Gaskell's narrative stage being 1691, a year prior to the outbreak of the Salem witch -trials, draws an important historical link to the British persecution of Irish Catholic's in colonial Ireland of the same year. Edgar Sanderson in 1890 writes on the Irish penal laws, describing that "after the surrender of Limerick [city in Western Ireland] in 1691, the treaty which promised religious freedom to the Catholics was grossly violated and they were made subject to the action of severe 'penal laws,' passed in the Irish parliament" (50). These penal laws, as Sanderson lists, included: 'Catholics were not permitted to keep school… Intermarriage with Protestants was disallowed, in case of the possession of an estate in Ireland. Children of mixed marriages were alwa ys to be brought up in the Protestant faith… No Catholic could hold any office or honour [sic] or emolument in the state, or be a member of any corporation, or vote for members of the commons, or, if he were a peer, sit or vote in the Lords" (50). In short order, the penal laws barred Irish Catholics from political participation as well authorizing the surveillance of their private lives. Ultimately, Irish Catholics posed as a threat intent on terrorizing and compromising English Protestant

Gaskell's story as a response to the 1859 religious' revivals in Ulster, Ireland's second-largest traditional province. These religious revivals were led predominately by working-class women who "took part in spontaneous open-air prayer meetings" (87). In light of this, the Victorian press, as Wynne in tracing Gaskell's engagement with social problems both past and present as they relate to nineteenth-century England notes "compared the scenes in the north of Ireland to both the Salem witchcraft panic of 1692 and the beahaviour [sic] of women in revolutionary France" (87). Just as colonial America will be the stage for Gaskell to address contemporary social issues, so too is Victorian society more broadly looking to the past to contextualize its present.

Gaskell's setting for "Lois the Witch" marks a strategic time in terms of colonial America's witch-trials, as the outbreak of persecution and execution would be inaugurated in Salem in 1692. Contrary to what such a broad survey might suggest, Salem was not the birthplace of the American witch-trials. For instance, proceedings from the General Court meeting in Jamestown, Virginia on September 11th, 1626, would hear that Joan Wright was accused by her neighbors of witchcraft: "Mrs *Isabell Perry* sworned and examined sayeth that uppon the losinge of a logg of light wood owt of the fforte, good wiefe *Wrighte* rayled uppon a girl of good wiefe *gates* for stealing of the same, wheruppon good wiefe *gates* Charged

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principles and governmental policy. The penal laws also were also directly linked to English colonial occupation beyond the geopolitics of Ireland. As Sanderson details, "the legislation against Irish industries had its origins in the narrow and selfish spirit of commercial monopoly in England which had devised the Navigation Acts against the carrying trade of the Dutch, and was displayed by her in commercial dealings with her 'plantations' and colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Irish manufactures and trade were openly suppressed and extirpated" (51). As Sanderson's historical context helps to position a thorough engagement with the political fervor surrounding Gaskell's setting of 1691, as much as her setting of colonial America does not directly indict England's role in the persecution of Indigenous and European Other's in the Salem witch-trials, a transhistorical approach to *reading* the British Empire's colonial dealings, witnesses its imperial and colonial influences as operating in distinct ways in its occupied territories. Whether it be its direct colonial governance in Ireland or its indirect influence during the Salem witch-trials, the year 1691 helps to showcase the mobilization of the British Empire's transatlantic terror regime in a myriad of colonial settings.

the said good wiefe *Wright* with witchcrafte" ("General Court Hears Case On Witchcraft" 112)[9]. However, occurring alongside colonial America's witch-trials is the colonists' genocide against Indigenous peoples. As Margaret Ellen Newell notes: "throughout New England before 1700, and in some sub-regions thereafter… Native American servitude was the dominant form of nonwhite labor. New England armies, courts, and magistrates enslaved more than 1,300 men, women, and children in the seventeenth century alone, and bound hundreds of others into finite terms of servitude in the eighteenth century" (33). Here, the utility of American settler expansion through its manipulation of Indigenous people, has at its core objective the exploitation of Indigenous labor. Newell furthers this point, stating:

> if Indian enslavement sparked little moral, legal, or political debate and discussion among the English colonists, contemporaries were perfectly clear about its utility. Colonial governments and interested individuals offered a number of material, strategic, and social justifications for the policy of enslavement over the course of the seventeenth century. Foremost among these rationales, particularly during the critical 1630s, when enslavement first became widespread, was the overwhelming need for labor both in New England in affiliated Caribbean plantations (43).

It is important here to address how the witch-trials depicted in Gaskell's fiction are emerging during a period in which racial difference and capitalist accumulation coalesced in the colonial New World. Hota's and Nattee's servant status posit the contractual way racialized Others were not just dealt with violently but were specifically exploited for their labor during the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries. Gaskell goes so far as to link Nattee's Nativeness to transatlantic slavery. In telling stories of mysticism "herself [Nattee] believing and shuddering as she narrated her tale in broken English, took a strange, unconscious pleasure in her hearers—young girls of

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[9]It is also worth noting that by 1642, witchcraft was a capital punishment in the Colony of Connecticut. Alse Young of Windsor, Connecticut is credited as being the first person executed for witchcraft in colonial America in May of 1647.

the oppressing race, which had brought her down into a state little differing from slavery, and reduced her people to outcasts on the hunting-grounds which had belonged to her fathers" (160). The narrative characterizes Nattee as *unconscious* of how Lois Barclay and Faith Hickson, in their whiteness and Europeanness, are of the oppressive class, and how capitalist accumulation has left her in "a state little differing from slavery," along with her people's land being stolen, minimizes how terror regimes work to destabilize a *conscious recognition* of violence and terror being enacted against one's body and one's kin.

Important to Gaskell's narrative assertion here is a convergence between racial formations, how they become weaponized, and the exploitation of labor through a stabilization of a European consciousness within a colonial landscape. Jennifer L. Morgan attests to how cultural shifts became marked by the "emergence of modernity for the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, including the decoupling of wealth from mobility and the capacity to relocate and remain English, depended on the possible commodification of all bodies" (19). Just as Gaskell's novella frames the Hickson family as despising Lois's Englishness, processes of state formation in the young settler colony are entrenched in British forms of land theft and the dehumanization of Other's. Much of the text's opening discourse focuses on disillusioned fears about encroaching and unseeable Native peoples. Yet, Hota and Nattee's presence within the settlement redress this fear into a process of converting "Red Indians… evil creatures" (148) into laborers. To fully capture this Indigenous threat would not only mean expanding labor exploitation within the colony but would be used as a screen for rationalizing the unsettled disposition of the Salem people.

The disposability of Hota's and Natee's lives under the guise of being suspected as witches is intertwined with the ongoing process of emerging racial hierarchies alongside

capitalist expansion in the New World. Gaskell's narrative says as much. Her narrator characterizes the affluence of the Hickson family in a damning manner: "and by an early purchase of land in Salem village, the Hicksons had become wealthy people without any great exertions of their own; partly, also, by *the silent process of accumulation*" (emphasis added 168). Gaskell's choice of "silent" is curious here, implying a static process of land acquisition undergoing for the Hickson's and other soon-to-be landowning families intent on acquiring social and economic capital in the colony. Cedric Robinson understood what was required for "silent" accumulation to occur: "labour [sic] was the key to the development of the Americas; initially land was plentiful, capital was available to 'prime the pump' (113). In this frame, the Hicksons' acquisition of the grounds "which had belonged to her [Nattee's] fathers" (160) can forcefully be procured by rationalizing the uncivil and neglected management of the land by Indigenous peoples. Making this land sustainable means domesticating it, making it habitable and sustainable for the British Empire. Important here also, is how once "civilized," the land can adequately produce exploited laborers. Tiffany Lethabo King argues "without labor to tame the land, it is closely assigned the designation 'nature' or 'wildness'" (23). The "old forest" surrounding Salem is mysterious and dreaded so long as it remains unproductive and unexploited. The land will become settled, cultivated, and civilized once it is adequately monetized by the labor market. For example, Hota and Nattee reside and labor *within* the settlement as commodified and subjugated servants. As much as Faith Hickson sees herself one with Nattee, once the "poor Indian" woman is accused of being in league against the village, her life becomes disposable, dreaded, and threatening. She is no longer safe to the settlement, in relation to both the domestic space as well as the market.

In diagnosing the link between labor, racialization, and the witch-trials, one must turn to Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Vital to my reading of Gaskell's story is Federici's assessment of the relationship between capitalist development and the persecution of witches throughout history. Hota's and Nattee's positions as Native servants' points to English settlers' long history of colonization in the service of producing new forms of exploited labor. Federici states "it should also have seemed significant that the witch-hunt occurred simultaneously with the colonization and extermination of the populations of the New World, the English enclosures, and beginning of the slave trade" (164). Important to Hota's and Nattee's positions as laborers to the New World is how their humanity must be converted into savagery and cannibalism. Federici puts this poignantly: "defining the aboriginal populations as cannibals, devil-worshippers, and sodomites supported the fiction that the Conquest was not an unabashed quest for gold and silver but was a converting mission… it also removed, in the eyes of the world and possibly the colonizers themselves, any sanction against the atrocities which they would commit against the 'Indians', thus functioning as a licenses to kill regardless of what the intended victims might do" (221). Inherent to colonial and imperialist logic then is the necessity to dehumanize and illicit fear in those it expects to enslave and exploit. *How* dichotomies of race came to fruition directly ties into how early colonizers viewed and depicted the landscape they were intent on exploiting.

As I previously mentioned, it is the "old forests" unproductivity and the innate "uncivilized" nature of the Native peoples that threatens the proliferation of capitalist accumulation in Salem village. Kris Manjapra notes "ever since the first British settlers arrived on the North American coast in the 1600s, they saw themselves as living on frontiers where the realm of civic relationships butted up against the extended 'wastelands' of native peoples" (120).

What emerges during the era of colonial expansion is not only the process of transforming Indigenous "wastelands" into civic and civilized European settlements, but an ongoing process of defining what constitutes the human. Conceptions, productions, and transformations of what constitutes the human exist within this plain as well. Categorizations of the human, not-so-human, and never-human directly clash with "the real needs of imperialism," which is the solidifying of a homogenous settler state. Conceptions of the human are lodged within the ledgers of European expansion, and Rinaldo Walcott states plainly "the human as we know it and experience it is a fairly recent invention, less than five hundred years old, and it was forged in the context of the encounters of post-Columbus, European colonial global expansion" (71-2). State and identity formation go together. Embedded in this process is a state-fueled terror regime intent on codifying those marked by their gender, nationality, ethnicity, and race, and deemed threatening to the supremacy of a bourgeois British settler state.

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Gaskell's text is meaningful as it relates to defining the contours of transatlantic terrorism because of the way it sets the stage from a Victorian author's narrative distance to the supposedly bygone era of American colonial history, which is essential for understanding the many headed-hydra of terror ongoing during the nineteenth-century. Gaskell's narrative supposes a remoteness to the era she fictionalizes, detached from England of the nineteenth-century, but relishes in the transhistorical relationship between the emergence of the American settler colony and the long-storied violence of the British Empire. Integral to the execution and maintenance of the New World colonial order is the strategic consolidation of a racial order bent on surveilling and criminalizing those regarded as disposable and relegated to peripheral.

"Lois the Witch" is an informative examination of how Indigeneity is characteristically depicted as combative to an emerging settler body politic. From this, the colonial state of "Lois the Witch" enacts its regime of terror through the witch-trials, as those antagonistic to the settler judiciary are strategically tortured and executed. Gaskell's text posits how Otherness broadly and the native informant specifically, informs the ways racial and national identities inform agency within capitalist society, as well as its limits. Colonial terrorism is thus a product of New World identity formation as well as the violence of capitalist accumulation.

A reader is left wrestling with the necessity of addressing how the British Empire through imperial and colonial expansion, made possible by the transatlantic nature of the witch-hunt, capitalist accumulation, and the emergence of racial formations during the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries, are essential to understanding what I term, *plantation terrorism* during the nineteenth-century. In my next chapter I turn to Dion Boucicault's 1859 play *The Octoroon* to wrestle with the transactional and transnational nature of the plantation. *Plantation terrorism* works to elaborate on the colonial and settler terrorism addressed in my analysis of Gaskell's "Lois the Witch," to more fully encapsulate the violence enacted against racial and gendered bodies in the service of capitalist accumulation specifically and the global plantation economy more broadly.

# CHAPTER III: PLANTATION TERRORISM AND DION BOUCICAULT'S *THE OCTOROON*

In this chapter I examine Dion Boucicault's 1859 play *The Octoroon* through the lens of the consolidation of racial terror within the plantation, thereby extrapolating the networks of capitalist accumulation addressed in my analysis of Gaskell's portrait of New World racial subjection. The emergence of racialization and capitalist accumulation foreground the formation of the planation as a formalized domain of terror. Here, I closely analyze Zoe's complex racial identity and how once her one-eighth black ancestry is revealed, it makes possible the capacity to financially capitalize off her mixed-race genealogy. I also tend to the ways Boucicault's controversial melodrama fails to establish a staunchly anti or pro-slavery plantation landscape. As Sarika Bose writes: "*The Octoroon* was one of the most controversial plays of his [Dion Boucicault's] career; it offended pro-slavery audiences who saw it as a condemnation of the institution of slavery, but it also offended anti-slavery audiences, who saw it as a portraying slavery as a benevolent institution" (10). Attending to *The Octoroon* as a minstrel-melodrama invites inquiry toward the ways racial performativity occurs within the realm of Boucicault's fictional Louisiana plantation, as well as revealing the multiple ways such racial performativity fails to stabilize expectations about what the reader and audience ought to know about Zoe's racial make-up. Saidiya Hartman's argument about how the melodrama meant "the fashioning of blackness aroused pity and fear, desire and revulsion, terror and pleasure" (38-9) is a key through-line in this chapter, helping us to observe the breakdown of Zoe's position as vaunted English-like heroine who is then thrust into the horrors of the auction block because of her mother's enslavement. The plantation ultimately constitutes a terrain on which race and finance produce danger in *The Octoroon*.

For this chapter, I expand upon understandings of how racial formation and identity breakdown within Boucicault's caricatured depiction of a Louisiana plantation. How does the plantation then operate as a zone of terror for the enslaved in *The Octoroon*? How do enslaved persons disrupt the demands of capitalist accumulation within the plantation? I begin by first defining the parameters of the plantation drama. I want to set the stage here for how blackness is *put on* Zoe in *The Octoroon*. I next turn to how race is rendered fluid, often blurred by the play's handling and depiction of Zoe's racial legibility. Important to my reading of Zoe's transformation from English-like heroine to enslaved object, is Bridgette Fielder's framework of *relative races*, by which "the nonnormative directions in which racial inheritance sometimes flows" (1). I end by moving outside directly analyzing Boucicault's play, to grapple key features to the logics of plantation slavery. By tending to the logics of the plantation, I want to give substance to the machinery of exploitation, commodification, and (re)production that would make Terrebonne run. Through each section of my analysis of *The Octoroon* and the logics of the plantation, I argue that Boucicault's plantation drama, by which the domestic and economic features of plantation slavery are fictionalized, invites inquiry into the ways the appendages of plantation slavery, economic and abject terror, are often sanitized and sensationalized in fictions of the melodramatic sort, but even so, the dehumanizing, exploitation, and unstable forces of the plantation regime are nonetheless always visible at every point.

**Zoe, the Octoroon and the Device of Racial Terror**

*The Octoroon* opens with George Peyton returning from Europe to his uncle's Terrebonne plantation in Louisiana. George has inherited the plantation and its *property* from his late uncle Judge Peyton. Jacob M'Closky, owner of one half the plantation and former overseer, tells George that because of the estate's dire financial situation, the land and slaves are to be

auctioned off. The auction scene works to respond to the insolvency of the Terrebonne plantation, brought on by the late Peyton's accumulated debts from poor financial investments in British banks. The auction will attempt to alleviate these financial pressures, whereby a new owner can possess the freshly liquidated Terrebonne estate. Boucicault's rendering of a Southern plantation serves to stabilize, sentimentalize, and sensationalize racial violence, never quite rejecting or incriminating the institution of slavery. Instead, *The Octoroon* is fixated on recklessness and scandal, key features that would put a theatergoer on the edge of their seat. However, even if the playwright may or may not be trying to make grand statements about the institution of slavery, the inclusion of troubled racial lineages, auction block scenes, and suicide as response to the prospect of enslavement, nonetheless forces readers and viewers to witness the everyday violence of life for black peoples on the plantation.

George will fall in love with Zoe, daughter of Judge Peyton and one his slaves, but so too will M'Closky. Upon being rejected by Zoe, M'Closky sets out to reveal that she is still enslaved despite the Judge's manumission and is to be *legally* sold as part of the Terrebonne plantation. In his own pursuit of buying Terrebonne, M'Closky expects to make Zoe his mistress through financial possession. M'Closky also murders the young slave Paul, framing the lone Native American character Wahnotee, who are to recover a mail bag that would contain a letter from the Liverpool bank. The contents of this letter would dissolve the Terrebonne debt as well void M'Closky's eventual *purchase* of Zoe. In turn, the Liverpool bank letter would legitimize Zoe's manumission papers, technically for the first time. However, before the end of the play when it the Liverpool letter is recovered and Zoe has been sold on the auction block, she commits suicide rather than be possessed by M'Closky. In the American version, Zoe commits suicide to avoid marrying George: she loves him but believes she cannot marry him or keep him from marrying

Dora. The men who will have attended the auction of the Terrebonne estate and its enslaved property, will try to have M'Closky lynched for the murder of Paul. Almost simultaneously, once George learns that Terrebonne is to be his, Zoe too is in possession of a poison given to her by the enslaved Dido. Just as the plantation is to be restored to the Peyton family, in the hands of a benevolent master, its prospective heroine dies. Ultimately, *The Octoroon* stops at the threshold of imagining George married to a mixed-race woman, where the Terrebonne estate would be overseen by a woman whose own mother was enslaved on its grounds. More complicated, what would this make George's and Zoe's children? By the laws of *Partus sequitur ventrem* (that which is born follows the womb), their children would be mixed-race, making them vulnerable like their mother and grandmother once were to being enslaved.[10] There can then be no "happy ending" for Zoe, where the mandates of a plantation society always win out.

In an important way, I read Zoe's death as reckoning with the impossibility of resolve in the time of plantation slavery. M'Closky's revelation about the financial technicalities surrounding Zoe's free papers preventing her freedom and his temporary possession of her, does not substantiate alternative possibilities between possessors and the vulnerable. The dictates of plantation slavery do not make possible a prospective marriage between future inheritor of the estate and a mixed-race woman. Despite the play's ending, Zoe's racial malleability plays a crucial role throughout. Zoe's *character* early on is portrayed as exceeding the qualities of a European woman. Current overseer, Northerner Salem Scudder, highlights early on Zoe's European disposition. While conversating with George on his return from Paris, Scudder states: "'What, Zoe! Guess that you didn't leave anything female in Europe that can lift an eyelash

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[10]*Enactment of Hereditary Slavery Law Virginia 1662 Act XII*

beside that gal. When she goes along, she just leaves a streak of love behind her. It's a good drink to see her come into the cotton fields—the niggers get fresh on the sight of her'" (24). The *sight* of Zoe, implying that she radiates a racialized glow to her, is striking to those cultured in European society as well as by slaves in the cotton fields. Scudder reveals Zoe's position among the Peyton aristocrats and enslavers: "'do you know that she is the natural daughter of the judge, and that old lady thar [Mrs. Peyton] just adored anything he cared for; and this girl, that another woman would a hated, she loves as if she'd been her own child'" (26). Zoe's illegitimacy in Scudder's mind is inflected by Mrs. Peyton's compassion, acknowledging that a less *feeling* white woman would have despised her.

Compelled by his motive to possess all of Terrebonne, M'Closky is driven by his disdain for the Southern aristocracy upon which George and his aunt are apart. In a bitter protest, M'Closky tells Zoe "'curse their old families—they cut me—a bilious, conceited, thin lot of dried up aristocracy. I hate 'em. Just because my grandfather wasn't some broke-down Virginia transplant, or a stingy old Creole, I ain't fix to sit down to the same meat with them—it makes my blood so hot I feel my heart hiss'" (33). M'Closky questions how a line of secession can dictate who does and does not get to govern a plantation. However, M'Closky will use the laws of bloodlines to make it possible to purchase and possess Zoe. In M'Closky's mind, Zoe a fitting possession if he is to rise to the status of plantation owner: "'stop, Zoe; come here! How would you like to rule the house of the richest planter on Atchapalaga—eh? or say the word, and I'll buy the old barrack, and you shall be mistress of Terrebonne'" (34). In rejecting his advances, Zoe forfeits a right to the wealth and protection of whiteness in M'Closky's mind. In the fashion of the melodrama, M'Closky intends to go to any length to *posses* Zoe. In discovering Judge

Peyton's finances, M'Closky encounters the consequences of the judge's mismanagement of the Terrebonne plantation:

> fair or foul, I'll have her—take that home with you! (*Takes up paper and examines it*) Yes, 'Thibodeaux against Peyton, 1838.' Hold on! whew! this is worth taking to. In this desk the judge used to keep one paper I want—this should be it. (*Reads*) 'The free papers of my daughter, Zoe registered February 4$^{th}$, 1841.' Why, Judge, wasn't your lawyer enough to know that while a judgement stood against you, it was a lien on your slaves? Zoe is your child by a quadroon slave, and you didn't free her. Blood! if this is so, she's mine! (emphasis original 37).

Crucial at this point in Boucicault's play, and what the revealing of these defunct free papers and the ensuing danger conveys how the plantation makes possible the commodification of black bodies as well as the blurring of racial identity. It is by M'Closky accidentally coming across Zoe's free papers and his knowledge of the current debts held against Terrebonne, that put Zoe's freedom in jeopardy. Before this point, Zoe's racial lineage has been relegated to the background, spoken of in offhand remarks by Scudder when talking about how other white women would treat someone *like* Zoe. Even if functioning as a plot point to draw attention to M'Closky's schemes, Zoe's free papers more importantly constitute the fractures and susceptibility freedom is for those vulnerable to being (re)possessed by the logics of the plantation.

With Zoe's free papers in hand and the explicit understanding of a judgment held against Judge Peyton, meaning his debtor was given the rights to the property (the slaves), the scene is set for M'Closky to pounce on the financial woes of a faltering plantation and family. The rights of the Terrebonne plantation in this case will be lost to its supposed inheritor, George Peyton, and so too will the romance between him and Zoe be severed. Zoe tells George as much: "'there is a gulf between us, as wide as your love—as deep as my despair; but, oh, tell me, say you will pity me! that you will pity me! that you will not throw me from you like a poisoned thing'" (42).

Not only can Zoe and George not legally marry, but she is to be rendered unhuman, allocated to the status of property when the Terrebonne plantation and enslaved are to be auctioned. Zoe's free papers represent a symbolic flux between what constitutes the human and unhuman, the free and unfree in the age of slavery. At play here is the ways in which the force of law is embedded within the free papers, thus untethering Zoe's claim to freedom, as well as reveling in the fraught relationship between racial genealogy and Judge Peyton's lingering debt that legally renders her enslaved.

Reading Zoe's blackness as in some capacity tied to the terms of the free papers and their ability to make one free or enslaved, constitutes the force by which capitalism is embodied and legislated within the black body. Tiffany Lethabo King states that "under slavery and conquest, the Black body becomes the ultimate symbol of accumulation, malleability, and flux, existing outside human coordinates of space and time" (122). The ability to *make* Zoe free and/or enslaved represents the means by which to exist outside the "human coordinates of space and time," whereby one's corporeality is controlled the language of economic and political legalese. *The Octoroon* raises troubling concerns about what it means to *read* Zoe's black identity in regard to the nullification of her freedom based on existing debts. The chief issue is that such a reading reinforces the "one drop of black blood" doctrine that Zoe herself is troubled by: "'of the blood that feeds my heart, one drop in eight is black—bright red as the rest may be, that one drop poisons all the blood'" (43). Important then for readers grappling with how amounts of blood define Zoe's racial identity, is being attentive to the ways in which characters as well as the play itself, regard Zoe as black when it sees fit, as well as identifying her as not quite so in other instances. For example, where exactly does M'Closky's desire for Zoe lie? Does the threshold of desire cross between Zoe's identity as a possible enslaved black woman and her being identified

as a woman of refined English sensibilities? The myriad ways of regarding Zoe's racial identity and free/enslaved status in relation to free papers, represents the terrorizing force by which the slave statute by which children follow the line of the mother dictates claims to the human and unhuman, free and enslaved.

The play's alternative endings emphasize the fraught relationship between the financial device of slavery, Zoe's free papers, and how these endings envision alternative frameworks for either becoming entrenched in the force of slavery or in its suppleness. Upon opening in London, Boucicault's "American ending" remains intact. However, as Sarika Bose notes on the first London performances of the play "British reviewers expressed strong disapproval at the tragic ending of the play, criticizing it as an aesthetic even more than an ethical failure" (12). Boucicault did not hesitate to manufacture an alternative ending for London theatre goers, knowing without such changes, the plays production would impact his pocketbook and ego. Needing to pander to Londoners "in response to this criticism Boucicault revised the play's ending, with Zoe's reprieve and averted suicide first presented on 9 December 1861, and *The Octoroon* soon became an even greater sensation in London than in New York" (12). Boucicault's American ending, where Zoe drinks poison brewed by the enslaved woman Dido, sees Zoe herself undermining the currency of the free papers defining her freedom or enslavement. In her dying words, Zoe protests "'when I am dead she [Dora] will not be jealous of your love for me, no laws will stand between us'" (75). In grappling with the American ending, Lisa Merrill and Theresa Saxon argue:

> given Zoe's mixed-race body and the interracial marriage to her that George has proposed, paradoxically *The Octoroon* could be regarded as either portraying an antislavery sentiment in its sympathetic depiction of the sexual horrors confronting enslaved women who are forbidden to marry, or the play could be considered a proslavery tract, since Zoe's death left her white lover free to marry Dora, the white

> Southern-woman character who throughout the play expressed her attraction to George and was originally unaware of his love for Zoe (132).

With both endings, Boucicault gives both sides of the American slavery debate a hope for envisioning its future: the end or maintenance of Southern plantation relations.[11] Regardless, the new plantation owner George is to have one of the women he desires and who desire him. The white Dora Sunnyside and her familiarity with plantation life, or Zoe, the heroine of Terrebonne and child of the exploitive sexual relations between planters and the enslaved on the plantation, are equally at George's disposal, and in either case, *The Octoroon* sees its new heir as either sticking with custom or choosing with his heart.

In either the American or British ending, the *force* of Zoe's free papers are (re)negotiated. Zoe's suicide attests to the internal force by which she herself recognizes the legitimacy of her enslavement upon which the nullified free paper's assert. In another way, a union between Zoe and George articulates the swiftness upon which such authorized forms of racialization become defunct and traversed. However, one must negotiate the fact that M'Closky killing Paul and the arrival of the letter alleviating the Terrebonne plantation's debt, *free* Zoe from enslavement or complicate the fact she kills herself before learning of the estate's fate. How then does racialization transpire within and beyond the freeing/enslaving device of the free papers? Can one consider Boucicault's endings as exploring the fraught and irredeemable nature of the

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[11]In Boucicault's London rewrites, the play's ending and its intentionality on the part of the playwright are in flux. Boucicault's revision includes an ending promising the George and Zoe marry, "although no marriage is seen to take place on stage" (Merrill and Saxon 137). Boucicault's personal relationship to this revised ending is a fraught one: "yet, in acceding to and authorizing the change in the script's ending, Boucicault, once on British soil, agreed to reverse the prejudice against 'amalgamation' that prohibited interracial marriages in the antebellum United States… by changing the ending, the playwright stood to gain financially" (Merrill and Saxon 139). Yet, Boucicault writes in *The Times* (London) in 1861 that, had Zoe been saved "and the drama brought to a happy end, the horrors of her position, irremediable from the very nature of the institution of slavery, would subside into the condition of a temporary annoyance" (5).

written record of freedom and enslavement? How then is *race written* into this record, and how does it exude beyond its boundaries?

**Race as Relative: The Making of Racial Legibility**

Questions of how race is written and performed in *The Octoroon* attest to the relative and fluid nature of racial identity. An essential feature of the plantation is that racial identities and their accompanying status, constitute one's relation to labor and capital, and need be clearly legible. Yet, it also true that the plantation *requires* racial identities be fluid, (ex)chanable at the will of owners, putting into a bind the way in which race is conscripted by and on the plantation. Race, the body, and flesh are thus related in so far as they constitute the subject-positions by which the plantation zone differentiates based on free and unfree as well as human, not-quite-human, and unhuman. The legal complexity of Zoe's racial identity puts the plantation's surveillance and codification of racial embodiment into a bind. Zoe's mixed-race ancestry highlights the messiness of reproductive and sexual violence on the plantation. The plantation operates as a locale through which and by which flesh becomes differentiated and commodified. Hortense J. Spillers makes a distinction between the body and flesh and imposes this "distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse or the reflexes of iconography" (206). Flesh becomes the "primary narrative" by which the wounding of slavery is registered. I read the racial legibility of flesh as a process by which the ruptures and wounding of plantation slavery, which for Spillars "render[s] a kind of hieroglyphic of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color" (207). Narrative analyses of the flesh tend to the processes of wounding that dictate the "cultural seeing" by which skin color is dependent.

One of the most melodramatic scenes in *The Octoroon*, and at the crux of the romance plot, has Zoe ask George if he wants to *see* and *touch* her blackness. With hand in hand, Zoe asks: "'George, do you see that hand you hold; look at these fingers, do you see the nails are of a blueish tinge?'" (42). Zoe further conceptualizes how an intimacy between her, and George is separated along racial lines, in evoking botanical imagery of the black body: "'could you see the roots of my hair you would see the same dark fatal mark. Do you know what that is?... That—that is the ineffaceable curse of Cain. Of the blood that feeds my heart, one drop in eight is black—bright red as the rest may be, that one drop poisons all the blood'" (43). Zoe's fingernails and hair roots draw her in connection to an enslaved past. Lucy Sheehan argues how "while the 'seven bright drops of blood' that belong to the white men of her family tree recall the hopefulness of morning dew, the 'one drop' of Blackness she has inherited from her enslaved mother forms a set of 'roots' that emerge at the hair and nails" (341). Zoe's racial fluidity in *The Octoroon* places her in both an intimate and exploitive relation to both George and plantation slavery, making tangible her *capacity for reproducing* enslaved subjects.

As much as Zoe's (ex)changeable racial identity serves as the central dilemma of *The Octoroon*, it is worth noting what the *performance* of blackness meant in Boucicault's nineteenth-century context. Boucicault's play works to create a different kind of (ex)changeable racial identity, whereby Zoe's complex racial lineage represents the 'truths' of the playwright's rendering of racialization within his depiction of Southern plantation slavery, and only becomes negotiable once the free papers arrive on the scene. Jane Kathleen Curry notes how "in Boucicault's script and his own productions of the play, the use of blackface and redface is not pointed up in any way. Whiteness is the default setting and whites maintain the power to define and regulate racial others" (49). Blackface and redface do not *mark* or *make* the actors in *The*

*Octoroon* the race they are performing, only that Boucicault is attempting to produce an "authentic" depiction of plantation life. As such racist dramatizations would garner controversy from twenty-first century audiences, it would not be perceived as spectacle in its production time. Boucicault strategically relies "on conventions of the minstrel stage with actors in blackface depicting the happy slaves of Terrebonne," as part of the plays assumed authentic depiction of plantation life and racial embodiment during the nineteenth-century (Curry 40). An audience would know that Zoe's character would be performed by a white actress not in blackface, making it important for the script itself to imply her racial ancestry. Therefore, M'Closky's reading of Zoe's free papers is crucial to one's *reading* of Zoe's (ex)changeable racial identity. Of course, Scudder raises concern about Zoe's race early on in the play, stating to George: "'and this girl, that another woman would a hated, she [Mrs. Peyton] loves as if she'd been her own child'" (26). Putting into motion George's and Zoe's tense conversation over their ill-fated love on the basis of her black blood, is M'Closky's observation of Judge Peyton's failed manumission of his daughter: "'Zoe is your child by a quadroon slave, and you didn't free her'" (37). What exactly would it entail to have Zoe *appear* one-eighth black on stage? This is an impossible and unfathomable task, but hearing and reading *quadroon* at this point has readers and audience goers *seeing* Zoe as black, in a way that implies a racial taintedness that is not seeable but is always and forever present.

The ordinariness of blackface performance on the nineteenth century stage is precisely the mode by which stage productions like *The Octoroon* codified the racial demarcations of plantation slavery. The link between racialization and blackface performance, as Eric Lott notes, is a clear one: "the primary purpose of the mask [blackface], then, may have been as much to maintain control over a potentially subversive act as to ridicule, though blackface performers'

attempts at regulation also appear to have been capable of producing an aura of 'blackness.' The incident suggests the danger of the simple public display of black practices and the offering of them for white enjoyment" (228). Performing *in* blackface projects a fraught tension between racial production, regulation, and pleasure. Ultimately, white subjectivity determines the threshold through which blackness is negotiated and consumed. Writing of the proslavery imagination in the antebellum North and the minstrel stage, Douglas A. Jones argues that "of all the antebellum cultural practices that shaped normative expectations of how African Americans should conduct themselves, blackface minstrelsy was the most formative… in response to economic depression of the late 1830s and early 1840s as well as its own commercialization, the form began to solidify its pro-plantation ideology and nostalgia" (51). In line with the commodifying process of plantation slavery through the degradation and dehumanization of black peoples, blackface performance commercialized blackness as well as debased black cultural and social existence.

Analyzing nineteenth-century American audiences and adaptations of Shakespeare, Andre Carlson notes "in the nineteenth century, *Othello* presented a challenge to a Shakespeare-adoring white public. While the dominant society understood African Americans to be a biologically and culturally inferior race, Shakespeare's play offered a noble black man engaged in a sexual relationship with a white woman" (176). Othello would become a "popular source for the minstrel stage because it allowed white Americans to combine a love and knowledge of the bard's works with their racial obsessions" (Carlson 176). The theatre then becomes a space by which to witness race through the suspended reality of the stage with attentive and obsessive eyes. In this capacity, the nineteenth century theatre need be understood as a *white space*, one that had the regular patronage of white people, but where blackness enters this space in a

controlled manner, intent on captivating and shocking theatregoers. Writing for the *Massachusetts Review* in 1970, Allan W.C. green sees how "the whole minstrel show was a fabrication of white performers, having no roots whatever in the American slave population." What features then of plantation slavery are white performers and audience members enacting and witnessing in these minstrel and melodrama plays? Lisa Merrill writing on the staging of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* observes how "'mock auctions' offered audiences some aspects of *both* forms of persuasive 'proof' integral to popular depictions of slavery: the ethos of truth claims and actual testimony evidenced in slave narratives presented on the speakers' platform coupled with the pathos inherent in melodramatic and spectatorial depictions of the brutality to which enslaved women were subject in theatrical productions" (133). *The Octoroon* is no different. The auctioning of Zoe serves as the pretense for planter elites to negotiate the terms of plantation codes, which includes legitimizing her black ancestry through the sale and possession of her flesh, which for the early portions of the play, has been of little significance to the characters. Just as such, earning that she is not free by the terms of her manumission, Zoe begins to question the *value* of her body on the block: "'Oh! must I learn from these poor wretches how much I owe, and how I ought to pay the debt?'" (56). Curiously, it is as if Zoe considers her very existence as a debt, where her father as the enslaver of her mother has made her vulnerable to the economic and physical exploits of the plantation. The auction block thus unsettles in Zoe's mind any past ties she once had to freedom: "'Have I slept upon the benefits I received, and never saw, never felt, never knew that I was forgetful and ungrateful? Oh my father! my dear, dear father! forgive your poor child; you made her life too happy, and now these tears will flow; let me hide them till I teach my heart. Oh, my—my heart!'" (56). For Zoe, the terms of her freedom are an internal struggle, having to wrap her mind around her future

enslavement, as if the Peyton family in totality aren't to blame. But how could *The Octoroon* do such a thing? Zoe's proximity to whiteness, in both appearance and relation to domestic care, presents the Peytons as doing everything in their power to give Zoe a good life. Thus, freeing her from enslavement even if not legally permissible as well as Mrs. Peyton's thoughtfulness toward her, depict the Louisiana family as saviors and nurturing.

The construction of blackness *through* white desire, pleasure, and regulation is crucial for how Zoe's fungible racial identity flows and contorts in *The Octoroon*. Lott writing of "the white male traffic in racial degradation" regarding blackface performance observes that "'black' figures were there *to be looked at*, shaped to the demands of desire; they were screens on which audience fantasy could rest, securing white spectators' position as superior, controlling, not to say owning figures" (emphasis original 28). As Lott argues, to this end "'blackness' provided the inspiration as well as the occasion for preposterously violent, sexual, or otherwise prohibited theatrical material that evinced how unsettling was the black power white performers intended to subjugate" (28-9). The revelation of Zoe's blackness then puts into motion the subjection that awaits here, as her whole leisure and safe existence swiftly collapses, as she endures the shame of being auctioned off and chooses suicide as an alternative to the possible sexual subjection that would come with being enslaved by M'Closky. Along what lines then does the *performance of blackness* or the *construction of blackness* become enmeshed with the very fabric of a black/white divide? Works like *The Octoroon* showcase "the elasticity of blackness and its capacious affects enabled such flights and becomings" (Hartman 36). Ultimately, the pleasures

and tensions educed by the minstrel stage, with its "figurative capacities of blackness and the fungibility of the commodity are directly linked" (Hartman 36).[12]

Zoe is read as both a captivating English-esque heroine as well as *containing* the "black drop" of her enslaved mother. Through Boucicault's construction, Zoe is depicted as transcending European femininity and beauty, who ought to be a perfect match for the European educated George. Zoe is not only refined in appearance, but in character as well. Mrs. Peyton states: "'if you [Scudder] spoiled her, I fear I have. She has had the education of a lady'" (25). These claims to refinement and distinction are wrought in Zoe's mind. Eventually, Zoe unveils her (ex)changeable racial identity to George: "'but the one black drop gives me despair, for I'm an unclean thing—forbidden by the laws—I'm an Octoroon'" (43). Zoe *reads* beneath the flesh, what only blood can reveal. In having George view her fingernails and the roots to her hair, Zoe makes it ever present that her body *reads* as black, even if it takes a keen eye to notice. One then must *work* to identify Zoe as legibly and noticeably black. It is essential to understand Zoe's racial identity as fluid, in that her whiteness decided her past, and that her present and future are defined by the "'ineffaceable mark of Cain'" (43).

Bridgette Fielder's conceptual frame of *race as relative* is useful as it relates to Zoe's (ex)changeable racial identity. Through close examination of nineteenth-century literature, history, and popular culture, Fielder writes of an alternative to how race is ascribed through genealogical transmission, arguing: "race is not simply constructed according to heteronormative

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[12] The inherent subjugation of chattel slavery is intertwined with the emotive force of performing blackness on white dominated stages. Hartman contends, "the ability to put on blackness must be considered in the context of chattel slavery and the economy of enjoyment that subtends it, Antebellum formations of pleasure, even those of the North, need be considered in relation to the affective dimensions of racial slavery, since enjoyment is virtually unimageable without recourse to the black body and the subjection of the captive" (37). The black body on stage contains an unlimited supply of signification, "launched by the myriad uses of the sentient object" (37).

trajectories. Rather, race follows different lineages in narratives of interracial kinship, which themselves defy neat boundaries between races and clear correlations of familial and racial identification" (3). Salem Scudder argues that Mrs. Peyton has been *like* a mother to Zoe: "'and this girl, that another woman would a hated, she loves as if she'd been her own child'" (26). However, in historical and material analysis of the gendered powers at play in the plantation household, Thavolia Glymph notes "the psychological and political needs of masters and mistresses to see themselves as honorable, just, and loved by their slaves no doubt encouraged a kind of blindness to inconsistencies that could be sated in expressions of ambivalence as well as justified by religious teaching, racist thinking, or paternalism" (29). Is it possible for the symbolic white mother to sever completely the "natural daughter" from her connections to her enslaved mother? In sorting through the late Judge Peyton's financial records, M'Closky resurfaces Zoe's slave ancestry: "'Zoe is your child by a quadroon slave, and you didn't free her'" (37). Mrs. Peyton as Zoe's figurative mother becomes ruptured as the financial failures of the Terrebonne plantation unearths Zoe's mother as having been racialized property. This too is the play's first mention of Zoe's mother, and it is worth noting that as she is depicted as having been a "quadroon slave," and as well we know, Zoe's father was her slave master and she is chattel property.

Terrebonne's financial disarray brings out from the shadows, *partus sequitur ventrem*, "that which is born follows the womb," as affirmed through the *Enactment of Hereditary Slavery Law Virginia 1662 Act XII*. The law states, "that all children borne in this country shalbe [sic] held bond or free according to the condition of the mother." The Virginia Grand Assembly will go so far as to legislate out of the body politic the tainting of whiteness, by criminalizing interracial relations, in order to make clear who constitutes free and enslaved persons. In 1691,

the Virginia assembly passes "An act for suppressing outlying slaves," which proclaims: "and for prevention of that abominable mixture and spurious issue which hereafter may encrease [sic] in this dominion, as well as by all negroes, mulattoes, and Indians intermarrying with English, or other white women, as by their unlawfull [sic] accompanying with one another" (86-7). Interestingly, this mandate is issued at the time "Lois the Witch" takes place, which too sees the witch trials as working to prevent "that abominable mixture" (86) between settlers and Indigenous peoples and English emigrants. Gesturing back to the juridical strictures imposed during the colonial period as channeling enslavement through the black mother while simultaneously criminalizing interracial relations, reckons with the coercive and imbalanced sexual power relations between white male masters and black female slaves on the plantation. Zoe having George see her blue-tinged fingernails and the dark roots of her hair, motions to the "abominable mixture" (86) of her black and white ancestry imposed by New World legislation. Even if the 1662 Virginia Assembly had no conceptualization of people of color having future access to limited forms of freedom, Zoe's free-papers and what it reveals about her enslaved mother, as well as rupturing her relationship to her symbolic as well as foster mother Mrs. Peyton, each connection follows along "different lineages" upon which, "neat boundaries between races and clear correlations of familial and racial identification" become dislodged and messy (Fielder 3). For example, *The Octoroon* in either its American or English staging's, does not dramatize a marriage between George and Zoe. This is precisely because, as much as the play argues that Zoe possesses English sensibilities as well as appearing white, their children would in fact be "black." Just as readers and audiences have had to hang on by thread, hoping Zoe wouldn't be enslaved by M'Closky, a similar fate would be cast upon her children, regardless of whose possession she would come under. Without overtly expressing such issues,

*The Octoroon* highlights the cyclical nature of fluid racial identities as well problems of comprehending these identities as capable of expressing monolithic conceptualizations of freedom or enslavement within the plantation zone.

One might argue that Zoe's enslaved mother conjurers up the horrifying prospect of enslavement for a young girl, who for the most part, has lived a refined life among the Southern planter class. However, there are not many mentions of Zoe's mother. In expecting George to consider the impossibility of an intimacy between them, Zoe faulters in implicating her mother as the reason: "'and what I say? I—my mother was—no, no—not her! Why should I refer the blame to her?'" (42). Zoe is unable to evoke her mother's enslavement, and conversely, her blackness. Dawn Lundy Martin writing of what compel the creation of a black poetics, foregrounds that "to imagine the black body is to imagine the creative is to imagine the discomfort" (159). Once the black body enters the realm of the utterable, entering the social as an object-not-person, Martin questions: "what is more disruptive to the American fantasy of itself than this black or brown body, that lurks and hulks, the one that opens and spills, that is uncontained and uncontainable, unbreakable/brutal, and just as fragile, the one that threatens the imaginary fabric of what weaves us all together?" (159). Zoe's enslaved mother, the one who "lurks and hulks," also threatens the "imaginary fabric" that constitutes an impediment to her and George's intimacy: "'the laws forbid it!'" (Boucicault 42).

Much of what will make Zoe's lost freedom devastating for white audience goers is the emotional impact it has on the Southern white aristocrats who have cared for her. In a broader sense, for Mrs. Peyton to both lose Zoe and all the people enslaved on Terrebonne, is to lose all her children: "'I do not speak for my own sake, nor for the loss of the estate, but for the poor people here… heaven has denied me children, so all the strings of my heart have grown around

me and amongst them like fibres [sic] and roots of an old tree in its native earth'" (50). One witnesses with Mrs. Peyton's sentiment a paternalism characteristic of the benevolent slave master or mistress. The enslaved then are not only tied to the plantation space, but also to the emotive force of the landscape's benefactors. Mrs. Peyton's imagined maternal relations between herself and the Terrebonne slaves reflects the ways race as relative "reimagines the relationship between race and family. It also reimagines the spaces of racialization as happening not simply within the body and through racial self-articulation, but also through familial recognition" (Fielder 4). For Mrs. Peyton, the Terrebonne slaves are rendered child-like, and to sever the estate from its rightful heirs the Peyton family, is to affectively dissolve an affective relation, but not a legal one. The "strings" of Mrs. Peyton's heart have also *grown* around the enslaved "like fibres and roots of an old tree in its native earth." The family for Mrs. Peyton is *rooted* in the land. The cash crop cotton isn't the 'plant' in Mrs. Peyton's vision of the plantation but is instead an enduring and uncultivated tree native to the land.

Mrs. Peyton's claim to an imaginative familial relation to plantation slaves is an important feature by which racialization is dependent on bodies being placed in relation to one another. Fielder points out: "race is relational, or 'relative,' in that it is not simply embodied by an individual but constructed as racialized bodies are placed into relation with or in comparison to one another" (5). In a sense, race as relative centers the ways in which race is relationally constructed, and for Mrs. Peyton, this means conveying a sense of maternity toward the Terrebonne slaves. The inaccessibility of a self-articulated kinship by the enslaved recalls Frederick Douglass's *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), upon which Douglass is attentive to slavery's process of annihilating any semblance of a distinct enslaved family produced through and by black and enslaved

peoples. In the opening to *Narrative*, Douglass recalls his own forced separation from his mother: "my mother and I were separated when I was but infant—before I knew her as my mother" (13). Off this reflection, Douglass works through why such a rationale for the severance of kin ties between the enslaved is necessary for the plantation system to function: "frequently, before the child has reached its twelfth month, its mother is taken from it, and hired out on some farm a considerable distance off… for what this separation is done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder the development of the child's affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the inevitable result" (13). In the case of *The Octoroon*, it is quite possible that Zoe's mother is "Hired out on some far a considerable distance off," removed from caring for her daughter, which is redirected toward Mrs. Peyton, who is regarded as maternal and benevolent. There is little to no mention of Zoe's mother, but what we do know is that Zoe has affection for her father, and that Mrs. Peyton raised her as if she were one her own (white) children. Yet, it is with the resurfacing and illegitimacy of Zoe's free paper's that conjures Zoe's matrilineal relationship to slavery. Even a brief thought about her mother and what her inability to marry George means as it regards her mother's enslavement, is too much: "'I—my mother was—no, no—not her!'" (42). How would the *presence* of Zoe's enslaved mother disturb how audience and reader understand her daughter's relationship to the Peyton's and to Terrebonne? Making Zoe's mother *appear* as her daughter discloses her racial lineage to George materializes the many violences perpetrated against this briefly mentioned enslaved black woman. In effect, giving Zoe's mother shape offer up a few questions: 1). knowing that the power dynamics between master and slavery are never truly equal or consensual, how does the plantation's perpetuation of sexual violence and the (re)productive potential of offspring (Zoe) impact one's reading of Zoe's mother's relationship to Judge Peyton,

the alleged benevolent slave master? 2). how might we read the fact Zoe's mother isn't present, as relating to the process of severing intimate kinship bonds between enslaved parents and children? 3). and lastly, how does Zoe's racial legibility as an "octoroon" and not a "quadroon" like her mother, protect her initially from a life of enslavement, but ultimately, the *arithmetic of blood* dooms her to her mother's fate, a life as subjected property? In each possibility, Zoe is unable to outrun the fate/lineage of her mother entirely.

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It is worth flipping the focus of racial identity being inscribed through the mother, and instead, exploring racialization through the lens of a black father and white mother, when considering the lie of the savage rapist black man and the chaste white woman of the Jim Crow era, and how such consideration is meaningful for understanding how racial genealogy and gender dynamics are reproduced within and beyond the plantation zone. How does such a familial relation attempt to legitimize property as belonging to the white patriarch? I raise this concern to foreclose the idea that the "racial biologism" of *following the line of the mother* is "inherently heteronormative, prioritizing biological reproduction and futurity, and ignoring other forms of race-making and kinship-making" (Fielder 7). Reading race through the mother reproduces the logics of patriarchy, and which Fielder points out "is inherent to white supremacy's ever-reaching effects on processes of racialization that sometimes but do not always follow predictable patterns… other linear paths, other genealogies are possible" (7). Even Zoe's white father, Judge Peyton, isn't technically present in the play, but is depicted through second-hand remarks, just as her mother is. But as such, *The Octoroon* presents Judge Peyton as existing off screen as carrying the weight of narrative and economic significance. As much as Zoe's enslaved future is tied to her mother's mixed-race ancestry, the failures of her father need be read

as resulting in the collapse of freedom into prospective enslavement. Whether it be his financial failures or the very real coercive and violent nature of his relations with Zoe's mother, the condition of any given slave is perpetrated and maintained by the logics of white supremacy throughout the plantocracy.

A meaningful case in point is Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859) where a light-skinned black girl, Frado, must constantly traverse the violence's and anxieties enacted and enforced by her white New Hampshire employers. Unlike Zoe, Frado's black father and white mother are both present. Frado's mother, Mag Smith, is a 'fallen woman,' for whom "every year her melancholy increased, her means diminished" (9). It is a "kind-hearted, African," Jim, who will "set about devising measures for her relief" (9-10). It isn't a white male savior, the likes of a Judge Peyton, who is tasked in economic alleviation, but a black man intent on "saving" a socially and economically vulnerable white woman. The two will marry and "time levied an additional charge upon him, in the form of two pretty mulattos, whose infantile pranks amply repaid the additional toil" (14). The economy of family is different for Jim than it is for Zoe's mother. Ultimately, Judge Peyton's *care* for Zoe's mother leads to his decision to free Zoe, where her mother has no legitimate claim to the future safety of her daughter. With the absence of Zoe's mother throughout, *The Octoroon* does not even remotely consider such a possibility. Zoe's enslavement and/or freedom is dependent on her late biological father's choice to compose free papers for her. What one also learns, is Judge Peyton's decision to free Zoe depends on his own finical acumen as well as the surplus value of the Terrebonne estate. Essentially, with bad or no credit, one cannot free their mixed-race children even if they are plantation-owning white men.

Jim dies from consumption and Mag will marry his business partner Seth Shipley, and "she was now expelled from companionship with white people; this last step—her unition with a black—was the climax of repulsion" (15). The bulk of Wilson's novel deals with Frado's life with the Northern white family the Bellmonts. Frado's racial ancestry lingers throughout the novel as her racialized laboring body is constantly examined by her white benefactors. One of the Bellmont sons, Jack, upon seeing Frado, in response to *what* the family should do with the abandoned six-year-old, protests: "'keep her,' said Jack. 'She's real handsome and bright, and not very black either'" (25). Frado, unlike Zoe, is to remain at a point of stasis, never truly experiencing the sheer dehumanizing brutality of plantation slavery, as she is an indentured servant, but is never truly free from racialized violence, as she endures constant abuses from the likes of Mrs. Bellmont and her daughter Mary.

Much like Mrs. Peyton's maternal care for Zoe through her willingness to have her educated, supposed acts of care from white benefactors always presents an air of coercion. Mrs. Bellmont on having Frado live with the family, puts this succinctly: "'I do not mind the nigger in the child. I should like a dozen better than one… I have so much trouble with the girls I hire, I am almost persuaded if I have one to train up in my way from a child, I shall be able to keep them awhile" (26). Despite being light skinned, both Zoe and Frado are seen as ripe for both domestic and slave labor. Frado's father was free-born instead of enslaved, which places her in the realm and violence of domestic labor rather than chattel slavery. Is it that Zoe's mother was a slave and not a white woman, the essential (re)productive body of the regime of slavery, which makes possible Zoe's (ex)changeability from the domestic comforts of the Terrebonne big house to the terror of the auction block? In the case of Frado, freedom appears as a horizon in reach but never truly reachable, whereas Zoe's racial lineage presents the ways racial fluidity dissolves the

boundaries between freedom and enslavement, as well as possibility and terror. Rather than a narrative of enslavement attaining freedom, Zoe's parable reverses fates. Both Frado and Zoe, as well as Douglass, nonetheless affirm how nonlinear patterns of racialization are stabilized by the violation(s) of slavery and labor, showcasing how the laws of racial identity that dictate the plantation zone also operate beyond its boundaries.

The process by which *The Octoroon* presents and disturbs Zoe's relationship to freedom, as well the other Terrebonne slaves' relationship to their master and mistress, are dependent on the plantation's present economic failures, the prospect of the estate being salvaged by the future post-abolition British amelioration schemes, and/or the slave market as a viable means for alleviating the estate's debt by auctioning on land and human flesh. Regardless of the path forward for Terrebonne, black flesh need be always understood first and foremost as property. The ability to (re)translate Zoe into a saleable quantity, no longer the fair-skinned maiden adored by Scudder, Mrs. Peyton, and George, is to be reminded that the planation is a terrain by which racialization is consolidated and white supremacy is maintained and legitimated, as well as a landscape that will go to any length to maintain its authority over those by which it can commodify and terrorize.

**The Auction Block: Dictates of the Plantation Economy**

Attending to the villainy of plantation owner and once Terrebonne overseer M'Closky, readers and audience members become aware of Zoe's nullified free papers on account of Judge Peyton's existing debts. This point is crucial, as Judge Peyton's debt is mixed up with "'this old Liverpool debt,'" which relates to the 1838 bankruptcy of Mason Brothers, a Liverpool bank (37). Zoe's free papers were signed in 1841, in which Mrs. Peyton reflects: "'the house of Mason Brothers, of Liverpool, failed some twenty years ago in my husband's debt'" (33). M'Closky

tells the widowed woman that she can't believe it possible to recover such a large debt. In Mrs. Peyton's mind though, there is hope: "'yes, the firm has recovered itself, and I received a notice two months ago that some settlement might be anticipated'" (33). Plantation economies are thus dependent and tied to a global network of slavery. In this light, capitalist economies are dependent on the success of other capitalist nations, and the economic collapses of places like Liverpool reverberate to other plantation zones like Louisiana. Yet, Mrs. Peyton's attention to the 'recovery' of the Liverpool bank underlines the ebb and flow of security and vulnerability of the plantation economy.

I return to M'Closky's locating of Zoe's free papers as it relates to his task of intercepting in the mail a letter from Mason Brothers, in which a government remission to the bankrupt bank Judge Peyton owed fifty-thousand dollars, will be paid to the Peytons, in which turn will financially *save* Terrebonne. M'Closky intercepts this letter by killing Paul who is tasked with retrieving the mail. He will then frame Paul's Native American companion Wahnotee for his murder. The letter reads thus: "'Madam, we are instructed by the firm of Mason and Co. to inform you that a dividend of forty per cent is payable on the 1st proximo; this amount in consideration of position, they send herewith'" (45). It is worth noting how such a firm would come into such an amount, sufficient enough to mitigate the Peyton debts. Lucy Sheehan in examining time and history as racialized processes in Boucicault's play as well as Branden Jacobs-Jenkins *An Octoroon* (2014), reads the collapse of the Liverpool bank in 1838 aligns with the abolition of slavery in the British West Indian colonies during the 1830s.[13] Sheehan

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[13] In its wake, a system of apprenticeship will be erected, requiring emancipated slaves to work for their former masters for up to six years. Colonial assemblies will abolish the apprentice system in 1838. Now with a legally oppressed labor force in the West Indies, economic pressures will make themselves felt in Britain. During the 1840s then, financial compensation will be doled out to British planters as remission for the financial impacts brought by emancipation and abolition.

highlights how “Boucicault ties Zoe’s reenslavement to the financial consequences of British abolition—consequences that would to some extend be reversed with the dispensation of compensation which might explain how the Liverpool firm has ‘recovered itself’ by the time of the plays opening (though not in time to thwart tragedy)” (339). As Sheehan demonstrates, then, *The Octoroon* implicitly connects British abolition and emancipation to the economic disarray of the Terrebonne plantation in Louisiana. The reverberations of slavery as a transatlantic enterprise are felt and recognized in Boucicault’s play through the inclusion of not only Britain’s own slavey economy, but the direct impact it has on the American plantocracy.

The *failure* of Zoe’s free papers to sufficiently secure her freedom underlines the malleability of documents capable of issuing freedom and deciding enslavement. The mere loss of the Liverpool bank letter will lead to not only the nullification of Zoe’s free papers, but to the ensuing slave auction that will sever enslaved families like those of Pete with his son Solon. If not for Scudder’s interjection between Jackson and Ratts, a planter and ship captain, a rescinded bid will keep Solon from being separated from his wife Grace, as well as their two children Saul and Victoria. It is Ratts who had purchased Solon, Scudder will remind Jackson: “‘this gal and them children belong to that boy Solon there. You’re bidding to separate them, Judge’” (59). In a ploy of sympathy, Jackson calls to “‘take back my bid’” (59). It is as if in righting this mishap, making sure it is Ratts who purchases Solon as well as his wife and two kids, the slave family remains intact and fruitful. The Terrebonne slave auction is a salve for Judge Peyton’s accrued debts, but it is also a way to sever or maintain enslaved communities and families, as the auctioneers see fit.

Act three takes place in “A Room in Mrs. Peyton’s house. An auction bill stuck up. Solon and Grace discovered” (46). The Terrebonne plantation *itself* becomes a space to assuage Judge

Peyton's fraught investment in the English slaving economy. As the stage descriptions attest, the room within the plantation home becomes an improvised slave auction: "enter Scudder, George, Ratts, Caillou, Pete, Grace, Minnie and all the negroes. A large table is in the centre [sic] at back. Pointdexter mounts the table with his hammer—his Clerk sits at his feet. A Negro mounts the table from behind. The company sit" (57). With that, as Pointdexter the slave auctioneer swiftly reiterates, the room is now a space for the dealing in human flesh: "now, gentlemen, we shall proceed to business'" (57). The failure of the Liverpool letter to materialize means the Terrebonne plantation must retrofit itself to compensate for its own financial woes as well as British ones. The Terrebonne slave auction necessitated by the British bank failures as well as its own Southern planters' debts, produces such a scene as transatlantic and transnational in nature, while also exposing the capitalist market's entrenched reliance on the global economic production of plantation slavery.

As Judge Peyton's debt remains hanging in the balance, "'those free-papers'" as auctioneer Pointdexter puts it "'ain't worth the sand that's on 'em'" (53). Mrs. Peyton's shock tells the story: "'Zoe a slave! It is impossible'" (53). In Zoe's mind however, she is resolved to her fate forever being rooted to slavery upon the Terrebonne plantation. In telling Dora Sunnyside of her love for George, Zoe reveals what compels her to be so open in her disclosing her sentiments:

> because it was the truth, and I had rather be a slave with a free soul than remain free with a slavish, deceitful heart. My father gives me freedom—at least he thought so—may heaven bless him for the thought, bless him for the happiness he spread around my life… I give him back the liberty he bestowed on me, for I can never repay the love he bore his octoroon child, on whose breast his last sign was drawn, into whose eyes he looked with the last gaze of affection (53-4).

Boucicault renders Zoe sentimental and thankful toward Judge Peyton's *gesture* of granting her freedom. Yet, despite Zoe's melodramatic acceptance of her fate, a few moments later, she posits on the horror of such a future: "'a slave! A slave! Is this a dream—for my brain reels with the blow? He said so. What! then I shall be sold! — sold!'" (54). Ultimately, the site of terror for those enslaved on the Terrebonne plantation resides at the ensuing scene of the auction block. At the nexus of Terrebonne's pursuit of economic remedy and British abolition is the inefficacy of abolition in the face of financial exigency. The auctioning of the Terrebonne slaves intends to address the economic collapse of the estate as it is directly tied to British abolition's impact on the planter class globally.

Boucicault's depiction of a slave auction is sensationalist and is fixated on the *spectacle* of bidding on human flesh. Sarah Meer notes how "although Zoe's situation is intricately tied up with slavery, Boucicault is not interested in the situation of slaves per se" (87). None better highlights this than Pete, the caricatured Uncle of Boucicault's play, who is tasked in disclosing the collapse of the Terrebonne plantation to his fellow slaves. Scudder, unable to face the slaves in the quarters, tasks Pete in speaking to them plainly about their fates: "'gen'l'men, my colored freens, and ladies, dar's mighty bad news gone round. Dis yer prop'ty to be sold—old Terrebonne whar we all been raised, is gwine—dey's gwine to take it away—can't stop here no how'" (54). The attention here isn't directed toward how said economic fallout impacts the lives of the enslaved on Terrebonne or to the ways such outcomes maim families and kinship bonds. Instead, the plantation "whar we all been raised" is the thing being lost, that which "dey's gwine take it away." The very fabric of the supposedly harmonious relationship between the enslaved and the plantation is coming undone: "'we taught dat de niggers would belong to de old Missus, and if she lost Terrebonne, we must live dere allers, and we would hire out, and bring our wages

to ole Missus Peyton'" (55). As the era of bygone-safety under Judge Peyton's administration on the Terrebonne plantation deteriorates, *The Octoroon* explores the ways enslaved subjectivity is rooted forever in the soil of the plantation. In the past on Terrebonne, upheld was the idea that what connected plantation slaves to the plantation was a relationship that could not be ruptured because of the instability and failures of the plantation economy. Yet, the auctioning first of Terrebonne's slave *property* gestures to the exchangeability of enslavement, and how the shortcomings of its late plantation owner can be abated by the selling and purchasing of black flesh, which was always of most significance, and not the safety of the enslaved.

It becomes important that the Terrebonne slaves work to make themselves *worthy* of purchase. Pete proposes to the male slaves that it is crucial that they alter their appearance, knowing the women will garner more attention and higher bids. Pete proposes: "'let every darkey look his best for de judge's sake—dat ole man so good to us, and dat ole woman—so dem strangers from New Orleans shall say, dem's happy darkies, dem's a fine set of niggers; everyone say when he's sold, 'Lor' bless dis yer family I'm gwine out of and send me as good a home'" (56). Ultimately, Pete advises that the male slaves *perform* hospitality despite the ever-present dread of being separated from kin. In Pete's estimation, the Terrebonne slaves must not faulter in showing thanks as long as George Peyton remains a possible savior: "'no,' say Massa George, 'I'd rather sell myself fuss; but they shan't suffer no how—I see 'em dam fuss'" (55). Despite this, Boucicault contradicts his enslaved characters sense of thankfulness toward their benevolent masters, with their supposed incapacity to *feel* like Zoe. In overhearing the prospect of the Terrebonne slaves being sold, Zoe cries, and Pete declares, "'come along; she har what we say, and she's crying 'fore us. None o' ye ig'rant niggers could cry for yerselves like dat'" (56). It is worth noting the complexity of affect as it relates to enslaved subjectivity. On the one hand,

Zoe as 'tragic mulatto' possesses the melodramatic cues to feel deeply for the enslaved as well as her own possible enslavement. The minstrel caricatures of slaves in *The Octoroon* and deployed particularly through Pete, are stripped mostly of feeling deeply for and about themselves and others. However, in *John Bull*, a conservative English periodical, an 1861 review of *The Octoroon* applauds the play's depiction of Pete: "but the character which was the greatest novelty in the cast, and which, as it proved, excited in the highest degree the approval of the audience, was that of the old 'nigger'… produced a remarkable effect" (91).[14] This review taps into *The* O*ctoroon*'s supposed authentic depiction of black people in the South, by further stating: "such a negro portrait we have never had before, impossible to be characterized, and yet played with such variety of detail and such force as compel a ready acceptance of it as a completely true picture" (91). In the words of this reviewer, nineteenth-century English audiences accepted Pete as a "completely true picture" of what it meant to be black and enslaved in the American South. An 1859 American review, published in the *Spirit of the Times; A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage*, is scathing toward Boucicault's failure to address the "wretched Zoes of the North," nonetheless sees the portrayal of Pete as an authentic depiction of being black in the South (81)[15]. The review states: "this representation would be true, at least, of much Northern life, but the 'Octoroon' has not a glimpse, if we except old uncle 'Pete,' that can with truth be termed characteristic of Southern life and Southern homes" (83). Despite the play's failures, "old uncle 'Pete'" represents a natural glimpse into the "real sentiments of the South and Southern people" (83).

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[14] From "Theaters and Music," *John Bull*, 1861. *The Octoroon*, Broadview Press, edited by Sarika Bose, 2014, pp. 89-91.

[15]From "'The Octoroon.' A Disgrace to the North, a Libel on the South," *Spirit of the Times; A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage*, 1859. *The Octoroon*, Broadview Press, edited by Sarika Bose, 2014, pp. 77-83.

At this point in the play, the enslaved characters are reduced and referred to as "Omnes," meaning all, or everyone. *The Octoroon* slaves become a fluid and communal voice and body. In other regards, the Omnes is an empty vessel, made to unflinchingly receive Pete's projections of enslaved performativity. Writing on the expectations and qualities of "affect distinctive of the economy of slavery," Hartman argues: "put differently, the mutability of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projections of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values" (28). The capacity for slavery's enforcement and distribution of terror is enacted through its ability to render black bodies as "counterfeit representations." Stephanie Smallwood in examining the transfiguration of African captives into African commodities asserts: "the alchemy of the market derived from its effectiveness in producing counterfeit representation; it had become plausible that human beings could be so completely drained of social value, so severed from the community, that their lives were no longer beyond price: they could be made freely available in exchange for currency" (63). On the auction block, then, occurs the dehumanizing process of making flesh "*available* in exchange for currency." Attending to the material violence of Boucicault's auction block moves beyond the auction block as a sensational and spectacular plot point, to focusing on the malleability and exchangeability of blackness as it relates to the plantation economy in *The Octoroon.* The racialized slave body in this way is always circuitously presented as possessing the prospects of freedom and thankfulness, materialized through free papers and kind masters, but is almost certainly made to endure and experience the seizure, selling, and purchasing of one's own flesh.

Prior to Zoe being auctioned off, the comedically depicted and sensational selling of Pete takes place. Pete is mistakenly listed as seventy-two as well as being "lame." In order to attract George's attention, Pete puts on a show while upon a make-shift auction block in the Peyton big

house: "'What, sar? me! —for me—look ye here' (*Dances*)" (60). George bids five-hundred dollars and Pete cannot believe it: "'Masa George—ah no, sar—don't buy me—keep your money for some udder dat is to be sold. I ain't no count, sar'" (60). At one moment Pete makes the spectators of his bidding conscious that even though George can purchase him, he is unworthy of the man's kindness. Pete's response to George is worth reflecting on, that while the system of slavery has declared black flesh a commodity, it too has rendered a sense of self evaluation by the enslaved invalid within this oppressive economy: "I ain't no count, sar." What then might it mean to be considered valueless/unworthy as it regards the planter class and planter capital? Is it possible to read Pete's statement as complicating the master-slave relation, of the benevolent master and submissive slave? In what ways might Pete be resisting the savior complex of the benevolent master, that such an enslaver can *redeem* slavery and make it respectable?

For a flicker, Boucicault's *The Octoroon* proposes that cordiality and compassion can *save* Zoe from the auction block, a feat is not accessible to Pete nor his son Solon, or Grace and their two children Saul and Victoria. Dora's father, the planter Sunnyside, wants his fellow auctioneers to look within as the prospect of selling and buying Zoe is in front of them: "'gentlemen, we are all acquainted with the circumstances of this girl's position, and I feel sure that no one here will oppose the family of who desires to redeem the child of our esteemed and noble friend, the late Judge Peyton'" (60). Of course, the memory of Zoe's "single drop" can be erased if the planter class wills it so. It isn't that Sunnyside associates *redeeming* Zoe with *protecting* her; rather, such diplomatic and paternalist aims intend to maintain the status quo amongst the Louisiana planters. Sunnyside acknowledges that there is a sort of fraternity among the planter class: "'there's not a planter round here who wouldn't lend you the whole cash, to

keep your [Mrs. Peyton] name and blood amongst us'" (33). For Sunnyside, the planter class need be seen as having *heart* for its fellow Southern aristocrats, the Peytons who are currently in financial trouble and their support. Pointdexter, the auctioneer, addresses the truth of the matter, however: "'while the proceeds of this sale promises to realize less than the debts upon it, it is my duty to prevent any collusion for the depreciation of this property'" (60). On the one hand, as much as the Louisiana planters want to do right by the Peytons, plantation codes about how slave auctions proceed are impossible to supersede.

Worth recognizing in witnessing the auction block scene and its primary function of trying to do 'right' by Zoe and the Peyton family, is the plantation men's attempting at moralizing of not only M'Closky's desire to purchase Zoe, because he is an 'evil' enslaver, but pointing to their own good heartedness in wanting to allow the Peytons to *keep* Zoe. This point is similar in soliloquizing about the failures of the Salem executioners adequately being able to recognize good and evil at the end of "Lois the Witch." In a similar fashion then, the declaration of regret signed by the Salem jurors captures Pointdexter's supposed dilemma of maintaining the status quo of plantation slavery that is up against keeping Zoe from being harmed by M'Closky. The Salem jurors profess: "'we confess that we ourselves were not capable to understand, nor able to withstand, the mysterious delusions of the powers of darkness… whereby we fear we have been instrumental, with others, though ignorantly and unwittingly, to bring upon ourselves and this people of the Lord the guilt of innocent blood'" (234). In a circuitous fashion, this declaration testifies that the deaths of Hota, Nattee, and Lois were compulsory collateral to the Salem people's unwillingness to confront their own ignorance as well as external prejudices. To allow Zoe to be purchased by M'Closky is to not only confirm the letter-of-the-law of the

auction block, but to unwittingly let harm befall Zoe under the rubric of "'it is my duty to prevent any collusion for the depreciation of this property'" (60).

The bidding for Zoe begins directly, with Sunnyside offering one thousand and then three thousand, as M'Closky counters with two thousand then five. Eventually as the price increases, Scudder will interject with a twelve thousand dollar offer, M'Closky with a fifteen thousand counter, and Dora Sunyside hoping twenty seals the deal to purchase Zoe. However, M'Closky's twenty-five-thousand-dollar counter will trump all. At this George will pounce on M'Closky. As all the men are in ready attack, Scudder reminds the buyers: "'and, strangers, ain't we forgittin' there's a lady present. (*The knives disappear*). If we can't behave like Christians, let's try and act like gentlemen'" (emphasis original 61). Scudder's interjection posits, that despite the circumstances of slavery and the auction block, one ought not to abandon decorum and the virtues of the Christian gentleman. With this, Pointdexter reminds the prospective buyers of the jurisdiction of the codes of the auction block in relation to the character of plantation slavery: "'gentlemen, I believe none of us have two feelings about the conduct of that man; but he has the law on his side—we may regret, but we must respect it. M'Closky has bid twenty-five thousand dollars for the Octoroon… To Jacob M'Closky, the Octoroon girl Zoe, twenty-five thousand dollars'" (61). Ultimately, the auction block exists as a site incapable of nuance, as it exists at the nexus through which commodification, dehumanization, and the severance of familial networks converge. Jennifer L. Morgan in describing the symbolic register of the auction block notes how "fixed by the gaze of the consumer, tallied and divided, Black life on display and on offer becomes exemplified by a figure of passivity inscribed by the stasis of the block. This stasis situates the objects for sale as still and dispassionate and demarcates the moment of sale as void of compassion or connection, across the gulf of the economic transaction" (173). The enslaved,

and specifically Zoe as the heroine in need of redemption, is fixed to the auction block is passively "inscribed by the statis of the block." Zoe's subjectivity and her response the back-and-forth bidding over her flesh, is stripped of having voice during the purchase of her body. This is confirmed by the very fact Zoe does not speak as she is being bid on. For nineteenth-century audiences, Zoe's presence on the auction block was central to the play and widely reproduced. This scene thus *reproduces* the cyclical process of the auction block; a constant of plantation slavery: "'we may regret, but we must respect it. M'Closky has bid twenty-five thousand dollars for the Octoroon… To Jacob M'Closky, the Octoroon girl Zoe, twenty-five thousand dollars'" (61).

Just like that, the bidding and selling of Zoe's body seals her fate. In one of the final scenes where the audience and reader encounter Zoe, she is seen in the "Negro Quarters" asking Dido for a "bitter drink" in the hopes of attaining an enteral slumber: "'it is not a painful death, Aunty, is it? You told me it produced a long, long sleep'" (68-9). In a sense, one does get Zoe's response to being auctioned: suicide. Zoe is matter of fact about the prospect of *becoming* M'Closky's property: "'in a few hours that man, my master, will come for me: he has paid my price, and he only consented to let me remain here this one night, because Mrs. Peyton promised to give me up to him today'" (64). Zoe in this moment details her *conversion* from ideal heroine and mistress to the "tragic octoroon." Zoe too recognizes how the language of commerce and power dictates her positionality, as she now knows she is under her slave master M'Closky's rule.

Rather than depict a complete transformation of sought-after mistress to enslavement, Boucicault considers suicide as an alternative *choice* for Zoe. One might consider that as the buying and selling of Zoe's flesh has transformed the essence of her corporeality, suicide

disturbs the authoritarian control of an earthly slave master: "'ah! give me the rest that no master but One can disturb—the sleep from which I shall awake free! You [Dido] can protect me from that man—do let me die without pain'" (70). In her final encounter with George, unaware that Terrebonne has been restored to the Peyton family, Zoe accepts that she must die rather than be enslaved. Zoe relays to her lover: "'you see how easily I have come reconciled to my fate—so it will be with you'" (73). This isn't to say, however, that Zoe isn't frantic with fear at the possibility of enslavement, as well as grieving what she will leave behind in committing suicide. The opening of act five best captures Zoe's turmoil: "'my home, my home! I must see you no more. Those little flowers can live, but I cannot. Tomorrow they'll bloom the same—all will be here as now, and I shall be cold'" (73). The finality of Zoe's monologue is most striking: "those little flowers can live, but I cannot." For Zoe, life cannot bloom within the bounds of enslavement. The monotony of a Louisiana plantation controlled by the dictates of slavery will continue, while Zoe's body "shall be cold."

Zoe too shifts the discourse surrounding the totality of slavery, conjecturing that it is but earthly and temporary. In committing suicide, Zoe proclaims: "'I am free! I had but one Master on earth, and he has given me my freedom!'" (74). Ultimately, even if enslaved, *The Octoroon* imagines reconciliation in the fact that in death, the enslaved will know freedom in the afterlife. Even as Dora Sunnyside conveys to Zoe that Judge Peyton did not *legally* free her, Zoe conceives that legality cannot dictate the parameters of freedom: "'not lawful—no—but I am going to where there is no law—where there is only justice'" (74). Even as much as Zoe is reconciled to freedom as idealized and spiritual, as well as the Liverpool letter arriving and saving the Terrebonne plantation, along with M'Closky being found the culprit for Paul's death, the plantation cannot be read as a landscape through which reconciliation, redemption, justice,

and freedom are ever achievable. For instance, the Liverpool letter ought to remind the viewer and reader that Terrebonne, whether supervised by George or M'Closky, will nonetheless *be* a slave plantation. Whether or not Judge Peyton *legally* freed Zoe does not matter. Instead, each scene that unfolds for Zoe, whether that be the nullification of her free papers, being placed on an auction block, or suicide as a means of escaping enslavement, the violence of the planation is always present.

The terror of the plantation regime need be located in the moments where *The Octoroon* proposes redemption: Mrs. Peyton unable to live without her slaves; Scudder proposing that the Louisiana planters will do anything for the Peyton family; and Dora Sunnyside and her father attempting to financial save Zoe from being bought by M'Closky. In each of these responses is the very terror that structures and maintains the plantation. The very idea that Zoe's suicide could be read as a form of "divine justice" is dependent on the plantation's production of black death.

**The Plantation: A Zone of Black Death**

Moving away from an analysis grounded in the specifics of *The* Octoroon, I want to attend to the logics of the plantation that are foundational for understanding it as a zone (re)producing black death. Focusing on the logics of the plantation makes known the larger systematic and architectural violences this terrain enacts. These logics are only witnessed briefly during the fast-paced auction scene and off-hand remarks about Zoe's ancestry. Here, contending with the logics of capital, dehumanization, and commodification that make the plantation economy productive and profitable is meaningful for understand the success, fall, and eventual reclamation of Terrebonne. As boundary created spaces intended to serve in the (over)cultivation of land, plantation production fueled the transition of Old-World mercantilism to New-World agricultural capitalism. The New World plantation proved to be a well-suited locale for modern

social and economic arrangements around the globe. As Deborah A. Thomas reveals: “the ‘settling’ of the New World saw the delineation of racial hierarchy in the language of the potentiality for Christian conversion during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Inquisition tribunals” (3). The linking then between New World capitalism and Old-World mercantilism meant, in Thomas’ terms, “the twin transformative processes of racial fixing (of diverse African peoples into *negros* and diverse indigenous New World populations into *indios*” (emphasis original 3). In other words, the language of racial hierarchies served to sever in the case of Indigenous and African populations, communal practices in order to make enslavement on the basis of racial lineage easily identifiable, where all African peoples become negroes and all Indigenous people become indios. Put simply, because “negroes” can’t locate pasts and families, this incapacity conveys the rationale for enslavement.

What Morgan also makes clear is that the “rationalizing practices of selling and distributing human beings demanded that the concept of kinship be subordinated to the mathematical logics of the marketplace” (59). A modern conceptualization of race is indelibly linked to the marketplace. As Morgan explains: “the turn to hereditary racial slavery happened in tandem with the emergent economies that market European exploration and colonial expansion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries” (59). Race then in its early attempt at solidifying the parameters of “historical blackness” functioned to mark the terms for the buying and selling of African peoples. In a historically descriptive manner Morgan outlines how “ultimately racial thinking worked to stabilize the category of value that enslavement was based upon, moving the definition of *slave* so that instead of referring to a subject of a population that was legitimately subject to enslavement as a result of crimes or war, it applied to entire populations identified using the notion of race and its heritability” (emphasis original 67). Race and the emergence of

"historical blackness" constituted the faceless commodity of the European exploitation and subjugation of African peoples. The creation of a supposed homogenous slave population meant that there was nothing discernable about the African black bodies entering the slave ship, being packed into the ship's hold, held at garrison forts, residing in slave pens, gazed upon on auction blocks, and sweating away days and years on plantations. Of course, however, there were discernable features marked in logbooks and sale sheets that differentiated the *universal negro slave* by age, gender, size, quality that increased or depreciated the individuals value.

The value of the black body in terms of its necessity to the laboring regime exceeds any quantifiable measure. Enslaved people, despite the branding of enslavement, lived beyond the pricing logics of *well-sized*, *ripe for breeding*, *docile*, and *submissive*. Critiquing the language of labor in terms of enslavement, Tiffany Lethabo King argues "labor alone does not sufficiently relay or explain the Black body's significance to the altering of the landscape and its transformation into a process under eighteenth-century relations of conquest and settlement" (115). The racializing process of converting blackness into a currency actionable by its laboring power, necessary to the maintenance of New World slave economies, plays the most significant role in the European expansion of global capitalism. The language of labor in terms of the black body's significance to regimes of dominance and exploitation of production, as King puts it, is limiting, that "labor alone does not capture all of the relationships that Blackness has to slavery, genocide, settlement, and capitalism" (115). The governing principle of blackness equating enslaveability led to the supposed severing of past lives, kinship bonds, and humanity forcefully enacted by enslavers upon African peoples of the diaspora. It's these annihilating processes that led to African peoples being transformed into the *enslaved negro,* a shell of a human without human qualities to European traders and buyers.

The transmuted enslaved black body, however, was a transformative process in excess of labor, despite enslavement constituting the discipling and civilizing process of labor production. From entering the slave ship, journeying the Middle Passage in slave holds, experiencing the spectacle of the marketplace, and residing on plantations, blackness has always represented, regardless of how these spaces intend to enact regulations on black humanity and freedom. As King sees it "if anything, Blackness enters Western modernity from a place of spreadability and boundarylessness made possible by the Middle Passage and various processes that render it outside of coherent and contained human coordinates" (134). As much as the production of blackness as unhuman meant to take shape through New World "discovery," settlement, and enslavement, blackness always contained "an alternative mode of being human" (134). Thinking of race then as a structure of discipline and containability with the capacity to define the terms of civilized/uncivilized and human/unhuman, the plantation serves a similar function in its fortification of boundaries between race and status.

The plantation is the landscape through which the master/slave dynamic takes on its most tangible form. How the enslaved created intimacy networks in response to the control and surveillance apparatuses of the planation is significant. In her revelatory book, *Courtship and Love among the Enslaved in North Carolina* (2007), Rebecca J. Fraser details how "the enslaved attempted to negotiate a path to their lover's door, both metaphorically and literally. As they did so they came up against numerous obstacles that they were forced to overcome" (5). An example of such in *The Octoroon*, is Grace's protestation that she bought by the man who has purchased her husband: "'Buy me Massa Ratts, do buy me, sar'" (59). As such, Grace and her two children are purchased by Ratts and not separated from Solon, and it is quite possible, that without

Grace's interjection and speaking back to the enslavers, her family and union to her husband would have been severed.

In the case of the eighteenth-century plantation economy of Jamaica, Vincent Brown details how "the work regime required for sugar cultivation demanded strict control by plantation supervisors. Their management practices both drew upon and reinforced imperial violence" (5). The culture of the plantation and the politics of the colony were linked and reinforced one another. It is important to acknowledge that plantations were violent production sites, not spaces intending to deploy ethical and humane environments. Again, drawing from Brown's detailing of Jamaican plantation slavery "the physical demands of planting, tending, and refining the cane amplified the hazards of malnutrition and tropical disease. Modern researchers have confirmed what contemporaries knew all too well: enslaved workers were consumed by the cane fields" (55). Despite being sites for mass death "as overwork 'decimated the field gangs,' the estates depended on constant importation of new slaves from Africa" (55) The necessity for large scale production on plantations outweighed the horrifying speed at which enslaved peoples were dying and being "consumed by the cane fields."

Regardless of being the life blood of planation economies, the enslaved sought out life in the face of inhumane circumstances. Rinaldo Walcott sees that the plantation as "the central institutionality of the zone of Black death" which "is therefore the foundation in a larger and more dynamic production of Black life" (20). Instances of planning for insurrection, composition of slave songs, of courtships and romances, reveal a struggle against the assumed totalizing domination of slavery. Evoking King in a similar way, Walcott's characterization of the plantation as a zone of black death, where countless bodies are lost to the over cultivation of

land, ultimately constitutes a realm for alternative possibilities for black life. Black life inevitably will be, must be, world making beyond the violent logics of the plantation.

Important to witness also is that patterns of racism structuring modern capitalisms development through plantation-based slave production provided the parameters for what constituted human, not-quite human, and unhuman. Race and its dehumanizing power on the plantation operated as a mobilizing force for how we understand modern racial capitalism today. Thus, *capitalism in any form is a racial capitalism.* Thomas puts this another way, nonetheless along a similar line: "race, as the organizing principle of modern capitalist production and labor regimes, thus always prefigures modern notions of what it means to be a human and potentially, a citizen; it disciplines us into the hierarchies of value and personhood that attach to particular bodies" (41). Respective of reading life on the plantation, one witnesses black enslaved peoples contending with slavery's compulsion to define the configurations of what does and does not constitute the human. It becomes crucial to identify emancipation's failures at rectifying liberal humanist constructions of the human and unhuman through the State's deployment of lynching as a means to annihilate black civil, public, and social agency. More precisely, attend ing to lynching as an apparatus of plantation slavery living on in the aftermath of emancipation, as well as concerns about who is and is not human, becomes distressingly significant to white plantation elites who, in the wake of legal enslavement's demise, scramble to reconfigure the liberal subject in a manner that maintains white hegemony.

# CHAPTER IV: LYNCHING AND POST-EMACIPATION TERRORIM IN JAMES BALDWIN'S *BLUES FOR MISTER CHARLIE*

Building from the witch-hunt and plantation as sites and technologies of social repression, lynching in a post-emancipation context precariously executed acts of terror through extrajudicial surveillance and execution of supposedly *free* black peoples. Integral to the stabilization of the lynching apparatus in the twentieth century was the continuation of the Victorian ideology of white womanhood. The chaste white woman as needing protection from the savage and hyper-sexualized black man, served to rationalize and legitimize the dismemberment and murder of black boys and men so as to *save* white women from defilement. This was so even as white men abused white women. For example, in William Faulkner's short story "Dry September" (1931), John McLendon after getting a mob together to lynch Will Mayes, who they suspect had raped Minnie Cooper, will return home to his wife who is still awake, which drive him into a rage: "he released her and half struck, half flung her across the chair, and she lay there and watched him quietly as he left the room" (182). In Faulkner's example, we see that white supremacist patriarchal violence has no jurisdiction or limits; difference in any capacity will be made susceptible to its violation. This too is aptly addressed in James Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie* (1964), where a young black man, Richard Henry, is murdered by Lyle Britten, on the basis that he made sexual advances on his wife, Jo Britten. Lyle, on his terms, cannot live in a world where black people do not step off the sidewalk when a white man walks by and cordially refers to him as sir. The pure white woman in *Blues* is taken to represent a mausoleum to be defended at all costs by its noble tribesman, while males. For a Victorian-esque South, it would be essential to create a cultural narrative, similar to Federici's assessment of New World colonizer's exploitation of Indigenous populations, that posited the

formerly enslaved black people as savage and irrational. This meant maintaining the master-slave dynamic, whereas Richard Henry ought to know that Lyle Britten is his superior/master, and if he does not abide by the logics of this relation, will be punished for such defiance.

In Baldwin's *Blues*, the white population alleges Richard Henry's return South from the North is a corruption upon a purportedly harmonious Southern town, where black people *know* not to be brazen, where the geographical and stage demarcations of Whitetown and Blacktown are not only representative of racial segregation in the South, but of the terror and violence directly embedded into the geography. In a post-slavery moment of virulent racial prejudice, Rinaldo Walcott contends "Black people come into a status of other than being enslaved" (3), whereby emancipation conceptually conceived of formerly enslaved as freed subjects by their oppressors. One is *given* freedom as opposed to considering it as an essence. Lynching then would serve to regulate and suppress black bodies entering the American body politic for the first time. Freedom under these terms is state-sanctioned, not natural. Emancipation and its supposed ushering in of freedom then must be understood as a legal process by which black subjectivity is marked by a state of continued unfreedom. Lynching would be the apparatus through which state-sanctioned terror could be implemented. As an extrajudicial form of racial violence, lynching works outside the formal parameters of police violence, for example, but as Baldwin's *Blues* counters, judges and sheriffs work to maintain that acts of individual and mob racial violence are *only* how the white public responds to white spaces being occupied by the formerly enslaved.

In my analysis of Baldwin's *Blues*, I examine how lynching as a form of extrajudicial racial terror works to fracture and sever black kinship networks, as well as deliberately annihilate black possibility and desire. *Blues* takes on, albeit from a distanced approach, the 1955 murder of

Emmett Till, Baldwin's play is published and staged less than a decade after the lynching of the fourteen-year-old Till in Money, Mississippi as well as having his body dumped in the Tallahatchie River. Though Baldwin's play is narratively distance from the particulars of Till's murder, it does include scenes that express and frame the false accusation justifying Richard's murder as explicitly sexual in nature, as was the case of Till supposedly whistling at twenty-one-year-old Carolyn Bryant. In flashback scenes, conversations between characters, and courtroom testimonies *Blues* takes to task the ability and willingness of American institutions like the church and courtroom to undermine black life. I explore how lynching is characterized and rationalized throughout Baldwin's play, and how various spaces and encounters work to define lynchings parameters as an extension of slavery's calculated slaughter of black life.

**The Horrifying Black Subject**

The *what* to do with those once enslaved who signify the hostilities between the slave holding South and the North will be integral to a post-emancipation politics in the aftermath of the Civil War. Ultimately, in the wake of the formal end to chattel slavery, emancipation will strive to surveille and regulate black flesh in the name of liberal humanism. In The *Souls of Black Folks* (1903) W.E.B. Du Bois asks and answers: "what shall be done with Negroes? Peremptory military commands, this way and that, could not answer the query; the Emancipation Proclamation seemed but to broaden and intensify the difficulties; and the War Amendments [thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments] made the Negro problems of today" (17). Contentious interactions between former masters and mistresses and newly freed black peoples will be a byproduct of emancipation. Writing to his nephew James in *The Fire Next Time* (1962), on the one-hundredth anniversary of emancipation, Baldwin wrestles with emancipation's failures: "you know, and I know, that the country is celebrating one hundred years of freedom

one hundred years too soon. We cannot be free until they are free. Godbless you, James, and Godspeed" (10). The bankruptcy of emancipation in Baldwin's assertion here, lies in white America's inability to reckon with its centuries-long project of exploiting, subjugating, and terrorizing black peoples. Without this acknowledgement, slavery merely changes names, retaining its face in the centuries to come. Baldwin observes that in this unaccountability on the part of white Americans, the country's institutions maintain their allegiance to white supremacy, learning nothing from the violence wrought on by the age of slavery. Baldwin notes "they had the judges, the juries, the shotguns, the laws—in a word, power. But it was criminal power, to be feared but not respected, and to be outwitted in any way whatever. And those virtues preached but not practiced by the white world were merely another means of holding Negroes in subjection" (23). For post-emancipation white America, upholding the virtues of freedom, liberty, and humanity means continuing to be the one in command of the gun; to shoot first and let the judges, juries, and laws clean up the mess. My claim of recognizing lynching as a feature of post-Emancipation America, even as act of violence strongly stigmatized in the North, is to identify it as a form of racial terror whose aftershocks reverberate throughout the country. I will more fully conceptualize lynchings effects throughout the nation in my following chapter on Campbell's *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*.

Lynching is a direct response to post-emancipation racial relations, where concerns about the (un)humanness of black flesh is handled by white supremacist mobs and their politically aligned juries and judges. Lynching must also be understood in its capacity to sever black subjecthood from the social, political, and economic plain of America's geography. Margaret Walker pleads against this in her poem "Southern Song": "I want no mobs to wrench me from my southern rest; no / forms to take me in the night and burn my shack and / make for me a

nightmare full of oil and flame" (lines 11-13). As much as lynching would serve to exterminate black life, it would also function to mark particular land as white space, as is the case in Walker's poem and Baldwin's play *Blues for Mister Charlie*. Baldwin's play, staged as a divided space into Whitetown and Blacktown, where only whites like Lyle can cross this mythical border, to prey on black women in Blacktown. In Sandy Alexandre's words: "as an instrument of white supremacy, lynching is undoubtedly about racial segregation, but it is also about spatial segregation. Race is spatially inflected and vice versa… I see lynching as a spatial technology of domination that privatizes and racializes particular spaces as 'white'" (6). Black social, political, and economic mobility were not exclusively regional and national threats to white hegemony, but geographical ones as well. A concentrated number of lynchings occurring in the South leads one to believe that the terror regime of white supremacy had its logics rooted in regional racial tensions, but as Wells-Barnett observes all too well: "the mob spirit has grown with the increasing intelligence of the Afro-American" (71). A drive to police and execute black peoples can be found where the white body politics feels threatened by black social, economic, and political mobility. Lynching becomes then a means of surveilling black people in a moment of purgatory for the U.S. in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Even as whites would be vying for a consolidation in regard to racial supremacy in the decades after slavery, white supremacy's constituents believed their monopoly on power relations had been fractured by legal emancipation and the severing of master-slave relations, but sought out extrajudicial forms of racial terror like that of lynching as an excellent modes of subjection to take on the dehumanizing work of chattel slavery.

Baldwin's *Blues* is in a way a eulogy to of Emmett Till. As Baldwin puts it in his "Notes for Blues" that situates his script, the play was "based, very distantly, on the case of Emmett

Till." For Baldwin, the play form embodied a fear "that I would never be able to draw a valid portrait of the murderer" (xiv). In exploring Baldwin's vexed relationship with the American theatre, Koritha Mitchell writes, "Baldwin argued that American's self-conception relied on mythology that ignored the violence and injustice of the nation's past and present" (33). Baldwin's Lyle Britten then is a caricature, an assemblage of the psyches of Till's murderers, Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, but also of the white supremacist murderers who preceded them and those who followed. Habiba Ibrahim on examining the "reclamation of Emmett's childhood through the horrific exposure of how his childhood had been violently denied," writes of Till's facelessness in the aftermath of his death: "when Till-Mobley [Emmett Till's mother] chose to display her child's unchildlike corpse, she was also putting in full view what black communities in the United States already knew—that no age or life stage protects black people. From the vantage point of what modern blackness signifies, which is exclusion from western humanity, the fallacy of innocence is laid bare" (2). Richard Henry's murder is the stage then upon which Baldwin meditates on America's perception of faceless black flesh. At its core, black dehumanization is articulated through white desires and anxieties about black subjectivity constituting the "alienating personas within the social world" (Ibrahim 15). In detailing Abdoulaye Saji's exploration of black peoples encounters with Europeans, Frantz Fanon deduces that "moreover, it's not the hatred of the black people that drives them [white Europeans] … hatred is not a given; it is a struggle to acquire hatred, which has to be dragged into being, clashing with acknowledged guilt complexes. Hatred cries out to exist, and he who hates must prove his hatred through action and the appropriate behavior. In a sense he has to embody *hatred*. This is why the American's have replaced lynching by discrimination" (emphasis original 35-6). In Baldwin's temporally shifting drama, an audience and reader come face-to-face

with racial terror as a "struggle to acquire hatred," by which it "cries out to exist" through the harassing, maiming, and killing of black persons.

An uncompromising meditation on the politics of racial terror in the Jim Crow South, *Blues* stages a grieving black community referred to as Blacktown alongside Whitetown, a white community going to any length to rationalize its local shop owner's latest lynching. With *Blues*, Lyle operates as Baldwin's confrontation with the logic that "something in the man knows—*must* know—that what he is doing is evil; but in order to accept the knowledge the man would have to change" (emphasis original xiv). Baldwin, as Mitchell puts it, "works to strip away sentimentality and any aesthetic convention that softens the blow leveled by a critique inherent in black life" (34). Lyle's socially and politically legitimated lynching of Richard confirms that such forms of racial terror are key to the maintenance of a white supremacist patriarchal political system. Baldwin, however, doesn't merely display America's enactments of racial terror through a distinct staging that separates black characters from white ones. Instead "Baldwin is interested in a corporeal truth, not an abstract conception of humanism or brotherly love. As he argues in many contexts, black and white Americans are blood relatives" (Mitchell 36). There are however varied corporeal realities for the members of Whitetown and Blacktown, which make apparent the unsuitability of life in both these racially demarcated spaces.

I frame Baldwin's play alongside Rinaldo Walcott's theoretical framework of a *long emancipation*, where freedom and life for black life-forms are currently unlivable; that lynching during the post-bellum period reveals that emancipation has never meant freedom, instead, has always been slavery repurposed. Ultimately, the aims of the witch-trials, auction block, and now lynching scene have functioned to establish an American racial terror regime fixated on criminalizing as well as killing racialized peoples. How then does Baldwin's play reconsider the

spaces and limits of freedom in an America where black people are hypersexualized, dehumanized, and ultimately killed for existing? Woven throughout to help contextualize the historical, social, and racial apparatus that is lynching, I assess the Victorian ideology of true womanhood that helps stabilize the rape-lynch myth that will serve to rationalize Lyle's state sanctioned murder of Richard Henry in the opening scene of Baldwin's play.

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Richard lives in the wake of his mother's death, which he does not believe was accidental, as the police investigation concluded. Richard's father is Meridian Henry, a black minister. Baldwin's play employs multiple flashbacks to not only disrupt a linear progression of events, but to also portray the impossibility of staging racial violence in a cohesive manner. Baldwin's staging of *Blues* places Whitetown on the right and Blacktown on the left, with the middle being the aisle of the courtroom, the pulpit of the church, and the ditch where Lyle leaves Richard. Each space of community, justice, and black death exist as one, as if Baldwin's stage design is fluid in nature, flowing from one institution to another, from White(space)town to Black(space)town. However, in the very fact of the racially demarcated spaces of Whitetown and Blacktown, the spaces exist to resist one another, as Whitetown pressures Blacktown to submit to the ways of the South as Blacktown protests and resists such conformities. As Brian Norman points out "the complicated flashback structure is central to Baldwin's call for his audience to confront the nation's history in its inequitable present… the structure is able to resurrect Richard (the [Emmitt] Till figure) so he that he can participate in the story that culminates in his lynching" (80). The use of flashbacks allows Richard to *live* to tell his story of agony and anger as he struggles with his mother's death, as well as his return South, whereupon he falls in love with Juanita and is eventually murdered.

The death of his mother triggers Richard's initial exile from the South. The mourning son believed his mother was murdered in a hotel, which the police claimed was an accident. Journeying North, Richard faces the reality that New York is no different than the South. In the first flashback that sees Richard retuning South and still alive, he begins opening up to his grandmother: "'I convinced Daddy that I'd be better off in New York—and Edna, she convinced him too, she said it wasn't as tight for a black man up there as it is down here. Well, that's a crock, Grandmama, believe me when I tell you'" (19-20). Richard is reminiscent of John Grimes, from Baldwin's first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1952). John, a fourteen-year-old black boy, battles with his sexuality and faith, struggling to envision a world beyond his father Gabriel's harm while simultaneously imagining a world that finds him beautiful. As Brittney Michelle Edmonds writes of John's relationship to the South, her observation aligns meaningfully with a discussion of Richard: "reproduced in his body, his movement, his language, and his mores, John discovers himself only after surrendering to return, only after *witnessing*, refusing to look away from the pain and suffering of his elders, with the understanding that their pain is also his own, to live out in shared provenance" (emphasis original 120). John's pain is also Richard's loss. For Richard, his only chance at surviving the pain, suffering, and trauma brought on by white Americas is to "drink it—a little every day in the morning, and then a booster shot late at night" (21). Richard intends to feed off the violence of his experiences: "'I'm going to remember everything—the jails I been in and the cops that beat me and how long a time I spent screaming and stinking in my own dirt, trying to break my habit. I'm going to remember all that, and I'll get well. I'll get well'" (21). Lyle, however, embodies the dirt of white supremacy, a filth inescapable, intent on the demise of black persons like Richard. Baldwin's characterization of Lyle is invested in the lengths white people will go to kill

black people, as the play is bookended by Lyle's act of lynching Richard in the beginning and the revelation for why he did so at the end.

Baldwin's play is broken up into three distinct sections: student protestors assembling in church to grapple with Richard's death in Blacktown; whites convening in Lyle's home in Whitetown; and the trial of Lyle at the Courthouse. In each section Baldwin takes the reader back in time, painting a lived(ing) portrait of Richard and his life up North, his return South, and his encounters with Lyle. Vital to Lyle's acquittal for murder will be the dehumanizing and hypersexualizing of Richard by Lyle, his wife Jo, and the State's defense of the white patriarch.

**Post-Emancipation Black Sexuality and White Male Anxiety**

Throughout a variety of twentieth-century African American literature depicting lynching scenes, black male sexuality and its threat to whiteness are centerstage. Baldwin's 1965 short story "Going to Meet the Man" is a prime example of this, where a police officer named Jesse recalls witnessing a lynching as a child: "the man with the knife took the niggers privates in his hand, one hand, still smiling, as though he were weighing them" (247). The grotesque legacy of slavery is gauged in such scenes, albeit fictionalized, that depict such depravity during Reconstruction and Jim Crow. Robyn Wiegman contends that, due to "the loss of one patriarchal organization of social life—that of slavery… this climate that the mythology of the black male as rapist emerges, working the faultline of the slave's newly institutionalized masculinization by framing this masculinity as the bestial excess of an overly phallicized primitivity" (458). For Lyle, Richard jostling him in his convenience store, asking "'maybe your wife could run home and get some change,'" and Lyle's response: "'I don't stand for nobody to talk about my wife'" (73), constitutes Richard's "bestial excess" in Lyle's mind, and Richard's renouncement of black subservience in relation to white respectability.

Richard's acknowledgement of Jo's ability to *leave* the store on her own accord challenges the stabilization of white domesticity that recognizes Lyle as authority over his wife's movements and actions. Richard's sociality in the Brittens' store as well as talk of their home, gestures toward black infiltration into white psycho-social spaces, like the home and stores. Lyle from the opening of *Blues* is compelled to imagine black sexuality as simultaneously arousing, deviant, and threatening. Lyle in conversation with his white friend, the journalist Parnell, gestures in a sarcastic manner but with simmering rage under the surface, at Parnell's friendships with members of Blacktown on the cusp of being arrested and put on trial for Richard's murder. Lyle's first engagement with Parnell in *Blues* is loaded with sexual innuendo: "'it's about time you showed your face in here, you old rascal! You been so busy over there with the niggers, you ain't got time for white folks no more. You sure you ain't got some nigger wench over there on the other side of town?'" (11). Interesting here, is that shortly before this, Jo insinuates that Lyle has been promiscuous, saying while changing their child, "'you tell your Daddy he can start sleeping in his own bed nights instead of coming grunting in here in the wee small hours of the morning'" (8). In Act Two, Jo will come out directly and ask whether or not her husband was having an affair with a black woman by the name of Willa Mae: "'that means you won't answer it. But I'll ask it anyway. Parnell—was Lyle—is it true what people said? That he was having an affair with Old Bill's wife and that's why he shot Old Bill?'" (61). It is as if Jo can't ask Lyle directly, to hear from the patriarch's mouth, that he has had an affair with a black woman, and because of such an affair, has killed a black man.

Briefly into *Blues,* it is obvious that Lyle is drawn toward expression of black sexuality. Lyle puts this clearly to Parnell: "'I don't won't no big buck nigger lying up next to Josephine and that's where all this will lead to and you know it as well as I do! I'm against it and I'll do

anything I have to do to stop it, yes I will!'" (14). The "what all this will lead to" in Lyle's mind is racial integration, a threat to white respectability in this quaint Southern town, as well as a tainting of white blood, reminiscent of Zoe's 'fall' as an English-esque heroine once it is revealed she possesses one-eighth black blood in *The Octoroon*. The means to which Lyle will go to prevent this opens *Blues*: "he [Lyle] looks around him, bends slowly and picks up RICHARD'S body as though it were a sack. He carries him upstage and drops him. LYLE: 'And may every nigger like this nigger end like this nigger—face down in the weeds'" (2). Ultimately, lynching serves to dismantle post-emancipation racial integration broadly, and is intent on terrorizing black subjectivity in the name of justice specifically. As much as racial integration threatens white patriarchal control over white women, in the minds of white men like Lyle, it grants permissible access to sexual depravity and violence toward black women.

Later in Act Two Lyle will confide in Parnell about his violent relationship with Willa Mae, a black woman who will leave the South after her husband Old Bill is murdered by Lyle once their affair is found out. Lyle's murder of Richard intersects in Lyle's mind with his desire for Willa Mae once again: "'after all the trouble started in this town—but before the crazy boy got himself killed, soon after he got here and started raising all that hell—I started thinking about her, about Willa Mae, more and more'" (67). Just as Lyle had earlier in *Blues* confronted his disdain at imagining black men "lying up next to Josephine," his early relationship with Willa Mae is also characterized as a violent struggle: "'yet and still, the first time I took Willa Mae, I had to fight her. I swear I did. Maybe she was frightened. But I never had to fight her again'" (67-8). Of concern here is why Willa Mae is unable to fight back against Lyle, and why Lyle believes this to be consent, and further, why he believes this to be enjoyable for Willa Mae: "'No. It was good, boy, let me tell you, and she liked it as much as me'" (68). A reader gets no

internal reflection from Lyle, as his anti-integrationist sentiments were stated earlier and his fixation on black sexuality is made obvious throughout. Talking with Parnell, Lyle is briefly introspective toward how Willa Mae felt during their first encounter. Lyle asserts "'maybe she was frightened'" (67-8). Frightened of what, Lyle leaves unsaid; for the viewer and reader though, one is left to imagine that Willa Mae's life was in danger and that fighting to say no would not have registered in Lyle's mind as an option. Nonetheless, for Lyle, possessing and overpowering black women was always about indulgence and deviance. In Lyle's mind, the real challenge was always going to be in *securing* a chaste and pure white wife.

In Act Three during a flashback between Parnell and Lyle on the night before Parnell takes the stand during Lyle's trial, the two are hunting together, a younger Lyle anxious about asking Jo to be his wife. Parnell wonders why and who Lyle wants to marry. Lyle responds curiously: "'well—I got to marry somebody. I got to have some kids. And Jo is—*clean*!'" (emphasis original 107). Marriage is inevitable for Lyle, and it is precisely as a means for reproducing white offspring. What is also necessary in Lyle's mind is that his wife be *clean*. Thinking back on earlier scenes (though they do not occur chronologically) between Lyle and Parnell, where Lyle voices his anxieties about "bestial" black men like Richard and un-consenting black women like Willa Mae, the cleanliness of Jo marks her in his effort to reproduce a pure white lineage. Whereas black bodies are figured as violent and submissive, Jo features as Lyle's only true precursor to white capitalist accumulation. As Lyle puts it about Jo: "'she ain't a girl no more. It might be her last chance too. But, I swear Parnell, she might be the only virgin left in this town'" (108). Lyle attests "'I can vouch for the fact ain't many black ones'" (108). Not only is Jo's chasteness beneficial to Lyle, but he also sees himself as her "last chance too" in producing white subjects. It is as if their matrimony is ordained in heaven; a

logical conclusion to no longer violently pursuing black women, by settling down, and reproducing inheritors of white capital. For Lyle, the fear of his son having nothing like his father did, in era where Southern whites "'wore themselves out on the land—the land never give them nothing'" (58), weighs heavy on his mind. In responding to Parnell's question of what he intends to leave behind for his son, Lyle states: "'we're going to leave him more than that. That little one ain't going to have nothing to worry about. I'm going to leave him rich as old Parnell here, and he's going to be educated, too, better than his Daddy; better even, than Parnell!'" (58). Lyle's purist of a clean wife and future progeny brings with it the prospect of generational wealth: *now* that he is married and has a son, he *must* leave behind a life changing inheritance.

An important caveat to Lyle's point that Jo "might be the only virgin left in town" is how such a proposition proceeds, in his mind, is his comedic gesture toward black female promiscuity. Lyle emphasizes what he knows: "'I can vouch for the fact ain't many black ones'" (108). The horror here lies in what the audience and reader are reminded of by Lyle's and Willa Mae's first encounter: "'the first time I took Willa Mae, I had to fight her. I swear I did. Maybe she was frightened'" (67-8). How many other black women did Lyle fight into submission? How often did he mistake coercion as "'and she liked it as much as me'" (68)? At the end of *Blues*, in a flashback that puts Richard and Lyle face-to-face before the latter kills the former, Richard asks: "'you sick mother! Why can't you leave me alone?'" (119). Why couldn't Lyle leave Richard or Willa Mae or the countless other black women he harassed and horrified alone? Just as Lyle *had* to fight Willa Mae, so too did he *have* to kill Richard. Lynching then as a racialized mode of extrajudicial terrorism functions to reinscribe whiteness as an authoritarian force in a post-emancipation context, where black bodies that are no longer enslaved, disrupt the very fabric of whiteness: white oppression and black submission.

**Lynching and Post-Emancipation White Power**

In many of his other works, Baldwin examines black existence in the South during the tumultuous period of Jim Crow. This is most notably apparent in his novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, his short story "Going to Meet the Man," as well as his essay "Nobody Knows My Name: A Letter from the South." In the latter, Baldwin opens with how black Americans in the North view their familial lineage to the South. Baldwin flips this script for *Blues*, as Richard Henry moves from the South, up to Harlem, and back again to the South. Examining how black Americans might *see* the South for the first time, Baldwin in "Nobody Knows My Name" writes: "the landscape has always been familiar; the speech is archaic but it rings a bell… He sees, in effect, his ancestors, who, in everything they do and are, proclaim his inescapable identity. And the Northern Negro in the South sees, whatever he or anyone else may wish to believe, that his ancestors are both and white and black. The white men, flesh of his flesh, hate him for that very reason" (98-9). For *Blues*, it is that Lyle and Richard, Whitetown and Blacktown, are of one America, and it is "for that very reason," that white vigilantes like Lyle feel threatened and challenged by black movement and existence.

*Blues* is noticeably set in the South, but Baldwin, in "Notes for Blues," specifies that the setting for "the play then, for me, takes place in Plaguetown, U.S.A. The plague is race, the plague is our concept of Christianity; and this raging plague has the power to destroy every human relationship" (xv). Baldwin's sentiments might read as ambitious in regard to the architecture of America in *Blues*; in another light, such judgements are an acute diagnosis of the 'illnesses' of American cultural, political, and social relations. In a sense, the *plague* of race and Christianity were set in motion by colonial expansion, the docking of slaveships, and modern capitalism's foundation rooted in the plantation economy, each of which are dramatized in

Gaskell's and Boucicault's formulations of American racial relations. In Baldwin's estimation, *Blues* attempts to create a space for an American audience to face the playwright's cataclysmic observation: "yet, with another part of my mind, I am aware that no man is a villain in his own eyes. Something in the man knows—*must* know—that what he is doing is evil; but in order to accept the knowledge the man would have to change" (emphasis original xiv). For white Americans, it is crucial for *us* to recognize our implicit and explicit roles in the terrorizing of black life for centuries. Lyle stands as the lyncher, a symbol of white terror, for all to see.

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Early in Act One, a flashback sees Richard discussing with his grandmother, Mother Henry, his doomed fate upon returning South. Richard questions: "'what I can't get over is—what in the world am I doing *here*? Way down here in the ass-hole of the world the deep, black, funky South'" (emphasis original 17). Mother Henry evokes Baldwin's feelings about Richard's destiny being rooted in a return South: "'you were born here. You got folks here. And you ain't got no manners and you *won't* learn no sense and so you naturally got yourself in trouble and had to come to your folks'" (emphasis original 17). In Mother Henry's mind, the South will always be where her kin have family. The "trouble" Richard got himself up North inevitably brought him back South. However, in the minds of Whitetown, this is exactly what the white Southerners fear is polluting their respectable way of life. In Act Three, on the stand, Jo tells the State: "'why, with the colored people! We've got all these northern agitators coming through here all the time, and stirring them [Southern black people] up so that you can't hardly sleep nights!'" (84). Richard as "northern agitator" functions to disrupt the purportedly harmonious affiliation between docile black people and God-fearing white folks. Act Two opens with members of Whitetown at the Britten home to, where members of Whitetown are in the home of a lyncher to

bask in the glory days of Southern race relations. A Whitetown resident named George recalls: "'oh, we had a little trouble from time to time, but it didn't amount to a hill of beans. Niggers was alright then, you could always get you a nigger to help you catch a nigger'" (48). Richard is expected to maneuver through a hostile terrain with no judgement and a sense of grace. In Jo's mind, rebellious types like Richard are a new phenomenon: "'how come the colored people to hate us so much, all of a sudden? We *give* them everything they've got!'" (emphasis original 49). However, in Richard's mind, people of Whitetown have only ever given him misery. Such conflicting characterizations of race relations as well as the racial violence it motivates, reveals the divisive ways discourse surrounding race in America leaves much to be desired? Richard himself struggles to have his own grief and suffering recognized by his grandmother and father. In what ways, then, is *Blues* not only an examination of the failures of American social relations and institutions, but a country failing its people on an individual and communal scale?

Richard confides in his grandmother, telling her the truth of how he'll treat whites, with the conviction that they are a terror upon the world. Mother Henry fears for her grandson: "'Richard, you can't start walking around believing that all the suffering in the world is caused by white folks'" (21). Richard questions her: "'I can't? Don't tell me I can't. I'm going to treat every one of them as though they were responsible for all the crimes that have ever happened in the history of the world – oh, yes! They're responsible for all the misery *I've* ever seen, and that's good enough for me'" (emphasis original 21). Richard's fate, however, is sealed, and in the minds of Whitetown, it is because of his hatred toward whites, that he is doomed to perish. Lyle, in deflecting early on in Act One that he had been the one who killed Richard, tells Parnell: "'well he'd been gone so long, he might as well have been a northern nigger. Went North and got ruined and come back here to make trouble—and they tell me he was a dope fiend, too. What's

all this fuss about? He probably got killed by some other nigger—they do it all the time—but ain't nobody even thought of arresting one of *them*. Has niggers suddenly got to be *holy* in this town?'" (emphasis original 13-4). Death becomes an inevitable response in the white psychosocial mind when black existence disrupts the spatiotemporal construction of a white patriarchal geography. On top of animosity toward "race-mixing," which is a constant point of contention in Whitetown, it is black folks themselves who are assumed to be bringing death upon themselves in defying the ontological differentiation of black-white, North-South dichotomies.

Recalling Papa D's juke joint and his first encounter with Richard, Lyle tells Parnell that, "'… He looked at me like he wanted to kill me. And he insulted my wife. And I hadn't never done him no harm'" (70). Remember, Lyle has given off the impression that he *did not* kill Richard. To Lyle, Richard's generation of "northern agitators" threaten *his* right to life. Yet, in his telling, Lyle's account doesn't take into consideration the fact he kills Willa Mae's husband Old Bill along similar lines: "'Why-- Old Bill. He looked crazy. Like he wanted to kill me. He *did* want to kill me. Crazy nigger'" (emphasis original 69). The corruption of Richard's mind is supposedly a product of a white race-hatred particular to younger black folks. Lyle says as much: "'oh. I think a lot of the niggers in town, especially the young ones, is turned bad. And I believe they was eggin him on'" (71). Lyle too uses similar language to describe Old Bill's rage toward him: "'Old Bill? He wouldn't never have thought nothing if people hadn't started poisoning his mind'" (68). Old Bill's and Richard's fates as they intersect with their encounters with Lyle are so intertwined, that when discussing them with Parnell, Lyle confuses the two. Parnell asks: "'I thought you meant the other one. But the other one didn't die in the store?'" Lyle responds: "'Old Bill didn't die in the store, He died over yonder, in the road.'" Parnell becomes every reader and viewer, puzzled by Lyle's telling of events: "'I thought you were talking about

Richard Henry'" (69). Lyle's conflation of the two black men's deaths as a singular event, highlights not only the little remorse he has in discussing his murder of them both, but is the core feature of black existence functioning as a metacognitive threat to white sociality. Old Bill and Richard are the same because, as Lyle's opening lines echo "'and may *every* nigger like this nigger end like this nigger face down in the weeds'" (emphasis mine 2).

Speaking against his own struggle against Lyle's determination to terrorize him, Richard's final words before being shot echoes *Blues*'s commitment to asking the white viewer and world to face itself and its actions. Richard is outside Papa D's with Lyle, and concedes "'I'm him. You been trying to give me a break for a great, long time. But there's only one break I want. And you won't give me that'" (119). Lyle is confused, but Richard puts his desire plaintively: "'for you to go home. And let me go home. I got things to do. I got—lots of things to do!'" (119). Richard knows the workings of the white subconscious; he knows that that there is no alternative dimension in which Lyle lets him walk home alive. Richard instead translates Lyle's grotesqueness for him, putting it into words he knows he understands. Earlier in *Blues*, Richard tells Mother Henry that what drives him is "'it's because my Daddy's got no power that my Mama's dead. And the only way the black man's going to *get* any power is to drive all the white men into the sea'" (emphasis original 21). In the recesses of Richard's mind is the trauma, terror, and grief he seeks to hold onto. For Richard, he wants to turn his anger into something actionable: "'I'm going to remember everything. I'm going to keep it right here, at the very top of my mind. I'm going to remember Mama and Daddy's face that day, and Aunt Edna and all her sad little deals and those boys and girls in Harlem and all them pimps and whores and gangsters all them cops'" (21). In Richard's mind, why must it be so difficult to ask white Americans to confront their violent obsessions with and resistance toward black subjectivity? Why not expect

white folks to recognize our involvement in "'the jails I [Richard] been in and the cops that beat me and how long a time I spent screaming and stinking in my own dirt, trying to break my habit'" (21)? At the root of white terror and its intent on blotting out black existence through the extrajudicial means of lynching is an obsession with continuing the terror regime that is slavery under new pretenses. One arguable difference in these two regimes is that the economics of slavery are visible: slaves provide labor. Baldwin's play, however, extends the psychological continuity of slavery that fractures both black persons and communities.

*Blues* ends with Richard asking the very questions of what motivates Lyle to murder him specifically and white America's compulsion to lynch black folks broadly. In the lead up to being shot, Richard asks: "'why have you spent so much time trying to kill me? Why are you always trying to cut off *my* cock? You worried about it? Why?'" (emphasis original 120). Richard too speaks back to Lyle as the "bestial excess" and "phalliciized primitivity" that he knows is in Lyle's mind when looks at him. Richard continues: "'okay. Okay. Okay. Keep your old lady home, you hear? Don't let her near no nigger. She might get to like it. You might get to like it, too. Wow!'" (120). Here, directly in front of him as he proceeds to kill an unarmed black man, is Lyle's biggest fear: the image of a black man next to his wife. Richard too highlights that entwined with this fear is the erotic undercurrents such a scene produces: "you might get to like it too." Tangled together are the erotic and violent, each representing core features of the terror regime of lynching. Once acquitted for Richard's murder, Lyle reveals to his father Meridian that his son's sentiments made it necessary that he kill him: "'I had to kill him then. I'm a white man! Can't nobody talk that way to *me*! I had to go and get my pick-up truck and load him in it—I had to carry him on my back – and carry him out into the high weeds. And I dumped him in the weeds face down. And then I come on home, to my good Jo here'" (emphasis original 120). Lyle

discloses here in intricate detail the process of killing, carrying, and leaving to rot Meridian's son. Also unsettling here is his last act: "and then I come on home, to my good Jo here." Killing Richard is merely a routine act, dumping him a mere moment along his journey homeward. Turning then to an examination of the Victorian ideology of true womanhood reveals how the human/not-human dichotomy plays an integral role in rendering lynching as a mundane part of tenuous black-white relations, whereby lynching functions as merely an *extension* of judicial procedure in the spaces where it has no jurisdiction.

**Post-Emancipation Humanism and the Victorian Ideology of True Womanhood**

Unlike Zoe in *The Octoroon* and Hota, Nattee, and Lois in "Lois the Witch," who are auctioned and tried amongst their purchasers and executioners, Richard's trial commences in the wake of his death. Yet the "legal" parameters of the Salem executions and the law of the auction block find credence in the American courtroom organized on the basis of debating the *right* to blot out black life. Neither guilt nor the inhumanity of lynching is discussed, but instead, the focus is on what Richard had done to enrage white citizens. In a similar fashion, the Salem executioners aren't in search of truth either. Reminding Lois while she is imprisoned, the Salem jurors conclude: "once more she was bidden to confess. The charges esteemed by all men (as they said) to have been proven against her, were read over to her, with the testimony born against her in proof thereof" (217). Similarly, the auctioneer Pointdexter reminds the "honorable" enslavers that despite the depth of their heart-of-hearts, the auction black cannot be negotiated, but must be governed by the infallible codes of plantation slavery: "'gentlemen, I believe none of us have two feelings about the conduct of that man; but he has the law on his side—we may regret, but we must respect it'" (61). In either case, there can be no negotiating the status quo; you must confess to crimes you did not commit, and one must let enslaved women be purchased

by men they know will commit heinous acts. Lyle Britten thus evokes the strictures of colonial era trials and auction block logics, so as to kill Richard Henry with immunity, knowing that the U.S. courtroom operates in a fashion similar to the ones in Gaskell's and Boucicault's fictions.

In her 1892 work on Jim Crow era lynching, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, the journalistic crusader Ida B. Wells-Barnett argues that white "men who stand high in esteem of the public for Christian character, for moral and physical courage, for devotion to the principles of equal and exact justice to all, and for great sagacity, stand as cowards who fear to open their mouths before this great outrage. They do not see that by their tacit encouragement, their silent acquiescence, the black shadow of lawlessness in the form of lynch law is spreading its wings over the whole country" (70-1). As Crystal N. Feimster recognizes "the dominant narrative, as white southerners told it, usually unfolded in rural districts where 'unprotected white women' lived on isolated farms, 'lustful black men' lurked around every corner, and 'honorable white men' lynched 'black rapists' to protect white womanhood" (93). In Feimster's exploration of Ida B. Wells-Barnett's "such narratives merely functioned to distort the reality of racial and sexual violence in the South" (93). Considering Lyle's fraught recounting of his sexual violation of Willa Mae and lynching of her husband Old Bill, the narrative he tells of racial animosity in the South is arguably incoherent and deliberately inauthentic. For the Southern white man "the mere suggestions that a white woman would willingly consent to sex with a black man was enough to send white men into violent hysterics" (90). In court it will be revealed—as a truth and not a fabricated lie—that Richard walked into Lyle's and Jo's store with his friend Lorenzo waiting outside, and sexually assaulted Jo Britten. Nobody better than Wells-Barnett understood the hypocrisy of lynching as a means of righteous justice by a white public hellbent on protecting white women/womanhood from supposedly predatory black men.

However, it doesn't matter whether Richard sexually assaulted Jo or not; black men in the American courtroom are always caricatured as lusting after pure white women. The rape/lynch myth as a justification for the killing of Richard exposes American institutions inability to serve justice and freedom, while also mandating the right to death through racialized extrajudicial terror.

In Frantz Fanon's monumental *Black Skin, White Masks*, the Martiniquais theorist and psychiatrist, proposes a methodology for diagnosing white desires to harm black peoples. In Fanon's words, Lyle's racism isn't merely compulsive, it is strategic and developed over time. Fanon argues "hatred is not a given, it is a struggle to acquire hatred, which has to be dragged into being, clashing with acknowledged guilt complexes. Hatred cries out to exist, and he who hates must prove his hatred through action and the appropriate behavior. In a sense he has to embody *hatred*" (emphasis original 35). Is it possible that Lyle's anxiety about not wanting "'no big buck nigger lying up next to Josephine,'" (14) derives from his own guilt about being able to "'vouch for the fact ain't many" black virgin women (107)? Lyle's act of lynching derives at some level from his obsession with black flesh, both in terms of its violation of white female chastity and as sexual excess in regard to white manhood. In Lyle's estimation, the significance of Jo being *clean* reflects, as Fanon states "I am white, in other words, I embody beauty virtue, which have never been black" (27).

It comes as no surprise then, that when asked to describe her encounter with Richard while on the stand, Jo recalls "'oh, he was just like an animal, I could—smell him! And he tried to kiss me, he kept whispering these awful, filthy things and I got scared, I yelled for Lyle!'" (84). With this account in mind, Jo doesn't want it to be misconstrued that Lyle killed Richard because she was being sexually assaulted. The Counsel of the Bereaved questions Jo by asking

"'and though he [Lyle] was under the impression that his wife had been nearly raped by a Negro, he agreed to forgive and forget and do nothing about it?'" (86). Jo responds that that is correct. Ultimately, Lyle is presented as forgiving, while Richard is animalistic and violently sexual. For the State's purpose and in Jo's words, Lyle didn't kill Richard, but that doesn't mean he shouldn't have been killed by *someone*. It is also worth noting that in this instance, Jo ought not to be framed as an autonomous speaker, but rather, a puppet for patriarchal white supremacist vitriol. Even if Lyle had killed Richard, he only did so to protect what was rightfully his: Jo Britten. As Sandy Alexandre argues "white women, whom lynched victims were alleged to have raped, were viewed less as persons with their own sense of agency than as precious property to be protected by white men" (16). At this crossroads, the relation between economics and the psychological terrain of lynching meet. For Jo, Richard walking into the store and antagonizing Lyle his inability to make change for a twenty, represents a larger epidemic in the South: "'why, with the colored people! We've got all these northern agitators coming through here all the time, and stirring them [Southern black folks] up so that you can't hardly sleep nights!'" (84). Understanding Richard as a "northern agitator," his murder intends to bring peace to both Whitetown and Blacktown. What exactly Richard stirs up is Lyle's lack. When going to buy a coke in the Britten's shop and Jo asks for twenty cents, Richard responds: "'*twenty* cents? All right. Don't you know how to say please? All the women *I* know say please—of course, they ain't as pretty as you. All I got is—twenty dollars!'" (emphasis original 72). As if mocking Jo's husband who is absent at the beginning of the encounter, Richard plays into the stereotype of the bestial and sexual black male, as he only possesses dollar bills larger than what Lyle can supply. Lyle then enters and is made to reveal his lack: "'change for a twenty? No, you know I ain't got it'" (72). The line is irrevocably crossed when Richard questions Lyle's financial lack, that what

he cannot provide financially, and most logically, sexually, is a failure of his whiteness: "'I thought white folks was rich at *every* hour of the day'" (emphasis original 72). It can be argued that Richard crosses multiple thresholds, that of the white wife, the white business, and white sexuality. In any case, Lyle intends to fight to protect what he deems is rightfully his, white space and white women. Richard entering the Britten convivence store, asking to break a twenty for two cokes, as Lyle says "'change for a twenty? No, you know I ain't got it,'" is antagonistic in Lyle's mind to what working whites in his family have struggled to claim as their own (72). Just as his father passed down property to his son, it is quintessential that Lyle remains secure in his ability to pass down capital to his future sons.

As Baldwin writes in *Nothing Personal* (1964), aligned with Lyle's commitment to the preservation of his white line and the destruction of black flesh, are lies that shackle white Americans to a past that terrorized them as well. In telling his family story, Lyle recalls: "'like my Mama and Daddy before me, God rest their souls, and their Mama and Daddy before them. They wore themselves out on the land—the land never give them nothing. Nothing but an empty belly and some skinny kids… I tell you—the old man [Lyle's father] struggled. He worked harder than any nigger. But he left me this store'" (58). Internalized is a fear of a return to struggle, in that Richard's twenty-dollar bill exposes what he does not have: adequate financial security for himself and his progeny. Baldwin notes "the poor white was enslaved almost from the instant he arrived on these shores, and he is still enslaved by a brutal and cynical oligarchy. The utility of the poor white was to make slavery both profitable and safe and, therefore, the germ of white supremacy which he brought with him from Europe was made hideously to flourish in the American air" (*Nothing Personal* 10-1). More than anything, Lyle recognizes that his supremacy is rooted in capital, as he expects his progeny to live off his gains: "'we're going

to leave him more than that. That little one ain't going to have nothing to worry about. I'm going to leave him as rich as old Parnell here, and he's going to be educated, too, better than his Daddy; better, even, than Parnell!'" (58). Lyle isn't just conscious of how essential it is that his capital accumulation sees life for his children; he is astutely aware of the lack of accessible financial, social, political, and educational resources for poor black folks. The Britten store is a symbolic example of black peoples having to rely on white supremacist funded spaces, the idea that slavery made whites financially and socially superior to black peoples. Lyle recalls this as his business has slowed down since the lynching of Richard: "'shoot, the niggers'll be coming back, don't you worry. They'll get over this foolishness presently. They already weary of having to drive forty-fifty miles across state line to get their groceries—a lot of them ain't even got cars'" (8). Lyle basks in the glory that all capital eventually makes its way back into white hands, whether through convenience stores or in the saving for future white offspring to reap its benefits. Consequentially, Lyle's drive to lynch Richard codifies Baldwin's claim that "the utility of the poor white was to make slavery both profitable and safe," creating a geography upon which white supremacy is given reign "to flourish in the American air" (*Nothing Personal* 10-11). Even so, it is worth acknowledging that poor whites in the pre-war South were thought of as threats to slavery, even as they tended to assert white supremacy as a means to *compensate* for their social denigration. A similar logic is touted by Lyle, as he must lynch Richard on the basis of his overt disrespect toward him, his business, and his wife. Lynching then is the germination of slavery's regimental preservation of white capital interests and its discursive terrorizing of black flesh.

Lyle's own rationale for lynching Richard is put in simpler, however sinister, terms. Lyle's need for a pure white wife, vouching for the fact that there "ain't many black" virgin

women, tells us a lot about his desire to maintain racial hierarchies based on black inferiority and white superiority, while exposing that such divisions are unable to prevent 'racial mixing' from occurring. For Lyle, whites crossing an explicitly sexual line demarcated by their spatial divisions—Whitetown and Blacktown-- and mixing with black people is justified, so long as black people never think intercourse or engagement with white people makes them human enough to cross into the 'freer' white space. Lyle is firm in this regard, telling Parnell that it would be okay for his son to grow "'fond of some little African princess'" so "'long as he leaves her over there'" (59). In the post-Emancipation American South black people are free *so long as* they remain separate from white space and peoples. By not recognizing these sorts of racial dynamics as still actively enforced in a post-slavery world, Lyle is granted license to lynch Richard. Lyle's incapacity to recognize the violence implicated in his affirmation that his son can desire a black girl so "long as he leaves her over there," constitutes an incapacity to name what drives him to oversexualize and obsess over black flesh. A failure to locate what lies beneath the naming of white terror, as Baldwin argues in *Nothing Personal*, allows for its cultural, social, and political longevity: "it has always been much easier (because it has always seemed much safer) to give a name to the evil without than to locate the terror within. And yet, the terror within is far truer and far more powerful than any of our labels: the labels change, the terror is constant" (12). Can a conceptualization of freedom and the human in a post-emancipation context remain viable so long as its guarantor, whiteness, remains intact? Is there a future beyond liberal humanism, where its contours of what constitutes the free and human are to remain visibly demarcated by whiteness?

Central to *Blues* is the proximity of subjugated black flesh to modern conceptions of freedom and the human. Locating emancipation's white intermediaries emphasizes its violent

institutional shortcomings. Writing of Britain's nineteenth-century emancipation process, Lisa Lowe identifies that "liberal parliamentarians legislating the four-year 'apprenticeship' and the post-emancipation societies after 1838 were guided more by the interests of West Indian colonial governors and ex-slaveholders, than by the commitment to providing material resources that would make self-determination possible for former slaves" (13). The technicians involved in a transition plan from slavery to emancipation were also the architects of transatlantic slavery. Access to the promises of freedom for the formerly enslaved was always going to be intertwined with the interests of their former oppressors. Richard's father Reverend Meridian asks a contentious question: "'but can I ask the children forever to sustain the cruelty inflicted by those who have been their masters, and who are now, in very truth, their kinfolk, their brothers and sisters and their parents?'" (77). The end to legal slavery brought on a renaming of the master/slave dynamic, transforming the former into the landlord and planter and the latter into a wage-earning liberal subject.

The threat of being terrorized by one's "kinfolk, their brothers and sisters and their parents," highlights too the interracial genealogies of enslaved families as well as their white counterparts, marking the sexual violence of such familial formations. This sexual violence did not vanish post-slavery, as Lyle's treatment of Willa Mae attests. Ultimately, one can read Baldwin's American South, in Walcott's terms as "a zone of and for the production of Black death" (9). When Meridian asks Lyle after he has been found not guilty, his rationale for killing his son, Lyle's response boils down to Richard disrespecting him, like a slave being dealt punishment for disobeying a master's orders. In his final encounter with Richard, Lyle says: "'boy, I always treated you with respect. I don't know what's the matter with you, or what makes you act the way you do—but you owe me an apology and I come out here tonight to get it. I

mean, I ain't going away without it'" (118). What Lyle doesn't expect is that Richard is unwilling to give Lyle what he *needs*. Facing Lyle's gun, Richard asks a series of rather simple, but pressing questions: "'why can't you leave me alone? White man! I don't want nothing from you. You ain't got nothing to give me… (*Lyle shoots once*) Why have you spent so much time trying to kill me? Why are you always trying to cut off *my* cock? You worried about it? Why?'" (emphasis original 119-120). For Lyle, answering, let alone *facing* Richard's questions, is impossible. On Richard wanting Lyle to contemplate why it is he needs him dead, Lyle tells Meridian "'I had to kill him then. I'm a white man! Can't nobody talk that way to *me*! I had to go and get my pick-up truck and load him in it—I had to carry him on my back—and carry him out to the high weeds. And I dumped him in the weeds face down'" (emphasis original 120). Lyle unveils that his strategic and meticulous killing of Richard is a testament to his internal necessity for retaining that "I'm a white man! Can't nobody talk that way to *me!*" Ultimately, nothing remains salvageable, let alone redeemable, if what constitutes the right to human in Lyle's estimation is, "continually defined against Black people and blackness" (Walcott 55).

For Lyle's brand of Southern white supremacy and for whiteness at large, the black body and flesh is a troubling matter. Challenging "the white world's assumptions," Baldwin argues in *The Fire Next Time,* is "to defend oneself against fear is simply to ensure that one will, one day, be conquered by it; fears must be faced" (27). As black peoples remain excluded from claims to the human, such an omission prevents folks from "authorizing what exactly freedom might look like and mean for them collectively" (Walcott 105). Richard's case then for "why don't you go home? And let me go home" does not register as an alternative form of action to Lyle, as it permits Richard the authority to decide the outcome of his encounter with a white man. In essence, Lyle cannot have Richard making decisions for himself and for whites. For Lyle, as well

as the Courthouse and Whitetown as an extension of himself, any black person questioning the legitimacy of his actions and intentions will be dealt with swiftly and violently. A reader and audience of Baldwin's play is left with a phantasmagoric portrait of racial violence continuously exacerbated by the catalyzing force that is whiteness. An alternative future depends then on reckoning with whiteness and its terrorizing of black flesh and peoples. Fear, as Baldwin puts it, must be faced.

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I want to end by addressing the juridical parameters of freedom for the formerly enslaved in America and how such orientation plagues the circumstances of Richard's lynching in *Blues*, identifying how a person is *given* freedom instead of freedom constituting a human essence. Freedom is state-sanctioned, not natural. Recognizing emancipation as a *legal process* whereby its boundaries differed based on region, Walcott reflects that in no case did "emancipation give the formerly enslaved the right to leave their surroundings" (1). To better highlight the rise of lynching in the post-emancipation period, Kris Manjapra highlights how "emancipations conserved and then reactivated the racial caste system of slavery, putting it to new uses that still structure the disequilibrium of life chances in our present societies" (5). In the postbellum period, no one better than Wells-Barnett understood the crucial tension between what constituted freedom and liberal subjectivity brought on by legal emancipation: "since the emancipation came and the tie of mutual interest and regard between master and servant was broken, the Negro has drifted away into a state which is neither freedom nor bondage" (73). Emancipation then must be understood as a legal process by *which black subjectivity is marked by a state of continued unfreedom.* It's important then to recognize emancipation's linguistic contours. Manjapra reflects candidly on the juridical language of emancipation: "the language of emancipation during the

nineteenth century referred to black people as various kinds of postslavery property, calling them 'cargo' and 'contraband.' European and American states designated emancipated persons not as 'citizens' but as 'freed people'" (8). Consequently, the language of emancipation renders the formerly enslaved as wards of the state instead of being its constituents.

Turning to Christina Sharpe to envision a dialectical understanding of racial terror's continued unfolding, where lynching constitutes the afterlife of the genocidal tendencies of the witch-hunt as well as the plantation, we witness how untenable life is for marginalized black folks in the wake of legal emancipation. Sharpe's work significantly gestures to the futures of Black Studies as well as the afterlives of transatlantic slavery in modern forms of black subjugation. Sharpe grapples with freedom in the post-emancipation period in theoretical terms: "that is, I say, the condition in the post-Civil War United States of the formerly enslaved and their descendants… still surrounded by those who claimed ownership over them and fought, and still fight, to extend that state of capture and subjection into the present. The means of Black subjection may have changed, but the fact and structure of that subjection remain" (12). The appendages of slavery, whether it be the slave ship, port, plantation, or auction block have principally been adapted to the terrain of the post-emancipation period, mainly in forms of state-sanctioned suppression as well as terror, including red lining, sharecropping, and lynching. This is where the utility of Sharpe's definition of *the wake* becomes vital. Sharpe defines *the wake* as the not yet past of slavery, which is "to articulate a method of encountering a past that is not the past" (13). Sharpe's methodology is useful in reckoning with state-regimes of terror as they adapt to the expectations of an ever evolving social and political present; this rears its devilish head most pertinently in the state's requirement for the surveilling and subjection of black bodies in in the aftermath of legal abolition. Sharpe's processes can be applied to the continued legacy

of the witch-trials and plantation through the enactments of lynching. For Sharpe, "to be *in* the wake is to occupy and to be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery's as yet unresolved and unfolding" (emphasis original 13-14). In concert with Sharpe is Saidiya Hartman's *critical fabulation,* which wrestles with the sheer inability to fully tell an adequate narrative of slavery and its afterlives: "the irreparable violence of the Atlantic slave trade resides precisely in all the stories that we cannot know and that will never be recovered" (12)[16]. Hartman's conceptual frame lends inspiration from Paul Gilroy's politics of transfiguration, deployed in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). Defining transfiguration, Gilroy notes how it "therefore reveals the internal fissures in the concept of modernity… its basic desire is to conjure up and enact the new modes of friendship, happiness, and solidarity that are consequent on the overcoming of the racial oppression on which modernity and its anonymity of rational, western progress as excessive barbarity relied" (38). The violence of slavery continues to unfold well after the nineteenth century as Baldwin's response testifies to the racial violence that took Richard Henry's fictional life, Emmett Till's life, and countless others in the twentieth-century and beyond.

In Walcott's words "emancipation as a synonym for *freedom* can only continue to make sense because it is through legislative and juridical practices and regimes that Black people come into a status that is other than that of being the enslaved" (emphasis original 3). To be other than enslaved, or to be human in Walcott's estimation, is to have one's humanness bound to the legislative and juridical practices that made certain life-forms enslaveable to begin with. Humanness and enslaveability are so intertwined with the legislative and legal, that to rely on

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[16] I extrapolate on Sharpe's and Hartman's work with the wake and fabulation as it relates to a literary tradition of paying tribute to the death of Emmett Till in the twentieth-century in my next chapter on Bebe Moore Campbell's *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* (1992)

these processes to move toward a future where freedom triumphs over oppression, is to be careless in our estimation of the potentialities of freedom beyond systems with the capability to free as well as enslave people. Instead, as an examination of Richard Henry's death reveals, black subjugation still remains legally permissible in an age of liberal humanism.

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The not-so-sharp divide between freedom and enslaveability has a legacy left unresolved by emancipation, manifesting itself in new ways in the post-slavery world. James Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie* takes one to a generalized post-slavery South, divided into Whitetown and Blacktown. Extralegal means, like that of lynching, have superseded chattel slavery in its pursuit to maintain the continuance of black death throughout the U.S. Lyle Britten's opening dialogue of Baldwin's play, talking to himself and the weeds around him, places firmly in the readers mind that *this* South is unchanged despite emancipation: "'and may every nigger like this nigger end like this nigger face down in the weeds'" (2). Baldwin's plot, the murder of Richard by Lyle, is revealed in these opening words. Never leaving the reader and viewer in doubt about who killed Richard, the utility of Baldwin's play is best summarized in the author's own words: "we are walking in terrible darkness here, and this is one man's attempt to bear witness to the reality and power of light" (xv).

In my final chapter, I turn to an analysis of Bebe Moore Campbell's *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* (1992), a novelistic rendering of Emmett Till's murder in the tradition of works like Baldwin's *Blues.* I look to Campbell's novel to examine the many-headed hydra of liberal progressivism and its countless failures. In reading *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, I highlight the *aftermath* of post-emancipation racial violence in the form of a lynching whose aftereffects give

readers a thorough understanding of how racial terror plagues the lives of poor and working-class black and white folks alike. Much of Campbell's novel addresses what follows the death of Armstrong Todd, a fourteen-year-old black boy killed in Mississippi while visiting his grandmother, and the consequent families and lives that intersect across temporal and spatial plains that connect to Armstrong's death. Campbell's novel exposes the hypocrisy and failures of anti-segregation legislation, and the resultant racial violence that follows. Ultimately, *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* begs the question of have we arrived at a time of freedom in a post-emancipation world? Baldwin's *Blues* in some ways only introduces an audience to the troubles inherent to dissecting the aftermath of racial violence across racial lines. In Campbell's novel, class and gender are more thoroughly intertwined in her text's assessment of the intersection between race, family, and trauma. In a more critical light, Campbell's novel fully envisions a transformation of colonial terror and the plantation in her narrativization of intergenerational and cross-geographical racial terror and trauma.

# CHAPTER V: THE MYTH OF FREEDOM: LYNCHING AND THE NEW PLANTATION IN BEBE MOORE CAMPBELL'S *YOUR BLUES AIN'T LIKE MINE*

Born in 1950 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Bebe Moore Campbell was a prolific writer of children's books, essays, novels, and plays who tackled issues like mental illness struggles in the African American community, as well as the generational impact of racial violence on familial, class, and racial dichotomies. Campbell's first novel *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, published in 1992, like Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie*, adds to the legacy of literary works addressing the lynching of Emmett Till, as *Your Blues* spans eras from the Eisenhower administration of the 1950s to the Bush administration of the 1980s. *Your Blues* portrays the brief life and subsequent murder of Armstrong Todd, a Chicago-born fifteen-year-old black boy visiting his grandmother Odessa Daniels in Hopewell, Mississippi. Floyd Cox will be driven to kill Armstrong on the conviction that the young boy spoke suggestively in French to his white wife Lily in his poolhall. Campbell's work examines the lives, black and white, of those impacted by Armstrong's death, from his mother Delotha and his father Wydell to Clayton Pinochet, a white journalist and son of the wealthiest man in this Southern community, a community whose wealth is enmeshed in the legacy of plantation slavery.

Much of *Your Blues* doesn't include a living Armstrong Todd. Rather, the ghost of their son haunts the likes of his father Wydell who struggles with sobriety, and his mother Delotha who will continuously call her future son W.T. by her first son's name. Armstrong's death haunts the white Coxes too, as Floyd's wife Lily struggles to comprehend the magnitude of what it means that her abusive husband killed a black boy under the guise of protected white hegemony. Armstrong's death forever encroaches on the lives of those most closely linked to what his future life *could've* meant. For instance, prior to Armstrong's death, Delotha and Wydell had been

estranged from one another. Eventually, however, they will find their way back to one another in the aftermath of their son's murder. The two open up a joint barber shop and beauty parlor business as well as have two daughters and a son. Once their second son W.T. is born, though, Wydell will fade from Delothoa's life, as she sinks her entire being into protecting her son. Wydell will slip back into a life of alcohol, as he longs for his wife as well as what it means to believe he has failed both of his sons. The trauma and legacy of Armstrong's death is always close at hand, no matter how desperately characters in Campbell's novel try to convince themselves they have moved on. This response is similar to the gesture of community Baldwin's play ends, but cannot be fully realized once Lyle is found not guilty for Richard's death, and Parnell was unwilling to fully condemn his friend while on the stand (121). *Your Blues* interrogates how race, family, class, and gender are thoroughly entwined in critical assessments of U.S. terror state. In vacillating between points of view throughout the novel to reveal the inner machinations of land-owning whites, poor white families in financial turmoil, and working-class black families wading through grief, addiction, and building a family in the aftermath of a traumatic even. Campbell's novel strives to critique racial terror as rooted in the state's abandonment of poor and working-class peoples, with a fixation on those most marginalized. Tensions along racial lines ultimately cannot seek resolve when financial insecurity and state sanctioned violence are ever present.

The chapter contextualizes the fracturing of intimacy and kindship bonds as a primary feature of state-sanctioned racial violence in order to understand the ongoing process of emancipation in literary works that explore American social and political relations through a post-emancipation context. Reading this fracturing in *Your Blues* emphasizes the reverberations of racial terror that not only harm those receiving said harm but shatter the family and kinship

networks of those either directly causing the harm as well as those who believe they have no ties to violence that transpired. What is important to reckon with is that state-sanctioned terror does not discriminate, as in the case of the Coxes, who in many ways, will experience grave financial distress in the aftermath of the lynching of Armstrong Todd. These familial comparisons exemplify how terrorism secures both racial and class hierarchies. As much as Floyd might consider himself carrying out his duty in lynching Armstrong for talking French to his wife, Floyd is merely seen as an expendable pawn by the planter class, primarily the Honorable Men of Hopewell, who are only concerned about ripple effects of the lynching impacting their larger project of exploiting both black and white folks in the pursuit to bring more industry to the Delta. Once familial networks as well as community relations are severed because of racialized acts of terror authorized by the state or otherwise legitimized, these sorts of state-sanctioned fracturings lead to the social fabric of what constitutes community being forever ruptured. Reading this fracturing emphasizes ways appendages of racial terror like lynching disrupt and alter black social relations, which *Your Blues* reveals as having catastrophic effects on white familial and social connections as well. Ultimately social relations across gendered, class, familial, and racial lines are concurrently ruptured by extrajudicial forms of terror. Under such duress, is possible to understand current constructions of freedom and the human as a tenable subject position for anyone? What does it mean that some white subjectivities, like poor whites, do not have access to the privileges afforded by liberal progressivism? How do we then grapple with the messy contentions between race, class, and gender when it comes to confronting how such positionalities are intimately tied to *being* free and *being* human? *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* posits how the failure and fracturing of liberal humanism through the example of Honorable Men of Hopewell who move to have Floyd arrested and tried for the killing of Armstrong, not in

pursuit of justice, but because having white investors believe that racial relations in the Delta are untenable, as black and white folks alike will be expected to work the new catfish processing plant, will deter Northern investors from bringing their capital interests to Hopewell.

First, this chapter will contextualize the relationship between the lynching of Armstrong and its larger implications to Stonewall Pinochet, the richest Honorable Man and the mastermind behind the catfish plan. He cannot have Northerners believing Southern capitalists don't have a handle on racial relations and that relations between black and white folks are stable and cordial, lynching both occasions to both threaten Hopewell's economic system as well as sustain it. What then is at stake when responses to extrajudicial racial violence are motivated by capitalist desires? The lynched black body ultimately remains tied to the dictates of profit gains and losses that defined plantation slavery.

Next, this chapter examines the geographic and familial fractures brought on by Armstrong's death, as his mother Delotha and father Wydell struggle to reconnect and build a family in the wake of their only son's death, both of whom were not in Mississippi when he was murdered. Important here is how Armstrong's death fractures Delotha's and Wydell's relationship to the point that even they have gotten back together, build a salon business together, and had three children, things inevitably collapse between them as both struggle to reconcile not only the loss of Armstrong, but their own wants and desires. Lastly, by taking the first two issues together, this chapter argues how lynching serves to mobilize the plantation economy into the twentieth century and beyond. Looking closely at how Stonewall understands disposable labor practices in the Delta, he sees it as necessary to exploit the poor and working class across all genders and races in order to modernize industry in the region. This means recognizing the plantation as a system of exploitation adaptable to liberal bourgeois practices. Ultimately, *Your*

*Blues* argues, legal emancipation did not free the enslaved. Instead, it brought with it new traumas, griefs, and struggles for black folks, as well as new ways of exploiting modernity, integration, and access for the New Plantation. As *Your Blues* showcases through its detailing of the fracturing of family networks and the manipulation of labor, plantation economy is able to live on successfully into the future.

**Mississippi Lynching and the Delta Blues**

*Your Blues* is a cross-geographic novel, weaving back and forth between Mississippi and Chicago, navigating the ways violence and trauma germinate throughout America. The Mississippi Delta haunts each familial and interpersonal relationship throughout Campbell's novel. In Campbell's Mississippi, the segregated white and black poor spaces reside far away from the mansions of the likes of the Pinochet's. Hopewell is thus a Delta town defined by the economic disparity between the affluent planter whites, the tenant farming black folks, and poor "white trash" families like the Coxes. In *Your Blues*, spaces like the desegregated factory-floor, for instance, do little if anything to fully dismantle networks of power, like that of the Honorable Men of Hopewell, a group of white Southern elites in Campbell's fictionalized Delta, that control the economic and social fabric of Hopewell, Mississippi. These same men are intent upon reproducing master-slave dynamics in the twentieth century, with the minor tweak of having the working public understand their inhospitable working conditions through the lens of racial harmony. The fear of operating within a racially harmonious factory floor, for example, terrifies Floyd as he resists working alongside mostly black women at the new catfish farm and processing plant. Instead, he is doomed to continue the life he led of petty crimes like burglary that he turned to after being released from prison that ultimately lead to a cycle of being in and out of jail.

Like Baldwin's *Blues*, Campbell's novel captures the cultural, historical, and political importance of Emmett Till's murder in Campbell's novel, which Donnie McMahand states "contextualizes personal struggle and psychological torment within rather transparent instances of social crisis" (212). Curiously, *Your Blues* doesn't begin by introducing the reader to the perspective of the Emmett Till figure Armstrong Todd, but instead delves intimately into the lives of the Cox family, the poor whites who are the reason the fifteen year old black boy is killed. At the outset, *Your Blues* intersects the singing of black fieldworkers on the Pinochet Plantation with the complicated gender and economic dynamics of Lily's and Floyd's sex life. Lily, to whom Armstrong will speak French in her husband's pool hall "woke up when the singing began. She lay quiet and still in her bed until her head was full of songs and the strong voices of the fieldworkers from the Pinochet Plantation seemed to be inside her" (9). For Lily, the blues songs of black fieldworkers exist in her mind like that of hymn, giving rise to a passion within her, which is ultimately tied to exploited black labor. These blues songs also represent for Lily the richness of the Delta landscape: "the music was rich, like alluvial soil that nourished everything and everyone in the Delta" (9). It is as if in Lily's mind, the Delta's "alluvial soil" *requires* the presence of laboring black bodies. Alongside Lily's thoughts of singing black folks is the description of a marital bed defined by material gain and the illusion of dominance. This is crucial to Campbell's opening to *Your Blues*, as Lily see the marital bed as a place to obtain material gains that are otherwise controlled by Floyd. Lily presses her bare breasts up against a sleeping Floyd, dreaming of what is to be gained by seducing her husband: "she kissed his spine and thought: *If I can get him to give me three dollars, I'll get me Rio Red lipstick; ain't had a lipstick in going on three months. I might can buy me some Evening in Paris and a scarf too. And maybe some rose-colored nail polish*" (emphasis original 10). In Lily's calculation, it requires

that Floyd sees her forced intimacy as coincidental. For Floyd, it is also importance that intimacy had to be initiated by him: “wanting her had to be his idea; he didn’t like it the other way around. Floyd said only whores acted that way” (10). In beginning with Lily’s acknowledgment of Floyd’s need for power, the novel highlights Floyd being vulnerable in his manhood as well as in the prospect of having to compete against sexually promiscuous women. In doing so, we witness Lily being aroused by the black fieldworkers right outside her door: “colored people’s singing always made her feel so good” (9). The aftermath of Emmett Till’s lynching is illuminating here: public response concludes that Carolyn Bryant, the twenty-one year-old white woman, had been flirted with and aggressively grabbed by Emmett Till in the grocery store owned by her and her husband. This revisionist construction of how events transpired speaks volumes to how rigid codes for black-white social relations were. Carolyn Bryant would maintain her remarks given at the 1955 trial of her husband Roy Bryant and his half-brother J.W. Milam for Till’s murder, that the young boy was sexually suggestive and physically violent toward her,[17] which nonetheless engages with how logics of lynching are intimately tied to white folks conceptualization of black bestial sexuality that is rooted in slavery’s production of black bodies as reproductive vessels. Important to how the white subconscious conceives of quantifiable desire is its relationship to sexual productivity and utility.

Armstrong reads his death in Floyd’s terror riddled eyes. Face-to-face with his killer, the young boy subconsciously asks: “where did all that hate come from?” (39). Armstrong’s question provokes an analysis of the hatred that fuels white supremacy writ large. Floyd has struggled with not being the apple of his father Lester’s eye, unlike his older brother John Earl.

[17] From *Civil Rights Division of U.S. Department of Defense*, “Emmett Till—Notice to Close File” (2021)

While in the Hopewell jail after the three men are arrested for Armstrong's death, Floyd remembers: "his mind drifted back to the first time his daddy had taken him hunting, when he was nine years old. Tramping through the woods, he felt sick and nervous, terrified that his father and brother would discover what he'd never told anyone: He was afraid of blood and guns" (97-8). Upon John Earl's joy at having shot a buck, Floyd's father forces his younger son to see the dying deer, upon which Floyd "became dizzy and nauseated… when Lester slung the carcass over the borrowed mule, he said to his younger son, 'I didn't know I was taking a girl hunting'" (98). For Floyd, having his own father put his fragile masculinity on display in front of his brother and himself is traumatizing for him as a boy. In an attempt to re-exercise his strong-willed white manhood in front of father, brother, and for his wife to bask in the glory of, Floyd will kill a black boy. Hunting a deer and killing a young black boy thus become interchangeable pursuits in Floyd's attempt at legitimizing his masculinity.

The reader arrives at this earlier memory *after* Floyd has already shot and killed Armstrong. Armstrong had learned French from his father Wydell who served in France during World War II to his white wife Lily in his poolhall. Armstrong is assumed to have spoken something explicitly sexual to Lily yet does so in a language white men like Floyd cannot comprehend, which calls into question a black boy's access to a language inaccessible to Southern whites, analogous to Richard's flaunting of a twenty dollar bill Lyle does not have change for in Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie*. Not only is it that Armstrong spoke to a white woman, but he does also so in a way that neither Lily nor Floyd can adequately respond to. This enrages Floyd. However, this episode coincides with Floyd's anxiety about what to *do* with the face Armstrong had talked French to his wife in his pool hall when he was not around: "for a moment he stood motionless, trying to decide what to do, because if the boy had talked crazy to

Lily, he had to something. Should he just holler at him? Should he go in that room and beat him with the pool cue? Knock him down? Just how angry was he supposed to get?" (20). Since a child, Floyd has struggled to "properly" showcase masculine feelings, to know how to react to a dying deer and how to respond to a black boy talking 'flirtatiously' to your wife. Floyd doubts how he'll respond, knowing John Earl would never hesitate: "if John Earl was here, Floyd thought, pounding his fist into his palm, he'd know just what to do. His brother always knew how to take the lead in any situation; that's what his daddy told him often enough" (20). Floyd's need for sexual dominance over his wife is compensation for what he lacks as a man of action compared to John Earl. Seeking his father's approval also lingers with every action Floyd seeks to undertake. The horror lies in the fact that a fifteen-year-old black boy's life is caught in the crossfire of a middle-aged white man straining for validation and struggling with his manhood.

For Floyd, when he journeys to Odessa's house alongside his brother and father to murder Armstrong, he feels enlivened by the fact his cold-blooded murder makes his father proud. After killing the young boy, the three men piled into a beat-up pickup trick, began smoking Marlboros, and listened to Hank Williams. Lester cuts in saying "'well, you might can't fix everything that needs fixing, but damned if you can't make some things right'" (40). It's as if Floyd has corrected his shortcomings as a young boy who was unable to withstand the sight of a deer's blood. To Floyd, murdering Armstrong functions as the terrain on which to *perform* manhood for white fathers to witness and congratulate. Later, as Armstrong's death eats away at Floyd's and Lily's marriage, as well as ostracizing the Coxes from the rest of the Hopewell whites, Floyd clings onto the moment when his father was proud of him: "later, when Floyd tried to forget everything else about this night, he would still recall the ride back home, the smoky air of the congested cab, the three of them pressed in close together, singing and laughing as their

shoulders touched. What warmed him more than anything was the sure, true knowing that his father, at last, was satisfied with him" (40). All it took was killing a terrified black boy for Floyd to feel a temporary sense of love from his father; it also appears that to Floyd, who will struggle with alcoholism, an inability to maintain steady employment, as well as being in and out of prison, all in the aftermath of being acquitted for Armstrong's murder, that it was all worth it.

Floyd's physical torment of Armstrong aligns with his abuse of Lily. In an attempt to survive his encounter with the Coxes, Armstrong contemplates, "what could he do to make them stop?" and ultimately, "remembered the two ten-dollar bills in his pocket. 'I have some money,' he said weekly" (38). Floyd is enraged by the prospect of Armstrong having access to money as well as making a judgment on why the young boy would even consider a monetary exchange for his life with a white man: "Floyd inched toward as the tall one stepped aside, and Armstrong could see the rage pouring from his eyes. 'You got money, nigger? You think you good as me?'" (38). Money in turn *creates* the possibility of equality and exchange as well as hierarchy based on who possesses more. In Floyd's estimation, Armstrong is supposedly questioning his financial status, and in turn, is infuriated that a black would consider himself on equal footing with a white man because he has money.

Floyd too will constantly be maddened by Lily's questioning his finances, as his post-acquittal will strain their finances, as the black fieldworkers who frequented his poolhall will stop coming, and he will hold onto the building longer than he should have before selling it. For Floyd and Lily, "their money had started running out the day Armstrong was killed. That was when the colored people stopped coming to the pool hall after work and the juke joint on weekends" (124). Lily knows that at all costs, she *must* keep Floyd in the dark about their dwindling finances and resources. The link between sexual intimacy and money is highlighted in

Lily's anxiety about not having any milk for their young son, Floydjunior. Having "slid into bed smelling clean and fresh," Lily "pushed into him with her breasts" (127). Regretting saying it as soon as she does, she asks: "'Floyd,' Lily said shortly, 'we need some milk for Floydjunior. He ain't had none in two days…' She knew as soon as the words were out that she had spoken too soon, that she should have waited until later" (127). Floyd is displeased that his wife is questioning his ability to provide for the family: "'Dammit. You saying I can't feed my own kid?'" (128). Floyd's question is rhetorical. Not only has he had to witness his masculine ability to react violently questioned by his father, now he sees his as status as a patriarchal provider being scrutinized by his wife. He responds then, the only way he knows how: "his palm came across her cheek, burning like a flame. She felt the heat, and then she saw a quick blinding light as he hit her again. Blood gushed from her lip. She covered her face with her hands. Floyd began punching her in the stomach… He just stared at her vacantly. Instead of rage, there was defeat in his eyes, and she didn't know which one was harder to see" (128). Through the abuse, it is as if Lily is able to witness and gauge her husband being wrought by the expectations of manhood and whiteness. In the moments right before Floyd shoots him, Armstrong witnesses a mixture of frenzy and defeat in his killer's eyes: "'Please, mister,' he managed to whisper. When he looked in Floyd's eyes he saw pain, rage, and loathing, but no mercy. 'Mama,' he cried'" (39). The novel's repetition of textual markers—the idea of Floyd's masculinity being called into question were he not to respond to Armstrong's supposed seduction of his wife through the backflash of his failure to kill the deer as a boy—establishes Floyd's violence as a reaction to the threatening gaze of racialized and gendered bodies who he believes are mocking his failures as a white man.

For the town of Hopewell, Armstrong's death has social and economic ripple effects. Stonewall Pinochet, the richest white man in the Delta town and leader of the Honorable Men of

Hopewell, fears what Floyd's murder of Armstrong will do the economy of the Southern town. For the Honorable Men, their power in the South is rooted in long history of white supremacy and plantation slavery: "the primacy they enjoyed had been historically bestowed upon them; it was their legacy. Their great-grandfathers had made the family fortunes with blacks and cotton, and both had continued to enrich them. And not by chance" (88). Ultimately, Pinochet argues that Armstrong's death will be bad for business. For the town of Hopewell, Armstrong's death will expose how fragile black-white social relations are, and reveal that it is capitalist purists that undermine these relations. As historian Leon F. Litwack in his introduction to the horrifying collection of lynching plates that comprises *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, notes how "every episode of racist violence in the United States was now [as America's public facing image expands during the Cold War] instantly reported around the world, affecting adversely the American image" (33). The Klan-like leader Stonewall argues: "'Now gentlemen, I don't have to tell you that this is a new day. And as our esteemed governor has told us privately, as well as publicly, Mississippi can't stand as an island. We can't be perceived as a group of savages. Wealthy northern industrialists don't invest in areas that are populated by savages. It's men like us who have shaped this region, and by God, we've got to take the bull by the horns on this whole affair. Gentlemen, we got us some rednecks that need to go to jail'" (89). The Honorable Men of Hopewell are the architects of the "alluvial soil" of Mississippi and need distance themselves from the "redneck" violence of lynching, or least, the poor whites that bring the area bad press.

A sense of planter affluence and laboring savageness recalls the master-slave relations, as James C. Cobb points out: "the Delta's reputation as a land where planters generally led a leisurely existence was in sharp contrast to its image as a region where the lot of the slave was an

especially hard one" (20). Stonewall's central concern is about the future of Southern economic interests that will have to rely on Northern investors, which means maintaining contrasting spaces of "the Quarters, a compound of rented two-room tarpaper shacks where the fields and sharecroppers who worked the nearby plantations lived," and "the sprawling plantation mansions of the Settleses and Pinochets, reminiscent of antebellum splendor that was part of the region's mythology" (13). The wealth of plantation mansions is reliant on the black folks living in the Quarters, reminiscent of, as Cobb notes "with so much of their wealth concentrated in their slaves, Delta planters, like their counterparts elsewhere, were understandably concerned about the health and natural increase of their slaves" (25). The future of Hopewell, Mississippi in Stonewall's mind means controlling the narrative of racial harmony, between poor whites and poor blacks, and also between wealthy whites and poor white and black folks. In Stonewall's estimation, letting the white trash Floyd Cox not have to at least face illusory accountability, means class respectability and amicable racial relations in the Delta are wavering, which in turn will deter Northern capitalists from investing in the region. For Stonewall, Hopewell's perception need be maintained as a bastion of Southern hospitality and amicable black-white social relations. Having someone like Delotha Todd living in Chicago and reading in the papers, as well as passing the message onto others, of the violence that has befallen her son, is detrimental in Stonewall's estimation to the market-value of Hopewell as a Southern town worth investing in. In Stonewall's terms, the South operates as a locale for working through the economic cache of racial relations in the South as endemic to capital security nationally. *Your Blues* in total, however, makes clear that racial violence is not exclusive to the South, nor is being the inheritors of plantation slavery's afterlife been regionally exclusive, where Jim Crow era terror and contemporary policing in concert with the war on drugs showcase.

In the wake of Armstrong's death, however, new lynchings happen in Hopewell. Stonewall's vision of a Delta where racial terror, at least getting national coverage, is vanquished and class and racial differences are peacefully accepted, is a pipedream. A maelstrom of racial terror follows in the aftermath of Armstrong's death: "a month had barely passed before another colored boy, this one seventeen years old, was shot down by a white man who was suspected of having fathered three of the lighted-colored children in the Quarters" (122). *Your Blues* points here to the gravest of sins a black boy or man could commit: having sex with a white woman and fathering mixed-race children. Terrance Finnegan similarly points to the assurance of supposed amicable relations between the planter class and former enslaved peoples post-Civil War: "many Delta planters believed that the region had transcended the racial tensions that had plagued other parts of the South since the end of the Civil War" (15). Stonewall's disillusionment isn't new to him, it's a product of inherited class and racial elitism: "the primacy they enjoyed had been historically bestowed them; it was their legacy" (88). Ultimately, the lynching of Armstrong Todd threatens Stonewall's vision of stable and amicable racial relations between exploited white and black laborers. If poor white and black folks are afraid of and terrorizing one another, this means not only losing Northern industrial investment in the region, but seeing the exploited labor force as unproductive and non-docile.

If anything, Stonewall's vision of racial unity post-Armstrong murder veers in the opposite direction. The reader learns "Floyd's acquittal and the press's subsequent departure gave the whites of the Delta license to act out the hostility that had been held in check by the glare of national attention" (121). The presence of press in Hopewell created a sense of cordiality among Southern whites, as if with eyes on them, they needed to uphold the adage of Southern hospitality. Sandy Alexandre in developing on the geographic meaning produced by the before

and after photographs of Emmett Till's life and death, interprets the young boy's body as what she calls, the "*geographies* of spatial subjectivity," by which "an individual's biography shapes our understanding of a particular geography, a particular place" (emphasis original 150-151). Armstrong's death encapsulates the defining characteristic of racial integration in the Delta, whereby the bourgeoise is only concerned with racial terror when it disrupts the labor market. *Your Blues* depicts the heinous lengths the Honorable Men will go in securing "their" labor market: "the Honorable Men of Hopewell had blood on their hands. Since the days of the New Deal they had manipulated relief benefits so that poor whites were often denied payments and pushed out of the county in order to keep in blacks who would work for starvation wages" (88). In equal measure, the Honorable Men displace poor whites in Hopewell so as to make it easier to prey on poor black folks. The violence of which Armstrong is dealt is part of his *biography*, which is part of the "geographies of spatial subjectivity" that define racial terror in Hopewell. As much as Stonewall wants to change the trajectory of Hopewell's relationship to racial violence, it remains forever and always a geography where "their great-grandfathers had made the family fortunes with blacks and cotton, and both had continued to enrich them. And not by chance" (88). For some Honorable Men, like Henry Settles, embracing the tradition of exploiting black persons through corning the labor market and paying them unlivable wages and lynching them when they resist such conditions, is what has gotten them their wealth in the first place: "'Maybe we're better off letting these Yankees think we are savages. That way they won't try to send our little girls to school with a bunch of black apes'" (90).

As Stonewall hopes, he wants Floyd to be arrested as a means for setting a precedent for peacefulness in Hopewell, knowing an all-white jury won't actually convict him. However, the very idea of Floyd's rationale for having killed Armstrong being put on trial makes the white

population of Hopewell uneasy. Floyd's arrest leads other white folks to question what privilege whiteness even has anymore: "Even whites were shaken by the trembling earth beneath their feet. Little towheaded kids, children old enough to know better, asked their mothers, 'Mama, is niggers as good as us?'" (123). Such a type of query unsettles the Honorable Men as well, who are initially offput by Stonewall's conviction that the Cox men need be arrested for the murder of Armstrong: "the idea that whites, even poor white trash, be punished for crimes against colored people was unheard of among the esteemed planters in that room" (89). To punish whiteness then is to call into question its ordained right to property, freedom, and control over the real of the human. The lynching site itself, as Alexandre argues, represented a site of self-possession: "lynched bodies and the frequency with which they were made spectacles of white amusement, anger, fear, loathing, and even love (as some have argued) constitute an 'informal system of display,' effectively granting titleship of a particular lynching site to whites through public practices of spectacular entitlement" (8). It is only when the communal white space of the lynching ground is called into question as a savage representation of Southern white customs, does its reign of white supremacy over Delta landscapes like Hopewell begin to destabilize. Similar to the old Reconstruction dynamics being recognized as barbaric in fictional landscapes like Hopewell, by the early 1870s, the Ku Klux Klan was also stigmatized by white Southerners, leading to it disbanding. From its ashes, routine everyday racial violence replaced it. In the pre-lynching domain of Hopewell, *Your Blues* presents picturesque racial harmony that inevitably will collapse. Lily's opening feeling toward the song sung by the laboring black folks reflects this sentiment: "the music was rich, like the alluvial soil that nourished everything and everyone in the Delta" (9). Such racial "harmony" throughout Hopewell, also reflets the everyday sexual exploitation black women endure: "even progeny of colored women and Chinese men, who'd

been enticed to pick cotton when colored workers first began fleeing north, could be seen, with their flattish faces, almond eyes, and kinky hair. These rainbow-hued children were absolute testimony that if colored women hadn't been honored, they'd certainly been desired. Although in practical terms that meant only that they and their children had been abandoned by men of every race" (35). The allure of Hopewell lies in the possibility of acquiring work there, as well as projecting desires onto black women that when through with, can be discarded, has had been done "by men of every race." The successive episodes of racial terror in Hopewell signal how extra-judicial forms of anti-black violence off one another, as whites in Hopewell are motivated by through their "license to act out the hostility that had been held in check" by the presence of Northern journalists (121).

Writing on the cultural logic of lynching, in order to think broadly about "why lynching emerged when it did" (5), Jacqueline Goldsby notes "from the 1890s to 1920s, observers vividly characterized anti-black mob murders as an addictive practice, a 'habit' that could spread uncontrollably around the country like a communicable disease" (21). However, as Goldsby further points out, the supposed regional limitations that ascribed lynching practices exclusively to the South, drove lynching to be less than central to defining American life and culture: "lynching confirms the extent of rural 'backwardness' compared with urban sophistication. It reifies the feudalistic power dynamics of agrarian politics against hierarchical instabilities produced by technologically driven industrialization" (21). The problem in Stonewall's mind, then, is that the economic future of the Mississippi Delta is vulnerable so long as the region is marked nationally as a geographical center of anti-black violence. The wealthy planter needs his esteemed Southern capitalists to realize the Delta's fate as well: "'Those of y'all with enough sense to be wearing your glasses will recognize this newspaper article depicting our fair town as

a place where barbarians are bred to murder colored children…" (89). The simulacrum of Southern white prestige is shattering; where white "barbarians" are being "bred to murder colored children," is spreading to the masses in the 'liberalized' and 'refined' North. For the elite whites of Hopewell, the actions of the poor whites are tragic, and for the poor whites, the appearance of educated and mobile black folks is terrifying.

During Floyd's trial, Lily herself becomes aware of a racially integrated public sphere. It is seeing black men not in tattered field clothes and not tending to the cotton harvest that shocks Lily:

> seeing so many colored men in suits when it wasn't Sunday made Lily feel strange. She'd seen colored men on their way to church in frayed coats and patched-up pants, wearing the same rough brogans they wore in the fields during the week, but the men in front of her weren't dressed in tattered clothing. They seemed prosperous and, as they busied themselves with their writing and picture taking, important. Her own dress, once a bright yellow but now faded, felt shabby (118).

For Lily, the black men in suits signal a higher income for black folks that she herself does not possess. The black men in suits also elicits shame for Lily, as her own appearance feels dirty and faded among prosperous and important black men. Similar to Jo Britten's courtroom allegiance to her husband Lyle in Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie*, Lily questions why her husband's murder need be thoroughly examined by a jury of their (white) peers: "Lily's shoulders were stiff and aching as she listened to her brother-in-law. Why wasn't it enough to say her husband had killed because he loved and wanted to protect her? She wanted everyone to know that" (119). However, as *Your Blues* unfolds, Lily will come to the realization that of Floyd's bitterness and rage toward black men in particular had nothing to do with her safety. As Michael J. Pfeifer astutely observes regarding claims to "justice" sought through extra-judicial mob violence "lynching across the postbellum United Stated underscored the difference between the criminal

justice values held by many rural and working-class people, who sought harsh retribution closely supervised by the community" (94). The question that hangs in Lily's mind, why is Hopewell *now* questioning Floyd's motivation for lynching a young black boy? Armstrong's lynching and the presence of suit wearing black men in relation to Lily's class shame emphasizes the importance of poor whites having an underdeveloped class consciousness that is incapable of recognizing their common struggle with poor black folks against white supremacist capitalism (which arguably, is all forms of capitalism). For someone like Lily in her poor working-class socioeconomic position, one can perceive that she has more economically in common with black families like the Todds who worked the Delta fields for decades, then she does with any of the Honorable Men of Hopewell. In Dora Apel's study of the iconography of lynching, she addresses how by "the 1890s, economic conflict among whites themselves threatened the possibility of interracial political alliances, prompting the huge 'spectral lynchings' that reinforced white solidarity across class lines" (25)[18]. Apel further addresses how "the assertion of white male power over all blacks as well as white women through the terror of lynching was meant to maintain white political supremacy through 'racial purity' in a segregated economy" (25). Lynching as an event not only leaves in its wake social and economic disruption, not only disrupting the subjective geography near the event's hypocenter, but to the very fabric of a white patriarchal subconscious grappling with its continued perpetuation of black death.

As we return to the interlude in Floyd's pool hall that leads to his death, Armstrong rages against Southern black folks being fearful of white men. In admonishing the barkeep Jake

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[18] Not just as possibility, but the Fusionist movement of the nineteenth-century had come to prominence prior to its takeover of the governorship and legislature in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1894. For example, the Fusion part in in 1845 in Ohio, had run candidates for election in opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 as well as the Missouri Compromise provision outlawing slavery north of the 36°30' parallel.

singularly and black folks collectively, Armstrong concludes: “If a white man told Jake to jump off a bridge, that black fool would jump... *That’s what’s wrong with the colored people down here; they’re so scared of these crackers. Well, I ain’t scared of no crackers*” (emphasis original 18). To Armstrong, fears about racial terror are uniquely Southern. Curiously, Armstrong imagines himself in close proximity to whites even as he’s removed from the Delta: “‘The supreme court said last year that the schools hafta integrate. But me, I’d rather sit next to northern crackers. Not these poor-white trash people down here’” (18). Armstrong talks to the fellow black men in the pool hall as if this were a space safe from white interjection and hostility. It is when Armstrong is speaking French to Jake, as if to rile him up, that Lily enters the pool hall, altering not only the trajectory of Armstrong’s life, but of the trajectory of black speech. In an attempt to redirect who Armstrong was talking to, Jake goes to Floyd: “‘Mr. Floyd, he was talking it [French] to your wife’” (19). *Your Blues* is clear in how it wants Jake to be represented in the fallout of his telling of Armstrong’s encounter with Lily to Floyd: “Jake’s crime was all more heinous because the inhabitants of the Quarters weren’t unfamiliar with betrayal, even the racial variety of that most grievous sin. The colored of Hopewell knew the Uncle Toms among them, but their betrayals were meager… but what Jake had done was far worse than passing or whoring or even loving white babies more than your own. What he had done was incomprehensible. A boy was dead, handed over to white men like garbage wrapped in newspaper. And Jake wasn’t sorry. Not one bit” (65). Deciding what to do, Floyd is hung up on what course of action to take in regard to Armstrong: “for a moment he stood motionless, trying to decide what to do, because if the boy had talked crazy to Lily, he had to do something” (20). Armstrong’s bitterness toward Southern black people, couched in his observation, “that’s what’s wrong with the colored people down here; they’re scared of these crackers,” fills the space of the

pool hall, which compels Armstrong to flex his knowledge of French in Jake's face, which has Armstrong forgetting that assumed arrogance and subversion of racialized language expectations can very easily be the motivating forces for anti-black terror.

Floyd struggles to stake a legitimate claim with himself for why he must kill a fifteen-year-old black boy, and is instead more preoccupied with how his family and the broader white public will perceive his inability to react swiftly to Armstrong's supposed advances on Lily. In Floyd's father's estimation, how his son acts in response to Armstrong's supposed transgression, instructs the personal and collective logics of white supremacist manhood: "'Handled it, did you' his father said, spitting out a slimy wad into the commode. 'I don't know about that. There's a certain way me and your brother handle niggers. That's the way you took care of it? Like we woulda done? Like you was one of us?'" (30). Lester needs his son to know that the future of white supremacy lies in white men like Floyd continuing the legacy of dealing with black peoples swiftly and violently. Exposing the ramifications of what motivates Floyd is similar to what Richard's father Meridian desires to hear from Lyle Britten in Baldwin's play, about why he needed to kill his son, caring little about the courtroom's not guilty verdict. Rather than confronting this dilemma by having the father of the lynched son confront the murderer as is the case in Baldwin's play, Campbell's novel is interested in examining this crisis through the interiority of the killer. Floyd does know that a core feature of his white manhood is tied up in how he handles black boys and men talking to his wife. Pfeifer accounts for how "although historians have yet to systematically study lynching across the South during Reconstruction, evidence suggests that episodic collective violence reinforcing white masculine authority in all walks of southern life accompanied the political violence" (13). Twentieth century lynchings like that of Willie Earle in Pickens, North Carolina in 1947, and Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi

in 1955, Litwack observes "anticipated a new wave of terrorist killings that would erupt when whites used every means at their disposal to maintain their supremacy in the face of an emboldened and enlarged civil rights movement" (32). In both Baldwin's and Campbell's works, we aren't presented with lynchings per se, in the sense of a collective mob action, but rather with terroristic murders. In each text there are individuals, Lyle and Floyd, who are impelled by the voice of the community. In Lyle's case, he can't have people in Whitetown believing he let a black man talk back to him. For Floyd, he can't let his father and brother down by letting Armstrong live for talking in French to his wife. Similarly, Pfeifer notes how "elsewhere, in the Mississippi River Delta parishes with overwhelming black majorities, lynchings were rare, occurring instead, at particular and infrequent moments of racial crisis" (22). Lynching functioned to maintain white terrorism's stranglehold on the social and political status quo in relation to black sociability as well as new forms of political autonomy. As a response, white liberalism's motivations for justice against lynchings was couched in preserving capital interests in the South.

**Chicago Blues**

Chicago is a source of pain, suffering, grief, and struggle for Armstrong's mother Delotha and father Wydell. Chicago is where their marriage failed, where Wydell struggles with addiction, and where Deoltha's financial insecurity as a single mother led her to have to send Armstrong to Mississippi to be cared for by her mother. Chicago in its capacity to fracture the Todd family is directly linked to what is often taken as a more visceral form of racial terror, lynching, which happens in in Hopewell. In either case, Chicago and Hopewell define the contours of the systemic violence of racial terror. The novel's first engagement with Armstrong's father Wydell, estranged from Delotha, sees him hungover and mixing up his days: "then he

remembered: he didn't have enough carfare, let alone money for breakfast" (107). Wydell's drunken tirades off screen have bled into another, a reader can assume: "only two months before, he had awakened on Tuesday morning, to find out that he had been unconscious all of Monday. His boss had warned him then about his absence. He wondered if he even had a job" (106). Being awoken by his landlord Mrs. Stewart who is asking for rent as well as informing Wydell that tenants have been complaining of his "stumbling" in drunk and at late hours, he thinks to seek out his cousin Lionel and his wife Amelia, owners of a shoe repair shop, to help pay his debts. Wydell thinks over what his cousin might give him: "maybe Lionel wouldn't give him enough to pay his rent—even though he had it—but he'd at least give him bus fare and enough for some food. After all, hadn't he let Lionel and his wife come live with him and Delotha when he first came up to the city? He shuddered as he remembered the four of them and Armstrong squeezed into one room" (108). For Wydell, there is resentment tinged with how he feels about Lionel, not seeing him paying as a sort of handout, but as repayment for letting him stay with Delotha and their son. With the introduction of Wydell, Campbell's novel presents the fractured family, one which despite the burdens of financial insecurity, reminds readers of its capacity to shelter and help one another even at its messiest. The Chicago sequences of Campbell's novel detail how the lynching of Armstrong reverberates throughout the country, by exploring how the Todd family in particular wades through grief, violence, and trying to pick up the pieces in the wake of state-sanctioned racial terror.

Wydell arrives at his cousin's shop as he's closing up, when Lionel asks: "'why aren't you at the church?'" (109). Wydell doubles down on his animosity toward Lionel, pointing again at the fact "after all, if it hadn't been for him letting Lionel live with him, Lionel wouldn't have nothing! Not the shoe shop, not that piece of a house he owned off Cottage Grove. Probably

wouldn't even have that big-butt yellow wife of his, or them knock-kneed boys he seemed to think were the new messiahs. He had him a boy too" (109). Lionel confronts Wydell's absence head on, putting Armstrong's fate bluntly to the father: "'don't you care about nothing no more?' He paused for a moment, and Wydell steeled himself for the onslaught of one his cousin's high-and-mighty speeches about the evil of alcohol and the power of the Lord. 'Man, we on our way to your son's funeral'" (110). In shock, Wydell merely deflects what he has just heard: "'listen, Lionel can you just let me hold five bucks till payday. I got kinda short on account of --'" (110). Hearing of Armstrong's death has a belated reaction, as it hits Wydell "like a delayed echo, played over and over inside his mind" (110). At his son's funeral, Wydell struggles to understand the magnitude of the loss of his son: "when he found himself before the casket, he forced himself to look; the boy's face was bruised, but still he seemed just to be sleeping, as though all Wydell had to do was shake his shoulder and he'd wake up and give him another chance" (111). Seeing his dead son before him, Wydell is forced to confront what he believes are the myriad of failures he has committed as a father; that to simply shake his son awake, he'd be given a second chance to do his son right.

The end of novel sees Wydell trying to have his second son W.T. see the world both his parents and brother came from, before it's too late and W.T. is swept up under the tide of gang violence and addiction in Chicago. The absence of a "promised land" represents the all-encompassing scope of racial terror, whether in Chicago or Mississippi, there can be so no safety or freedom for black folks. In a similar fashion, it is as if the Southern social landscape is imported to the North. As Wydell and Delotha will have two daughters and a thriving beauty salon, it is the birth of their second that (re)haunts them in the Chicago hospital. Wydell begins to fear: "another boy, he thought. They kill the boys, the men. Hang them by their necks and then

torch their lifeless bodies" (222). Seeing his newborn son, Wydell can only think of his future death. In Wydell's mind, what will stop Chicago whites from doing to his newborn son what they did to Armstrong in Mississippi? Eventually Wydell will take his son back home, reminding him "'that is where me and your mother is from. This is where your brother got killed. I thought you ought to see it one time in your life, just so you'd know'" (331-332). Needing to see Hopewell again and having his son W.T. see it for the first time, he is reminded of the life that had him and his mother laboring in the cotton fields, his old man beating him, him falling in love with Delotha for the first time, and the field songs that could keep someone from the brink. This same Delta took Armstrong, but so too was Chicago shaping to feed his second son to the fire.

As readers we have known about Armstrong's death for quite some time, and yet, here we are witnessing his father come to the revelation that his own cousin knew of his death well before he did. Not only that, but the funeral preparations had gone on without him, and with that, Wydell finally comprehends he has lost his baby boy. Wydell recognizes there had been a gulf between father and son, both before his death as well as after. For Wydell, trying to fully articulate what his relationship to his late son once was, is unfathomable regardless of where he was being raised when he died. For the grieving Wydell, he was estranged from his son well before he was murdered. Wydell in the proceeding pages following his son's funeral is haunted by what Armstrong's fate could have been if he were in Mississippi with him. Drinking at Scott's Bar, Wydell begins to blame Delotha for Armstrong's death, thinking "women were supposed to raise their kids, to protect them" (153). In another sense, Wydell argues when speaking to the bartender that Armstrong's fate was sealed the moment he went South: "'a mule got a better chance at living than a nigger in Mississippi. And that's the truth'" (153). After Armstrong's funeral, Wydell will go on drinking binges and have breakdowns at work, where he

has visions of Armstrong, leading to him checking himself Wydell checks himself into a psyche ward where "he insisted upon remaining there for four months, long enough to purge from his body the memory of alcohol and banish the phantoms of his dead son from his mind" (162). Campbell's novel sees a point of contact between financial insecurity and black folks struggling with addiction as social fractures brought on by legacies of racial terror. Armstrong's death fuels Wydell's bitterness, resentment, and guilt as a father to a black boy, where such struggles will be sustained through his addiction.

Visiting Wydell while he is hospitalized, Delotha begins to remember the old Wydell she fell in love with when they were both down in Mississippi. Eventually, however, Delotha realizes, "what she wanted more than anything was a chance to begin again, to have a brand-new Armstrong filling her womb" (167). Eventually rekindling their intimacy, Delotha wants desperately to have another son with Wydell; a second Armstrong. Delotha's willingness to "begin again" is entirely bound to having a second son, and in a crucial way, a reborn Armstrong: "he would fill her again, she thought, put another Armstrong inside her, and this time she would do better. This time she'd take care of her son and not anyone hurt him" (164). Delotha keeps her longing for a second son away from everyone, including Wydell. Having just had her second daughter Karen, Delotha needed to conceal how her needing to have a second son was weighing on her: "she didn't want anyone to know how badly she wanted a boy, not even Wydell. Armstrong had never stopped haunting her, and she still grieved for her dead son, crying for him when her husband didn't see her… for fifteen years, she'd wanted to retrieve the child she lost. And now, at forty-four, she had one last chance" (217). Delotha's struggle with the ghost of Armstrong, to be able to do right by a second son, is a battle she wants to wage on her own, to keep even her husband in the dark on this longing.

Delotha and Wydell will eventually have another son, Wydell Todd Jr., or W.T. as he is referred to in the novel. Delotha instantly notices W.T.'s likeness to his deceased brother: "he was so much like her first boy. 'Armstrong,' she said softly, pressing her lips on the nape of his neck, the side of his face, next to his little ear. 'Armstrong,' she repeated, and her fierce words rose. 'No white person will ever hurt you'" (220). Delotha will be consumed by caring for W.T., which will lead her to paying her daughters no mind as well as stopping her work at the salon. She will begin to push Wydell away as well. Upon being in the hospital room with Delotha and having Lionel and Amelia visit, Wydell is filled with dread by the sight of his newborn son. Delotha's care for W.T., her nursing of him in a way she did not do with their two daughters, breastfeeding him and giving the girls formula, leaves Wydell feeling uneasy: "[Wydell] was astonished when Delotha pulled down the front of her gown and gave W.T. her breast" (223). For Wydell, this scene made him "vaguely aware of an uneasy feeling, a pinprick of annoyance deep within him" (223). The prospect of keeping W.T. alive terrifies Wydell similar to the ghost of Armstrong's ability to drive him to get clean to busy him to the point of not being haunted by his son's memory.

Campbell's novel is strategic in going to great lengths in describing the complex relationships between the Todds and Coxes. For *Your Blues*, both couples are forever linked through not only Armstrong's death, but their class struggles as well. Regarding Delotha's and Wydell's relationship, the moment W.T. is born, Wydell becomes a ghost to her. In the brief quiet of awaiting upon children returning from school, there is a moment of rising intimacy between Delotha and Wydell. Being close to his wife "he laughed a little, brushed up against her, and held her breasts in his hands. 'I need you too,' he whispered into her neck" (272). Yet, for Delotha, it is as if she is compelled to resist Wydell: "for a moment she felt heat stirring between

her thighs, and she wanted to pull her husband close to her, to feel him inside and drown in the pleasure that they created. But as Wydell began caressing her she thought she heard W.T. calling her. She pushed her husband's hands away. 'My baby wants me,' she said" (272). Interestingly, just as there is a lack of intimacy between Delotha and Wydell, this gulf between the two is somewhat comparable to the sort of contractual intimacy that defines Lily's and Floyd's marriage. For Delotha, Wydell has been useful so long as he could supply her with a new son. Lily she would press her breasts up against Floyd as she thought of the lipstick, perfume, and scarf she'd buy with the money he'd give her. Of course, there is a gulf of difference between what is at stake for Delotha and Lily in their respective marriages, but recognizing the contractual elements of their relationships reveals the fractured nature of these intimacies. Wydell longs for companionship with his wife but will search to fill this feeling as Delotha pushes him away. Wydell will take up drinking again, seeing it this time as a form of intimacy: "drinking again was like finding an old lover and taking her to bed; Wydell knew what to expect and where her secret pleasures were hidden. What he forgot was that he didn't know how to control her" (278). Wydell will take his resentment out on W.T., who will be suspended from school for righting, revealing bluntly to his son his relationship to school: "'do you know that when I was a boy, I couldn't even go to school all year long. That's right. All the black kids had to pick cotton, and our schools stayed closed as long as there was cotton to pick. Some years I didn't go to school but four months'" (281). There is a distance between himself and his son which Wydell relates to his upbringing as an exploited young black boy. However, Wydell resists revealing to W.T. the violence that awaits him on the Chicago streets.

Eventually, all of Delotha's smothering of W.T. will not be able to protect her son from the world outside their home. Thinking about high-school-age W.T., Delthoa worries: "why did

that bot love those streets so much? His rhythms matched those of the loud rappers who constantly screamed from the radio in his room" (308). The lure of a world for her son beyond his mother's embrace has always scared Delotha. The life Armstrong could have lived had he not been killed, takes hold of her as she fears for her second son: "as hard as she tried not to think of him, visions of Armstrong forced their way into her mind. Her church's twenty-year memorial for her son would be held later that year, and the prospect had set Delotha to thinking of him almost constantly. Now she couldn't help reflecting bitterly that if he had lived, he might have graduated from college also" (269). As much as Delotha has tried to protect W.T. from the terror of white folks, it is an unknown enemy taking hold of her son: "she didn't know where he was, except that he was somewhere gravitating toward peril, dancing with it, embracing danger like a woman he paid for. Delotha sighed. All her life she'd been defending him against the wrong enemy; she would have to fight the streets to save him, and she didn't have the strength" (308). In a tragic way, what kind of strength would it have taken for Delotha to save Armstrong from being consumed by white terror? Wydell's battle with addiction, his own trauma of growing up poor with an abusive father, and Delotha's eventual struggle of having to financially and care for herself and Armstrong, are all forces that led Delotha to send Armstrong to Mississippi to stay with her mother. In essence, Armstrong's fate was sealed through the harm his parents endured in Chicago. Chicago and Hopewell worked in concert to beat down Wydell and Delotha as well as kill Armstrong. They will continue working together to destroy W.T. The social geophagies of one are haunted by the other and vice versa. For example, while working at Erlinger Knitting Mills in Chicago the day after Armstrong's funeral, Wydell is subconsciously transported back to Hopewell: "as he pressed clothes, Wydell remembered how, when he was a boy, his father would walk out on Pinochet's fields with the expression of a whipped dog. It didn't take much, not

much at all, for his father to grab him by his elbow, yank him behind the house, and strip him down" (155). Like Armstrong, Wydell too endured violation and abuse in Hopewell that has brought them both to Chicago.

**The New Plantation**

For the New Plantation, it is the mobilization of lynching that links the legacies of chattel slavery, the Jim Crow Era, and the Civil Rights Era to stabilize a New Plantation economy for the twentieth century. As collateral, the New Plantation works to fracture black families seeking stability post-enslavement. It isn't only that Reconstruction failed in realizing the possibilities of freedom for those once enslaved, but that plantation politics remained integral to twentieth and twenty-first century industry and policy reform, thus making the possibilities of freedom restrictive and limiting. *Your Blues* offers this critique through Stonewell's and the Honorable Men of Hopewell's invitation for modern industrial innovation to find its way to the Delta. Stonewall proposes a catfish farming and processing plant as Hopewell's future market, which will rely on the exploited labor of poor black and white folks. Because of how Stonewall understands the extractive potential of black and white folks collectively, he sees black-white social relations as having to appear and operate on cordial and productive terms in order to harvest the full potential of the poor laborers of Hopewell. Thus, for Stonewall, Floyd's lynching of Armstrong need be understood as compromising future capital aspirations for not only himself, but for the Honorable Men of Hopewell who collectively exploit the Delta.

Campbell's Mississippi Delta is rigidly divided by the mansion-owning planter elites, poor black fields workers of the Quarters, and the poor white folks. For Hopewell, these divisions of Southern spaces are embedded in a mythology of racial and class antagonisms rooted to the geography. Clayton Pinochet, a faux liberal and Stonewall's only son, remembers

his once tenuous relationship with the only daughter of the Coxes, Dolly, and how Clayton's father was to pay for him to take her to Jackson to ger an abortion, under the pretense that "Pinochets don't marry her kind. That's the end of it" (50). Stonewall confronts Lester and John Earl, reminding them of the two family's intimate history, rooted in the class and racial politics of the Civil War: "'All this time, and you don't know who the law is around here? Your granddaddy knew. In 1862 my granddaddy paid three hundred dollars and sent yours to war in his place. He couldn't send a nigger, so he sent one of y'all'" (51). Stonewall's historical account here is questionable at best. However, Stonewall reminds the Cox men that poor white folks in their own ways, are vulnerable to the violence enforced by planter elites. The plantation economy isn't accessible to all, and the 'law' makes it so that poor white folks are disposable.

With the Pinochets' influence still strong well into the Civil Rights era, it is no shock that Stonewall intends to control the Coxes when Hopewell finds out Floyd lynched Armstrong. Telling the Honorable Men, Stonewall posits: "'We got to think about the economic future of this state, as well as our own futures… Everything we do from her on in has got to be done according to the letter of the law. Those crackers have got to be arrested'" (90). Hopewell's economic future is entwined with performativity of racial solidarity, thus making his lynching of Armstrong not indicative of racial relations in the region. Besides, Stonewall knows the state is on only making an example of Floyd: "'We arrest them. We let two of them go. From everything I've heard, it was the younger boy that actually killed the nigra. Besides, we don't need but one symbol got justice, and I'm sure a sympathetic jury of his peers won't deal too harshly with him'" (91). While being in collaboration with the state and the courts, Stonewall attempts to preserve an economically viable Delta, where poor and working class folks, regardless of crimes committed, are controlled like pawns by planter capitalists.

What then is the future of Hopewell? On an occasion of the "leaders" of Hopewell gathering, Stonewall addresses how the Delta has changed from relying on the labor of chattel slaves to poor black folks, to an agrarian system that has become more and more mechanized. Stonewall reflects and considers: "'Why, I remember the time when the fields were full of nigras singing and picking cotton. Now it's mostly machines. The Delta's always meant cotton, gentlemen… The Delta needs new industry if the people are going to be able to make a living. Otherwise all those nigras who used to be in the fields, the ones that haven't caught the train to Chicago or Detroit, well, they're going to be emptying out the state coffers'" (172-3). Stonewall then proposes catfish farming in order to maintain the status quo, where the mostly poor black folks who arduously labored in the cotton fields will make pennies on the dollar in factories. The plantation model thus modernizes, getting a facelift. Catfish farming, in Stonewall's estimation, is no different than how plantation slavery *bred* its living capital: "'Listen. You breed them just like you breed hogs. Just because they're in the water don't make no difference. If you all remember, we used to breed the nigras'" (173). The method of extracting resources from the land through subjected labor, that once maintained an agrarian style economy in South, will benefit a more industrialized one. Where it was once enslaved black peoples working cotton fields, to the now more modernized process of land extraction, cheap labor has always defined the economic vitality of any given industry. Clayton understands his father's rationale for brining catfish farming to Hopewell: "he had heard enough to know that the new industry his father was heralding offered nothing to the legions of poor whites and blacks who had become idle because of the mechanization of cotton farming. The profit margin of catfish farming would be maintained by the abundance of cheap labor in the area" (173). Stonewall's earlier sentiments about having Floyd arrested for the murder of Armstrong, in order to quell anti-integrationist

attitudes in Hopewell, is vital to the future of his proposed catfish farming venture, that will rely on both poor and white folks to maintain the profit margin of this new plantation industry. Stonewall's desire for the catfish farm and processing plant to take over for the bygone era of cotton farming in the Delta, echoes that of New Capitalism, whereby the idea that the plantation has always been an adjunct and support to Northern "industrial" capitalism, and that modernity in the South is linked to progress in the North.

With the prospect of job opportunities on the horizon, the New Plantation Catfish Farm and Processing Plant seems to usher in hope for the black folks in Hopewell who have put off migrating to Detroit and Chicago under the pretense of better jobs in the North. *Your Blues* puts into context the personal struggle of poor black folks living in the Quarters who eagerly await new industry in the South: "the old-timers, who'd chopped and picked cotton in their youth, were so thoroughly riddled with rheumatism and arthritis that they could barely manage to satisfy their curiosity by walking to the end of their porches and staring at the heavy equipment for a few moments before collapsing into rickety rockers" (252). It's as if the bodies of these people have been broken by the labor once readily available in the area, trying to find hope in the new work that will inevitably bring with it mental and physical pain. The catfish farming industry brings with it hope for younger generation black folks as well: "but the younger people, those who had failed to take either the Illinois Central or, later, Amtrak to Chicago and were now surviving on welfare checks and fatbacks, were excited. There hadn't been prospects for employment in Hopewell since the last of the manual laborers had been run off cotton plantations by automatic pickers" (252). The New Plantation thus exploits possibility and hope as means for possessing labor extraction and exploitation.

The catfish farming plant signals a transitional period in Hopewell, a landscape once prosperous through chattel slavery, then through sharecropping and tenant farming, and now moving in the era of factory labor. Campbell characterizes the illusory hope of prospective industry in the Delta as a byproduct of capitalism's supposed innovative industry creation, noting that: "months before the first pregnant catfish was dropped into its new home, the mood of black Hopewell was as close to celebration as it had been since the Emancipation Proclamation" (252). The newly built catfish process plant shepherds in sentiments of possibility comparable to those generated by the end of chattel slavery. Crucially, it is under the guise of bringing work to Hopewell that Stonewall has poor black and white folks believing the future of economic vitality in the Delta is in catfish. Just as tenant farming appeared favorable to enslavement, its exploitive principle showed little differences in the practices of plantation slavery. The New Plantation is thus a response and fix to the failures of tenant farming, as well as continuing the task of modernizing and liberalizing dehumanizing labor practices.

Ida Long, a working-class black woman, who we learn toward the end of the novel is the daughter of Stonewall, ties together *Your Blues* attention to the fracturing of the black family and the sexual, gender, and class exploitation explored in many ways throughout the novel. In a sense, Ida's narrative, in both her own working-class struggles and coming to terms with the sexual and class exploitation that brings about her birth, reveals the fraught intimacies that connect the Coxes and Todds. In coming to terms with Clayton being her half-brother, but not being forthright in revealing this to him, she reaches out to him for a potential position at the catfish farming plant once it opens. Clayton however reveals the exploitive potential of the factory farm. Just a page after characterizing word getting around about the catfish farm as production celebration and jubilance, Clayton tells Ida to stay away: "'You don't understand,' he

told her. 'It's going to be just as bad as—as sharecropping ever was'" (253). In Richard Shweid's examination of the catfish farming industry, he notes: "many people in the Delta found close parallels between farming cotton and farming catfish… critics of the Mississippi catfish industry contend that it continues a long tradition of keeping black Deltans dependent on minimum-wage labor for their income, keeping them poor and frequently uneducated in order to have a ready labor pool" (9). Instead of funding worker's programs in the area, for instance, Stonewall's proposition to build and establish a new industry in the Delta figures to revamp the plantation economy, to continue growing the Delta economy though a "ready labor pool" desperate for anything. Important to note, is that despite its location in the South, the catfish farming and processing plant is implicated in American economics, as Stonewall persistently makes it known that in order for Hopewell to actually implement this new industry, it will require Northern investment.

The New Plantation Catfish Farm and Processing Plant will most employ black women, and Floyd who is newly out of prison on one of his multiple convictions for robbery cannot fathom this. Floyd struggles to witness a Southern labor force where black and white folks work alongside each other. Knowing there isn't much work available in Hopewell, Floyd initially goes down to the New Plantation to ask about work. However, he begins to have a change of heart: "but when he watched the women and imagined being inside the processing plant, a squat concrete building, gutting and cleaning fish all day long, he turned right around. He'd rather chop cotton than be cooped up in a room full of niggers" (260). As one might consider most depictions of backbreaking factory work being comprised of men, Hopewell's is distinctly made of black women. Depending on the moral compass of any narrativization of factory work, depictions of unionization oftentimes accompany these illustrations. The New Plantation's union

is led by black women, including Ida who will direct the union efforts once she begins working there. Lily's and Floyd's twenty-four-year-old daughter Doreen also works at the New Plantation. Lily struggles to imagine her daughter working as well as in political struggle alongside black folks: "the thought of her daughter carting a sign and marching around the fish processing plant with a bunch of niggers made her dizzy" (325). Doreen on the other hand acknowledges the racial and class exploitation by the New Plantation through its benefactors, the Honorable Men. There is a clear line between the New Plantation and plantation slavery as Doreen points out: "'them same people that own the New Plantation, they worked the niggers to death picking cotton. Now they're trying to pull the same shit. They work us all like dogs. That goddamn Reagan don't give a good goddamn if you ain't rich. I'da been better off with Jesse Jackson for president" (290). Lily sees the problem as rooted in a cross-racial workforce but for Doreen, and for working-class white people broadly, racial solidarity is necessary for class struggle.

In navigating her own shortcomings, Doreen grapples with what class and racial struggle against the planter elites looks like: "'Mama, either I work with them [black folks] or I get in the welfare line with them, and you know how I feel about them. I was raised around here, and even though I went to school with them, I always felt like they was different from white people, like I was better than they were. Hell, I was raised on that feeling, and I'll probably take it to my grace, but Mama, you know one thing: It's getting to where I can't afford thinking like that no more. Them feelings just ain't practical when you work at the New Plantation" (290). Working to undo the white supremacist logics that compelled her father to lynch Armstrong Todd, Doreen posits how it has always been planter elites against the interests of all working-class and poor folks. The Southern capitalists of Hopewell benefit financially regardless of harmony or hostility

between poor black and white folks. As long as poor folks can *be coerced* to labor amicably or strained to compete for work, not through their own volition most importantly, then the Honorable Men of Hopewell remain a despotic force upon the region. For as much as the likes of Floyd have found it impossible to labor alongside black folks, his daughter recognizes that such racism isn't fruitful for poor whites who desire work in the Delta. Rather, Doreen points to the fact the New Plantation doesn't discriminate, that it exploits and dehumanizes regardless of gender and race. Just as Stonewall saw Floyd as having to be arrested for Armstrong's murder on the basis of setting an example to Northern investors that the South doesn't tolerate hate crimes, the New Plantation sees all poor folks as expendable to the cause of industry expansion.

*Your Blues* ends with a return to Mississippi, where Wydell takes his second son W.T. who is troubled by the allure of drug and gang culture in Chicago, to see for the first time where his family toiled for generations picking cotton and where Armstrong was lynched. Wydell tells W.T.:

> This is where your brother got killed. I thought you ought to see it one time in your life, just so you'd know. My mama and daddy and your other grandparents, they come from here too. You see all that water? Well, it used to be nothing but cotton before the machines come, black folks picked that cotton. Me and your mama and your grandparents, your aunties and uncles we all picked that cotton, We picked that cotton until our fingers bled. And sometimes when it would get bad—and boy, it could get real bad—we'd be in them fields just a-singing, you know. 'Cause them songs, them songs could get you right (332).

Wydell takes W.T. *back in time*, before the catfish farms, before the machines were brought into the cotton fields, and a time before Armstrong, which also means a time before he could be killed. Closer still, Wydell has his son see the Hopewell not only as the place where his mother an faither labored, but also "'this is where your brother got killed'" (332). The terror of plantation slavery isn't isolated to the antebellum period or to the time of sharecropping. It's *felt*

*trauma* is present at hand, in a nation where the lynching of a black boy takes place where a New Plantation is built and profiting.

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June Jordan, writing about a trip she took to Jackson, Mississippi in her essay "Break the Law!" (1988), recalls wanting to go for a swim. Jordan remembers: "I had forgotten. Or I had never understood: The hotel had been forced to desegregate, which meant the hotel had been forced to allow me to swim in that pool… They would boycott, they would forfeit, the summertime relief of swimming rather than mingle their white bodies in the same element that held my own" (55). Jordan's testimony recalls Floyd's unwillingness, despite being out of a job, to work alongside mostly black women at the catfish processing plant. In principle, In Campbell's and Jordan's Civil Rights era context, desegregation did little to rewire a U.S. consciousness rotted by the mandates of white supremacy. In a similar vein, the end of slavery and the eventual end of sharecropping didn't result in ethical labor practices, as the catfish plant proves. Campbell's novel and Baldwin's play, are necessary for reckoning with what Sadiya Hartman terms "critical fabulation." In examining the figure of the enslaved woman Venus in the Atlantic world, Hartman explores how methodological approaches to slavery need reexamine the archive and its temporal foundations: "the intention here isn't anything as miraculous as recovering the lives of the enslaved or redeeming the dead, but rather laboring to paint as a full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible. This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration" (11). Works like *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* and *Blues for Mister Charlie* aren't

just using the event of Emmett Till's lynching to tell a story, but are more importantly, capturing the "impossibility of representing" such horrors "through the process of narration."

Armstrong is alive in *Your Blues* for a moment, breathing for only a few pages. His presence nonetheless haunts those intimately connected to his life and death, allowing for us as readers to see how this *one* event, the heinous killing of a young black boy, is embedded in and corrodes U.S. liberal discourse. It is worth reflecting on the fact that Campbell's novel upholds that progress hasn't been made in realizing a world beyond the mobilization and enactment of racial terror. As Ibrahim analyzes, Till's death and its link to centuries of white supremacy torments our present: "it also becomes possible to imagine, as many have, that the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in 2012 was the moment of danger that calls Emmett's flesh to mind in the twenty-first century. To view both the postwar years of the 1950s and the reactionary years of the 2010s through the analytical prism of untimely flesh reveals that in both eras, a social split arose between the potential of a radially inclusive humanism and the neutralizing promise of liberal personhood" (20). Our present is one where the possibilities *granted* through "liberal personhood" are not accessible to all. To even understand personhood as something that can and cannot be accessed is a testament to the failures of a liberal and "inclusive humanism." The expendability and disposability by which the state sees black bodies reveals that, in the twenty-first century, emancipation remails unrealized, and potentially not worth achieving. The unrealizable potential of emancipation illuminates why present conceptions of the human and freedom, through their intimate attachments to plantation slavery, cannot and will not be accessible so long as economic and governing structures remain merely outgrowths of the plantation model.

# CHAPTER VI: EPILOGUE

In David Mulry's book on the 1894 Greenwich Park bombing in London and its subsequent inspiration for Joseph Conrad's 1902 novel, *The Secret Agent*, he notes how Martial Bourdin, a French anarchist targeting the Royal Observatory, was "the first anarchist bombing, or explosive act of anarchist 'propaganda by deed,' to take place on British soil during the eras of bombs in the latter part of the nineteenth century" (1). Because of its location *on* British soil, Mulry notes how Bourdin's actions "contributed to a heightened anxiety in the domestic response, not only to terror, but to vague and mounting fears that contemporary novelists were quick to capitalize on, that Fenian, anarchist, and revolutionary socialist groups had formed, or were forming, and international alliance which threatened the very fabric of the world of late Victorian and Edwardian England" (2). As much as terror exists as a 'phenomenon' of extreme violence threatening the fabric of social order, what then does it say about social existence if it is categorically maintained through state-sanctioned articulations of extra-judicial forms of terror? In essence, terror is and always has been state-manufactured. For Victorian studies, for example, Gaskell's "Lois the Witch" has been read as having nothing to do with slavery, in a field that has long evaded and suppressed such types of readings—and yet—from this point of entry one can legitimately apply reading methods that reveal explicit literary engagements with processes of racialization and exploitation that help to animate enslavement. These types of reading practices can in turn be applied to a variety of place/time/author pairings. Similar to Mulry's close reading of Conrad, *Transatlantic Terrorism* turns to nineteenth-century British and twentieth-century American literature to trace and establish how particular literary works are integral materials to the archive of historical and political manifestations of terror.

In a discursively constructed fashion, terror and terrorism operate as socially manufactured perceptions of resistance and those people deemed capable of haunting and threatening the vectors of political hegemony. The political and social apparatus of terrorism is constructed by and maintained through its subjection and dehumanization of racialized and sexualized Others. I return to Anjuli Fatima Raza Kolb from the introduction and her work on the spreadability and infectious qualities of terror, upon which she notes "there are patterns in what kinds of societies believe themselves to be subject to infectious diseases, just as there are patterns in what kinds of actors are perceived to be agents of destruction beyond the parameters of legitimate violence" (256). At the nexus of racialized and sexualized otherness lies this "agent of destruction." As Kolb extrapolates, defining these actors as terrorists enacting *legitimate violence* has no material shape: "no legal definition of terrorism offers enough solidity to function as anything but a vector toward the question of a bomber's or a hijacker's or a gunman's ethnicity and religious beliefs" (256). Terrorism, functioning as a "vector" for revealing "ethnicity and religious beliefs," melds racial, ethnic, gendered, sexual, and religious difference with each positionalities capacity to contaminate, threaten, and destroy. Terrorism's lack of social solidity, both discursively and temporally, is what it makes it a fruitful ideological reference point for thinking through the varied manifestations of terrorist subjectivity throughout time and space, which grants literary modes and periods resistive of one another, the capacity to contend with terror's historical and political legacy. Hence, the kinds of texts this project has engaged works to rethink neat literary studies approaches to periodization and geography.

A literary studies approach to examining how terrorism is expressed in nineteenth and twentieth century contexts, if this isn't already understood, is not limited to these periods. Precisely because of my own interests in nineteenth-century British and twentieth-century

American literature, I have chosen such literary periods to open up new dialogues and trajectories for addressing the myriad manifestations of terror and terrorism. With *Transatlantic Terrorism*, I have begun by taking nineteenth-century British authors whose narratives are set in America as a transatlantic and transliterary baseline for probing questions about how terror in the U.S. is understood from both temporal and geographic distances. There are decidedly different struggles and pressures happening in Britain as opposed to the U.S. when Elizabeth Gaskell and Dion Boucicault are writing their works in 1859. However, the American stage is applicable to map onto it supposedly distant struggles, ultimately revealing the intertwined nature of British and American literary consciousness and transnational political instability. Through Gaskell's depiction of American colonial terror and Boucicault's dramatization of plantation terror, the stage is set for deconstructing the transformation of these forms of terror into the twentieth century, when slavery is in the relative past. Despite this, by reckoning with lynching as a vestige of colonial and plantation terror, one witnesses a contentious America post-legal emancipation, where the country remains ripe with extrajudicial racial violence. In works by James Baldwin and Bebe Moore Campbell, both of which are examining the murder of Emmett Till, albeit from different genres and approaches to historical record, both expose the cyclical nature of racial terror, from colonial witch hunts to auction blocks, to the lynching of black men and boys.

My transliterary and transatlantic close reading practices in working from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century reveal the adaptability of a methodological approaches to assessing terror within literary works regardless of period or genre. For example, one could explore racial terror in contemporary African American poetry, in which the authors work to recontextualize historically distant episodes of racial violence. Similar to the quandary of racial lineage and blood that that is central to Boucicault's *The Octoroon*, Kiki Petrosino's collection,

*White Blood: A Lyric of Virginia* (2020), dissects histories of racial genealogy, bondage, sexual exploitation, and Virginia. In a similar vein to black ancestry tainting Zoe's beautiful European flesh, Petrosino's poem "If You Tell Them Sally Hemmings Was Three-Fourths White" unveils the contradictions inherent in defining race through appearance and blood. Petrosino's poem opens with a disembodied They speculating about the shade of Thomas Jefferson's enslaved concubine Sally Hemmings: "They'll ask how dark she looked. When you compare her memory / to an earthen porringer, briming with late sun, they'll say / *Fetch that porringer. Now.* / They'll make you fill it up with rain so they can regard themselves" (emphasis original 39). Evoking a comparison between Hemmings and a shallow bowl of an earthen hue, in the minds of They, the image of the bowl and Hemmings are interchangeable. Asking to "*Fetch that porringer. Now*," a reader is troubled by the implication of whether they mean the bowl or Hemmings and are undoubtedly off put by the way in which Hemmings's image can be so swiftly replaced with that of an object. This too is precisely the intention, as a reader observes how race is so easily manipulated in association to any object brought to mind. Race-making and object association as forms of dehumanization is further carried out, as "They'll probably mark a thing or two / which makes them shiver. *But how'd* / *you say she looked* / they'll ask, patting their foreheads. *Not like you since* / *you're twice as black*" (emphasis original 39). The impetus highlighted here, is for whiteness to *make* racial legibility noticeable, that which draws attention to difference, as is evoked in the final lines, "*Not like you since* / *you're twice as black*." The conceptualization that race can be fractioned and mathematically identified, whether it be Zoe's one-eighth black ancestry or being *twice as black*, signals the sexual terror and exploitation of black peoples and bodies in order for there to be varying degrees by which blackness can be calculated and seen.

In Tiana Clark's poetry collection *I Can't Talk About the Trees Without the Blood* (2018), in which she composes a lyrical critique of black suffering throughout, details how contemporary black death is intertwined with past modes of racial terror, as is the case in witnessing the entwined relationship between the 2012 lynching of Trayvon Martin and the 1955 lynching of Emmett Till. Clark's poem "The Ayes Have It," grapples with the life and death of Emmett Till, reminiscent of the works of Baldwin and Campbell, and by extension of doing so, broadens the historical context of lynching in post-emancipation America. Clark works in tandem too with the legacy of the murder of Emmett Till to capture the racial terror that remains fully implanted within American consciousness and its institutions. Clark's speaker visualizes how, "When I think of Trayvon Martin, I think of Emmett Till, / when I think of Emmett Till, I think of you, black men in the South, / then I think of young, white men in the South" (35). Just like in *Blues for Mister Charlie* and *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, the fates of black and white peoples remain linked. As much as Lyle Britten's, Floyd Coxes, Roy Bryant's and J.W. Miliam's, and George Zimmerman's heinous acts are indictments on their individual characters, more important to recognize is how the long-storied history of anti-black violence does not begin with Bryant's an Miliam's killing of Till in 1955, nor did it end with Zimmerman's murder of Martin in 2012. Clark reveals as much: "So when I think about a post-racial American, I don't-- / because the trees in the South have strange fruit histories, / the roots are deep red, tangled and gnarled, so again-- / when I think of Trayvon, I think of hoodies, then I think of stereotypes" (36). The world's Richard Henry and Armstrong Todd did not adequately navigate on the basis of white respectability, is damming evidence that black life has never been valuable or worthy of preservation. This may appear like a rather simplified way of characterizing the expenditure of black life in America, but my hesitation to ask the question, why does it feel so simple, so

expected that black adults and children will be killed for living, whether that be for making mistakes or doing nothing at all? Making sense of a world that can and will kill on the basis of difference, movement, and living is anxiety inducing for Clark's speaker: "and then I'm back to my husband [who is white], / and see he's trying to hold my hand again, but the truth is I'm scared, / because I have to love him differently in the South, / just like young, black men have to exist differently in the South, / they can't just wink at any woman, Mr. Till, / just walk through any neighborhood, Mr. Martin, / just wear any hoodie, buy any iced tea" (36). Clark's poem subsequently highlights the way black desire and movement, whether for black men or women, are contingent on awareness that holding the *wrong* hand, winking at the *wrong* woman, and walking into the *wrong* neighborhood can mean death. Such texts testify to the proposition that there is no question that America has always been a country built on the power of terror and violence.

Natasha Trethewey's *thrall: poems* (2012), a collection dissecting and exploring taxonomies of mixed-race unions, weaves together in personal and public histories to examine her own family's complex family lineage. The collection of poems that comprises "Taxonomy," for example, are ekphrastic poems probing casta paintings from the eighteenth-century, which were mostly portraits depicting racial hierarchies in New Spain, by portraying caste systems throughout the Spanish colonies in the Americas, with particular attention to parentage. Trethewey notes "*Casta* paintings illustrated the various mixed unions of colonial Mexico and the children of those unions whose names and taxonomies were recorded in the *Book of Castas*. The widespread believe in the 'taint' of black blood—that it was irreversible—resulted in taxonomies rooted in language that implied a 'return backwards'" (81). "De Español y Mestiza Produce Castiza," which identifies a woman of indigenous descent having a light skinned

daughter (castiza), who in this particular painting was three-quarters Spanish and one-quarter Amerindian. For Trethewey, of particular attention is what the casta painting as a portrait of familial unions reveals about colonization: “How not to see / in this gesture / the mind of the colony?” (22). The body in poses and gestures *is* the colony. Trethewey further makes this argument: “In the mother’s arms, the child hinged / at her womb-- / dark cradle / of mixed blood / (call it *Mexico*) / turns toward the father, / reaching to him / as if back to Spain” (emphasis original 22-23). Whether it be the mother, father, or child the body contained within the casta painting conjures the image of colonized subjective and the colonial empire. To be the daughter reaching toward her father is to also be reaching “back to Spain,” reminding the young girl and reader of the exploitation that makes her racial genealogy conceivable. In the final poem of the “Taxonomy” poems, “The Book of Castas” highlights the process of backward looking, as racial lineage of these sorts compels forcefully having to look back toward empire: “Call it the catalog / of mixed bloods, or / the book of naught: / not Spaniard, not white, but / *mulatto-returning backwards*” (emphasis original 24). Just as Gaskell’s and Boucicault’s texts struggled through what to do with characters whose identities compromised the status quo, with the likes of Lois being white but of Old English lineage and Zoe of English refinement but one-eighth black, reveal the not-quiteness of difference. In similar fashions, each of these women’s fates are sealed, doomed to death by their assumed taintedness. *The Book of Castas* reveals as much: “Guidebook to the colon, / record of each crossed birth, / it is the typology of taint, / of stain: blemish: sullying spot: / that which can be purified, / that which cannot” (24-25). As if revealing a limit to the amount of blood that can be purified, emerges a process of racial identification that is foundational to how racial terror has grown into the system of policing and surveilling bodies it is today.

Each of Petrosino's, Clark's, and Trethewey's collections engages with the myriad ways racial terror has been expressed throughout time as well on taking on various forms. *Transatlantic Terrorism* does the work of taking seriously the ongoing literary manifestations of terror and terrorism in disparate literary genres, landscapes, and periodizations. Literature thus serves as a generative archive for examining the past and present vestiges of terror. It becomes important for literary scholars of varied periods to seriously consider the origins and traces of terror in their disciplines so as to help rethink, reshape, and expand the archive of terror and terrorism.

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Elizabeth Gaskell's (re)imagining of the Salem witch trials contextualizes the colonial mobilization of terror and its production of terrorist subjectivity. In Robert Rapely's *Witch Hunts: From Salem to Guantanamo Bay* (2011), he argues, "fear is and was a prerequisite for witch hunts. It still is… the witch has been replaced by the terrorist—with equal dangers to the individual, for the most pronounced characteristic of a witch hunt is that the accused is automatically treated as guilty" (ix). In line with Kolb's assessment of contagious terrorism, through observing the events of the Salem witch trials, Rapely's outlines: "… the initial limited results of accusations against two cantankerous old women and a slave had jumped a major boundary and spread to a respectable churchgoer. The contagion was spreading would soon threaten everyone" (75). For Gaskell's gothic tale, it the colonial apparatus, as well as its proximity to what it deems savage Indigeneity, that seeks outs servants Hota and Nattee from the onset of the accusations and renders them guilty upon suspicion. The Salem of "Lois the Witch" sees a terrorist threat coming from the outside of the social center, where indigenous presence and existence lies on the fringes of the settlement. Such spatial/racial segregation is fitting for

literary engagements like that occur with my analysis of James Baldwin's *Blues*, where the stage/setting is divided into Whitetown and Blacktown, where for most of the play, time itself is nonlinear despite the rigidity of place and its social mores. This threatening positionality is deemed as such because the Salem people are capable of defining the agents and victims of terror. Lois on the other hand, is more readily identifiable as a source of contagion, as she arrives on the shores of the New World from Old England. In both cases, the colonial power structure must exterminate any and all possible threats, those there before their arrival and those who follow.

In the wreckage of settler colonialism, the plantation's utility derived at the nexus of racialized and sexualized dehumanization and domesticity, as well as exploitation and subjection. Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon* witnesses the American plantation as a supposed site capable of the balancing security and exploitation of the enslaved and manumitted. The mixed-race Zoe is at one moment in the parlor room of the Big House welcoming her cousin George from Paris, and just as swiftly, she is placed on the auction block to mitigate financial ruin. The links between the racial, sexual, gendered, and economic terror on the plantation in Boucicault's play is at times subtle, while at others, outright horrifying. These scenes of extremes highlight Boucicault's investment in a "right" way to maintain plantation slavery. None other best reflects this than of Mrs. Peyton's and George Peyton's wishes of mothering and marrying Zoe, as opposed to M'Closky's vision of the plantation as a site of possession and coercion. In either case, as Thavolia Glymph traces in the gendered violence of the plantation household, she argues "we are left simply with a slave society where 'brutal and sadistic masters and mistresses did not represent the norm, but they did exist,' where some were 'irresponsible,'

some ‘psychopaths,’ and some ‘reasonably humane,’ where mistresses’s violence is deemed ‘seldom calculated or premeditated’” (30).[19]

In each of the chapters, this project has contended with historical terrains of terror and the myriad articulations extra-judicial forms of violence mobilized within these temporalities and landscapes. Taking on a transliterary and transhistorical approach to examining to the formation, deployment, and transformation of terror regimes, I began with considering Elizabeth Gaskell’s novella “Lois the Witch” to witness the witch-hunt and its targeting of racialized and gendered peoples in the service of New World colonialism. Seeing the British-American political, cultural, and social sphere amalgamated in Gaskell’s fictionalization of the Salem witch-hunts, I grappled with the elaboration of racialized forms of terror and their manifestation on the plantation in Dion Boucicault’s *The Octoroon*. My exploration of Boucicault’s play fused together an analysis of the relativity of race at the nexus of free papers and the auction block to emphasize how the logics of the plantation both undoes and stabilizes the utility of blackness as it enriches the plantation as a locale of profitability and productivity. Ultimately, as plantation operates to terrorize black subjectivity, this manifests in reshaping of the spectacle of the auction block in the form of the lynching scene during Jim Crow. James Baldwin’s play *Blues for Mister Charlie* engages the lengths the courtroom and white body politic will go to legitimize lynching as an authoritative means for confronting black social mobility. In Bebe Moore Campbell’s novel *Your Blues Ain’t Like Mine*, however, curtailing lynching as an appropriate means for whites to

[19] Glymph’s quotation pulls from: Stampp, Kenneth M. *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South*. New York: Vintage Books, 1956, pp. 182; King, Wilma, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995, pp. 95; Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*. U of North Carolina P, 1988, pp. 132 and 201; Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. “To Be Worthy of God’s Favor: Southern Women’s Defense and Critique of Slavery.” 32nd Annual Fortenbaugh Memorial Lecture, Gettysburg College, 1993; Genovese, Eugene D. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Vintage Books, 1974, pp. 333.

respond to subconscious fears and animosity toward black folks, is founded in white Southern capitalists' concern that white mobs disproportionally targeting black folks, who are or will eventually be absorbed into an exploited labor force, will lead fellow U.S. capitalists to be apprehensive about investing in Southern industry. Lynching ultimately impedes on the sustainability and growth of the plantation economy.

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