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This purpose of this thesis is to examine the way in which Herman Melville utilizes the minstrel stereotype not as tool of subjugation, but as a means of empowerment and identity in the “Stubb’s Supper” chapter of *Moby-Dick*. By first contextualizing the cultural and political environment of 1850-51, the year in which the Fugitive Slave Law is ratified and *Moby-Dick* is composed, an analysis is constructed in order to take into account the influence of personal, familial, political, philosophical, and cultural factors on Melville’s construction of race in “Stubb’s Supper.” And by doing so, argue that Melville’s rhetorical complexity in *Moby-Dick* should be recognized as a method of dismantling the cultural value of the racist stereotype.

DECENTERING THE RACIAL PARADIGM: A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE  
“STUBB’S SUPPER” CHAPTER IN HERMAN MELVILLE’S *MOBY-DICK*

by

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DECENTERING THE RACIAL PARADIGM: A POSTCOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF  
“STUBB’S SUPPER” IN HERMAN MELVILLE’S *MOBY-DICK*

In the late morning of February 15, 1851, fugitive slave Shadrach Wilkins is arrested by U.S. Marshals in Boston. Five months earlier in September of 1850, Congress had passed the Compromise of 1850 which forced, through the Fugitive Slave Act, all northern or non-slave holding states to return slaves to their legal owners. The arrest of Shadrach Wilkins is the first time this law is acted on in Boston.<sup>1</sup> According to the *Pittsfield Sun*, quarrels and general unrest are reported outside the courtroom among abolitionist whites and free blacks, as well as among the legal counsel inside. By mid-afternoon, Wilkins is readied to enter the courtroom of Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw. A large crowd has gathered outside the courthouse in anticipation of Wilkins’s arrival. The escort is halted and quickly overwhelmed by the mob, which pursue and capture Wilkins who is said to have been cowering inside the courtroom. He is later transported in secrecy into Canada.<sup>2</sup> Evidence of conflicting political opinions from the legal counsel and the objection of a racially mixed crowd represent a microcosmic vision of growing benevolence in a generally ambivalent American society.

Less than two months after Wilkins is abducted and ushered into hiding, fugitive slave Thomas Sims is arrested. The Sims trial quickly becomes the apex of national tensions surrounding the question of slavery. Chief Justice Shaw, once again, presides

over the Sims trial, and in order to prevent a repeat of the Wilkins case, Shaw orders a chain to be wrapped around the courthouse in order to prevent anyone from leaving or entering until the trial is through. According to the Barre *Patriot*, in addition to securing the building with a chain, “a large portion of the city police was stationed there, while three companies of infantry together with Lancers, were in readiness for action.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite protest outside the courthouse, Sims is tried and ordered back to his native Georgia in accordance with the Fugitive Slave Law. According to Michael Rogin, Shaw’s decision to uphold the Slave Law and send Sims back to Georgia signaled the climax of the slavery crisis in America (107). The American institution of slavery had been a hotly debated topic going back before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It is the chained courthouse of the Sims trial, however, which symbolically represents both African Americans and American politics as being indelibly linked in bondage.

By 1850 the threat of southern secession was pressing on the minds of many Americans, including Judge Lemuel Shaw. Michael Rogin points out that Shaw was wedged between maintaining harmony in the Union by honoring the Slave Law and adhering to Bostonian, as well as personal views of abolition. In the end, “[Shaw] honored [the compact with the South], in the name of the Union, when he returned Thomas Sims to bondage” (141), and in effect, conceded to the perpetuation of slavery. Shaw’s ruling may be defended as acting for the benefit of national unity and peace, but also illustrates the ambivalence of several generations in America over the question of slavery.

Addressing Congress on February 14, 1847, John C. Calhoun stated “I am a Southern man, and slave-holder. I would rather meet any extremity upon earth than give up one inch of our equality...What, acknowledge inferiority! The surrender of life is nothing to sinking down into acknowledged inferiority!” A year later, he would attack the Declaration of Independence itself, stating “All men [are] not created equal,” and it is to this logic, according to Calhoun, that the upheavals in Europe as well as the threat to American unity was possible.<sup>4</sup> In other words, without a hierarchal structure privileging some over others, society cannot sustain any form of unity. Driving Calhoun’s anxiety was an awareness of the enormous economical importance of slavery to the Southern way of life. To this end, Southern animosity toward abolition is ontological in its particularities to economy, sustenance, and genteel culture; all of which are indelibly linked to slavery, and negated in the economic prosperities of Northern manufacturing and entrepreneurship. Therefore unlike the North, southern society cannot sustain its way of life without the institution of slavery.

Nevertheless, Calhoun’s distinguishing of two distinct cultures is reciprocated in the North as well. Shortly after the Fugitive Slave Law is put into effect, Ralph Waldo Emerson proclaimed that the “‘Union’ is ‘a real thing,’ as it shares one language, but ‘there are really two nations, the north and the south.’”<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law and its enforcement in Boston demonstrates the desperate reach for national harmony and unity. On the other, it concedes to white superiority by maintaining the institution of slavery.

*Sims* serves as an entry point into how white hegemony, particularly in the North, was maintained. In general, the late antebellum period of the 1850s is telling in how slavery was physically and philosophically sustained in the United States two decades after its abolishment in Western Europe. In particular, it is also a period in which American authors such as Herman Melville attempt to decenter and deflate privileges of whiteness present from the conception of the American colonies. Cultural reflectors such as political discourse, newspapers, fiction, science, and the minstrel show all negotiate ways in which white hegemony is maintained and insured—beyond legal action such as the Fugitive Slave Law or the threat of southern secession.

Throughout *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville explores the conflicts of bondage. More specifically it is in the “Stubb’s Supper” chapter where Melville directly challenges American slavery. By reversing the minstrel stereotype, Melville establishes a formidable opposition to a common cultural mechanism of degradation and othering. Looking at Melville’s familial and philosophical influences, in addition to contemporary criticism, this thesis will explore how the specific use of the minstrel stereotype in *Moby-Dick* speaks back to white hegemony in antebellum America.

Beginning roughly around 1830 and ending around 1860, what is commonly referred to as the antebellum period, saw a revival of British romanticism and continental philosophy in America. Particularly concentrated in the Boston area, American Transcendentalism championed by scholars such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Ellery Channing, and Henry David Thoreau embraced ideas complementary to those of Jean-Jacque Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. Joel Myerson writes that transcendentalism

followed, as its two prime principles, Rousseau's argument that social evils are derived from institutions not the individual, and Kant's belief in an intrinsic and intuitive presence of knowledge within the self which exists as pre-experience (xxxi). For example, In "The Transcendentalist" (1841), Emerson explains that "you call [the definition of self] the power of circumstance, but it is the power of me" (369). So as to say, one who lives according to the empirical, materialist vision of reality is denying the power of the self. The self or the "thought which is called I," according to Emerson, is a well defined mould in which the empirical is poured (369). It is, in fact, a naturally occurring and defined caste which makes up one's interaction with reality. And through this interaction, emphasis is placed on the individual to be proactive in their relationship with the world.

Therefore, to Emerson and his followers, the model of the new American should disallow social realities to control and undermine a citizen's ability to project positive change in one's surroundings. It is to this end that the transcendentalist determines individual and social value within his or her world. This fundamental change in perception not only empowers self-reliance, but demands others be judged by an intrinsic criterion. As Emerson further explains in "The Transcendentalists," "[Our] quarrel with every man [we] meet is not with his kind, but with his degree. There is *not enough* of him,—that is the only fault" (emphasis added, 373). In retrospect, F.O. Matthiessen writes that this is a period which is developing a sense that "a single man contains within himself, through his intuition, the whole range of experience" (7). This possession of a

*range of experience* connotes a universal privileging of all individuals, but is ultimately complicated when factored into the perpetuation of slavery.

Matthiessen writes that according to the “new consciousness” of the transcendentalists, “the nation exists for the individual, for the guardianship and education of everyman”—therefore in essence, “the individual is the world” (6). As Mathiessen points out, there is a renaissance during the American antebellum which is responding to a new and distinct way of viewing the world. Scholars like Emerson and others were keenly aware of the need of a new America identity. And American Transcendentalism signaled a positive shift in how citizens viewed and interacted in their world. Unfortunately, it mostly recruited educated, white followers exclusive to New England. However, fueling this thinking is the desire to create a unique American philosophy. And as it turns out, the desire for a national voice carried over into popular, low-brow entertainment.

The anxiety surrounding America’s supposed incapability of producing a national poetry and literature proves not only essential to transcendentalist identity witnessed in Emerson’s “The American Scholar” (1837) and “The Transcendentalist,” but to the minstrel show as well. Together, these cultural products were struggling to define a national identity. It is the latter, however, which suggested a national identity is only possible by examining and consequently mimicking the identity of the American slave in the form of the minstrel show.

Recent studies in American minstrelsy show a vast and varied cultural exchange. William Mahar’s *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask* offers a detailed historical and cultural

analysis of American minstrelsy. Mahar writes that in reality, the minstrel show has just as much Irish, Spanish, Italian, and English influence as it does African American (9-10). But anxieties of defining a self/national identity prevalent during the antebellum called for a distinct and wholly original form of American art. Therefore emphasis on the “originality” of its African American content was preserved throughout the nineteenth-century. As Mahar maintains, “[m]instrelsy was a commercial venture created for a mass market at a time when the United States lacked a definable *national* culture and when American performers envied their European competitors” (9). As it turns out, this “commercial venture” proved to be immensely popular throughout the country, particularly in the Northeast.

Edwin Christy of New York, one of the first to capitalize off of blackface minstrelsy, established what would later be referred to as a Christy Minstrel. In 1854, Christy reported annual earnings of \$31,759.00 (which Mahar estimates in contemporary figures as translating to \$415,724.00) to New York’s *Evening Mirror*.<sup>6</sup> Even if these figures were thought to be slightly exaggerated by Christy, Mahar contends that this is still a sign of minstrelsy’s immense popularity (9). Mahar emphasizes a few common characteristics found in minstrel performances from 1820 to the late 1850s. One is the use of riddles, jokes, mock-sermons, and dancing or shuffling. The other is the consistent use of Virginia as a setting for many of the songs. There is some speculation that Virginia’s reoccurrence may be attributed to “Joel Sweeny (1813-1860),” a circus leader and early minstrel performer, “or his brothers, who lived in Virginia and performed in Boston and New York during the late 1830s and early 1840s” (13). Mahar’s analysis of the minstrel

show signals how the minstrel show worked to fill the identity-void by establishing a national aesthetic.

Critic Alexander Saxton cites a preface to one of Christy's "countless 'plantation songsters'" (67) which suggest that the Christy organization was well aware of the call for a national aesthetic: "[Europeans say] that nothing original could emanate from Americans—the next cry was, that we have no NATIVE MUSIC [until] the genius of E.P. Christy, who...was the first to catch our *native airs*" (68). Christy was actually not the first to introduce the minstrel show, but instead, was one of a group of struggling actors, directors, and simple laymen like Dan Emmett and Thomas Rice, who made modifications to the popular burlesque show by, ironically enough, adopting European elements from the stage and from folk traditions. For example, the shuffle, the jig, and in fact, many of the songs' melodies which Christy and others adopted were taken from traditional arrangements already generations old in England, Ireland, and even parts of Italy.

But these facts were overlooked by audiences and performers, particularly as the minstrel show gained popularity throughout the 1830s and 40s in the Northeast. Saxton writes that the intent of the minstrel performers, either unconscious or not, was to project a "slave music" that was "close to nature" which not only sparked the romanticizing of the South, but provided an opportunity for performers to "Europeanize" traditional African dances and movements in order to traverse the profane and taboo in white society (70). By taking on the persona of the African and his "savage" nature, white entertainers were able to explore areas of their own hetero and homo sexuality as well as gender roles,

and a host of other socially taboo areas. In doing so, minstrelsy created both a psychical space which allowed minstrel performers to set predetermined characteristics to be inscribed as the African American persona. This inscription is the formation of what will be known as the minstrel stereotype.

By Europeanizing any remnants of actual African culture, minstrelsy was able to appeal to a wide and eager white audience throughout America and actually form its own distinctly American composition. Paradoxically, these white men consumed the African image as a source of authenticity as well as a vehicle for their own exploration. Yet they performed in a mode that relied solely on degrading it. In this action of degraded mimicry, the minstrel performer and perhaps even its white audience, participated in what critic Franz Fanon called “an insurance policy on humanness” (129). In other words, a designated Other must be constructed in order to reassure oneself of one’s superiority. And through the minstrel show’s popular reception, minstrelsy men like Christy felt they had succeeded in capturing a unique American art form.

A popular New England publication, *Knickerbocker Magazine*, published an essay by minstrelsy advocate James Kennard who addressed the excitement surrounding this new found national voice. In it, he exposes stereotypes which “naturally” dehumanize the African American therefore making it white America’s responsibility to harvest this inherent American talent.

In “Who Are Our National Poets?” (1846), Kennard begins by positioning the American slave alongside Scottish poet Robert Burns. It is Burns’ affiliation with hard labor and seclusion in the rural, poverty-stricken thatches of the Scottish countryside

which enabled him to compose poetry as a national voice (51), writes Kennard. The authentic voice of America comes from Virginia, by way of the American slave, for it is there that “our national poetry originates” and to a point, that “[w]ithout any teaching, the negroes have contrived a rude kind of opera, combining the poetry of motion, of music, and of language!” (54). Essentially, Kennard writes, the American slave is a “thoughtless, merry fellow, who sings ‘to drive dull care away’” (59). Like speculations on Burns, the slave’s “national poetry” is only authenticated through immense poverty, subdued mobility, lack of education, and general isolation (52). Therefore, according to Kennard, blacks are socially and naturally incapable of projecting their “poetry” beyond the boundaries of the plantation. It is then up to white entertainers to adopt and breathe life into this “opera” by traversing white audiences in blackened faces. The result is the paradoxical romanticizing and othering of what is to become *the* authentic representation of the African American individual, and even more tragic, the sanitizing of plantation life.

The antebellum minstrel show signifies a bizarre and utterly devastating form of psychological distancing by way of imitation—one which circumvents social realities by utilizing fantasy in order to mute and cleanse the conscience of the perpetuities of chattel slavery, and which flagrantly contradicted the ideology of equality found in the Declaration of Independence. Kennard’s essay serves as an example of the formation of psychological mechanisms which give currency to the minstrel stereotype, and code the enslavement of African Americans as a form of entertainment.

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Herman Melville is one of the many writers of the period struggling to expose and work through the inner contradictions being threaded through racist America. Earlier works such as *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847) show a writer actively engaged with the horrific propensities of Euro-American imperialism as well as an objection, albeit gradually in his work,<sup>7</sup> to racialized ideologies. Much of Melville's early writing is based on his own South Seas adventures to the Marquesas and Hawaiian Islands between 1841 and 1843. Prior to these voyages Melville also made trips to England and various points along the European mainland. In all, spending a large portion of his early adulthood at sea aboard vessels which Sterling Stuckey observes as “[h]is Harvard, his Yale,” adding that “his time at sea – gave him time to consider how he might transform what he was learning into art” (45). The influence of living and traveling among a continually shifting ethnic base certainly had a profound influence on Melville's work. While scholars like Herschel Parker contend that Melville enjoyed a self-imposed exile from abolitionist movements in Boston, there is little doubt that his past experiences abroad directly influenced his opinion on race.

Paul Gilroy suggests that in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries, ships could be seen as vessels of modernity. Advances in technology are made in order to refit vessels to be more efficient devices for delivering human cargo: They “refer us back to the middle passage, to the half remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialization and modernization” (17). Therefore, they come to represent “micro systems of linguistic and political hybridity” (12), and should be thought of as “cultural and political units rather than abstract embodiments of triangular

trade. They were something more—a means to conduct political dissent and possibly *a distinct mode of cultural production*” (emphasis added, 17). Gilroy’s analysis serves as an important junction for the argument surrounding Melville’s representation of Fleece in *Moby-Dick*. Gilroy proclaims that “the time has come for the primal history of modernity to be reconstructed from the slaves’ points of view” (55). Melville is indeed deconstructing the role of the minstrel stereotype through Fleece in order to reassemble a new voice for African Americans in the oppressive grip of white hegemony.

It is the “Stubb’s Supper” chapter from *Moby-Dick* which demonstrates Melville’s radical diversion from fixed racialized stereotypes of the antebellum. Studying this specific scene, I will trace out and deconstruct what Homi Bhabha calls the “processes of subjectification” which attempts to unpack the structures and signifiers of power invested in the racialized stereotype (95). This discussion inevitably will address the question of how and why American culture gave agency to a racialized hierarchy, by examining what Bhabha calls “the fantasy of origin,” which is ultimately what gives license to the perpetuation of the stereotype (106). The intent is to uncover through historical, literary, and postcolonial analyses, a means in which to read *Moby-Dick* as a significant argument against American white supremacy.

## II

When Melville began work on *Moby-Dick* in 1850 national and in particular Northern insecurities toward slavery were prevalent topics of conversation. Robert Midler points out that: “[it is a time] of national crisis during which the Compromise of 1850 was enacted and, the following April of 1851, escaped slave Thomas Sims was

arrested in Boston and ordered to be remitted to slavery in compliance with the Fugitive Slave Law.” It just so happened that “Judge Lemuel Shaw, *Melville’s father-in-law*, issued the decision” (emphasis added, 32). In addition, the lawyer for escaped slave Frederick Wilkins, arrested as a runaway, was Richard Henry Dana, a close friend of Melville.

In sympathy of Wilkins’s imprisonment and of the abolitionist cause, Dana petitioned to Shaw for Habeas Corpus but is vehemently rejected. Herschel Parker makes note of Dana’s dismay citing an entry from his diary: “The disposition shown by such men, our best citizens, shows, more than anything else, the extent to which the selfish spirit of N.England has run” (817-818). Dana’s comment on the “selfish spirit of New England” is reminiscent of the *Suns’* documenting of quarrelsome behavior cited between the press and legal counsel over Wilkins’s incarceration. Shaw’s decision to preserve national unity over one man’s individual freedom is seen as reprehensible and symbolic to many Bostonians of how impossible it is to sever the courts support of slavery. It is the Sims trial, however, which signaled to the American public that even Boston courts are determined to comply with perpetuating slavery.

A few months before the trial, Melville had written Dana thanking him for advice regarding the composition of a new manuscript centered on a whale. At one point Melville affectionately writes, “[I] am more pleased than I can well tell, to think that any thing I have written about the sea has at all responded to your own impressions of it.”<sup>8</sup> Here, Melville is emphatically referencing Dana’s popularity stemming from his novel, *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840). Dana, like Melville earlier with *Typee*, found success

in the popularity of travel writing. And like Melville, Dana's was based on his own sea adventures.

In one notorious scene, Dana depicts a captain adopting the persona of an American slave driver while whipping a sailor. At one point, the captain shouts: "I'll flog you all, fore and aft, from the boy up! – You've got a driver over you! Yes, a *slave-driver* – a *negro-driver!*" (156). Corporal punishment, a major element in Dana's text, would become a significant theme in Melville's *White Jacket* (1850), and at one point in the text, Melville even cites Dana, stating "get my friend Dana's unmatched *Two Years Before the Mast*" (124). Critic Tony Tanner considers that Dana's depiction of the captain as a slave driver is an explicit attempt at critiquing the American institution of slavery. Tanner writes that "what Dana's account inscribes is an intolerable contradiction at the heart of the newly emerged – recently invented – republic of America itself [...] the whip was the mark of its secret shame, the cancer of a slavery always seeking to spread." But "Melville's work," writes Tanner, "probes relentlessly deeper" (40). Therefore, evidence suggests that Melville was influenced and in active correspondence with Dana during the early formation of *Moby-Dick*. And even more poignant, he was receiving critical advice from Dana regarding the formation of his ideas.

In his speech "Slavery in Massachusetts," delivered to an antislavery demonstration on July 4, 1854, Henry David Thoreau cited the inaction of Governor George S. Boutwell regarding *Sims*: "when the *Sims* tragedy was acted, I said to myself, there is such an officer, if not such a man, as the Governor of Massachusetts [...] Has he done as much as he could do to keep on the fence during this moral earthquake?" To this

end, Thoreau insists, “He could at least have *resigned* himself into fame” (604). To some such as Dana and Thoreau, the ideology of individualism, freedom, and universal justice is bound by the chains of racism—symbolically dramatized in Shaw’s chaining of the Boston municipal courthouse. Thoreau drives this home contrasting the ideology of the American Revolution against the contradiction of slavery: “*those* three million had fought for the right to be free themselves, but to hold in slavery three million others. Now-a-days, men wear a fool’s cap, and call it a liberty cap” (605). The media’s response to the Wilkins incident and later *Sims* is ambivalent regarding Shaw’s disregard for abolition. The concern instead is for public harmony and legal conformity.

Herschel Parker discusses the ambivalence of the Boston media shortly following the Wilkins incident, writing that “the liberal Boston *Investigator* [...] declared on 26 February that ‘it is better to obey even a bad law, than to resist by physical force its execution.’ The Whig Boston *Daily Courier* and the Democratic Boston *Post* united in denouncing the radicals who freed Wilkins. Doing so, both accounts form a consensus which asks “whether *any* law shall prevail in Boston?” (818). Following the Sims trial the *Farmers’ Cabinet* writes with the same ambivalent tone, at once rallying alongside calls for legal obedience, while deploring the makers of such laws. It is the North’s responsibility, replies the *Cabinet*, to uphold laws it may find disagreeable in order to maintain order and harmony in the Union. In other words, the *Cabinet* is using the Sims trial as a chance to thumb its nose at Southern threats of secession as means of protesting Northern politics.<sup>9</sup> A response from the New York *Herald* is more antagonistic of abolitionist leanings. Michael Rogin cites the *Herald’s* reaction to letters from New York

abolitionists William Seward and John Van Buren regarding *Sims*. An excerpt from the *Herald* reads:

Did you ever see a whale? Did you ever see a mighty whale struggling...in the terrible current on the boundless ocean, that was hurrying everything above and beneath it...to some final but awful catastrophe? ... Such a scene...resembles, to some degree, the present condition of this mighty republic ... This fair republic has been launched on a current, which is now rolling us on, with its dark and hideous waves, to some frightful destiny...the ultimate dissolution and destruction of this great Nation. (142)<sup>10</sup>

Beyond the coincidence of the *Herald's* metaphor, it is striking how the whale comes to represent the American ambivalence to slavery; the “dark and hideous waves,” its opposition and the destruction of the nation. These public discourses are particularly poignant when seen in context of the “Stubb’s Supper” chapter from *Moby-Dick*. For they illustrate definite and binding ambivalences present at the heart of antislavery culture, and as well, a formidable and *imaginative community* in which Herman Melville is immersed.<sup>11</sup>

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Clearly the Union is at stake in the *Herald's* narrative, but as Michael Rogin points out, “To attack slavery [...] was to endanger both Southern Society and the Union. To leave it alone, once it was an issue, was to acknowledge that freedom for some Americans required the enslavement of others. Perhaps that symbiosis was more than a political arrangement, necessary to save the Union. Perhaps it spoke to the character of American freedom itself” (127). Rogin’s notion of a unique American perspective on

freedom is the “fool’s cap” as Thoreau would say, in which Melville is trying to circumvent, albeit coyly, in his use of the minstrel stereotype.

Regarding the influence of events in April of 1851 on Melville, Herschel Parker speculates that he must have certainly been aware of what was happening, but was trying to “keep his focus on his manuscript, certain of its literary value” (819). Michael Rogin and Eleanor Simpson would strongly disagree with the passivity of this statement. While Melville was certainly mindful of his economic interests, his familial ties alone positioned him at a focal point of American racial tensions.

According to critic Eleanor Simpson, Melville radically altered portions of the *Moby-Dick* manuscript in September of 1850, the same month the Fugitive Slave Act took effect. Simpson further adds that in addition to the Fugitive Slave Act, in the spring of 1851, there is evidence of additional rewriting which occurs during the same period as the Sims trial (27). Also, Richard Henry Dana was appointed to defend Sims. Simpson underscores these facts noting “thus two events pertinent to the fugitive slave issue took place during the course of [*Moby-Dick*’s] composition and may have figured in its repeated revision” (27). In addition to direct personal ties, Rogin notes that during the month of the Sims trial Shaw sent Melville “a copy of Owen Chase’s narrative of the sinking of the *Essex* by a sperm whale” (143). Rogin writes further that Melville cited Chase in *Moby-Dick* in order to convince readers that the *Pequod* could be sunk by a whale. Therefore, Rogin contends that “[t]ogether, Shaw’s gift and the news of *Sims* must have made a powerful impression upon Melville” (143). The fact that Melville had direct

social and familial ties to significant moments in the enforcement of slavery legislation gave additional weight to the racialized scenes in “Stubb’s Supper.”

In the first few pages of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael addresses the reader with the rhetorical question: “Who aint a slave? Tell me that.” He continues, “however the old sea-captains may order me about—however they may thump and punch me about, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is all right; that everybody else is one way or other served in much the same way—either in a physical or metaphysical point of view” (21). This comment not only foreshadows Ishmael’s relationship with Queequeg, reflecting one of the major breakdowns in racial stereotyping held in antebellum culture, but also makes enslavement both physical and metaphysical. This is the entry point which signals Melville’s careful deconstruction of the stereotype. It will be in the “Stubb’s Supper” chapter that Melville will most dramatically critique the American racial divide, and rhetorically re-instill power and humanity back into the African American.

Before this moment, however, Melville offers a powerful introductory critique of American norms. The Anglo-Christian ethic and its “wolfish,” “civilized hypocrisies” and “bland deceits” are criticized throughout Ishmael’s questioning of Queequeg’s savage idolatry (56). According to Ishmael, there was an ethical absence in the Protestant fold which was fundamental in maintaining a hierarchal subjugation of the other.

Ishmael’s introspection begins by shifting from first-person to third-person: “But what is worship? thought I. Do you suppose now, Ishmael, that the magnanimous God of heaven and earth—pagans and all included—can possibly be jealous of an insignificant bit of black wood?” (57). Four sentences later, the narrative changes back to first-person.

This rhetorical switch to the third-person replicates the shock of the Christian reader—the opposing scorn for *reasoning-out* the golden rule by Ishmael aligning himself and then participating in Queequeg’s worship: “Why, [I wish he] unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently, I must then unite with him” (57). This equalizing is effective so that Ishmael may proceed to highlight the single value which is absent from a supposed moral-driven American society.

By exposing the Protestant ethic to be entrenched in hypocrisy, Ishmael underscores the absence of ethics which preach morality but ignore fundamental values of respect crossing cultural variances. He is also adhering to a key element in Enlightenment thinking: the process of reasoning through dictums, particularly religious ones. In doing so, Ishmael exposes one of the first instances in *Moby-Dick* where reason is applied to entrenched cultural signifiers, such as moral codes, in order to underscore the actuality of their absence; for it is the stereotype which manipulates a justification for *othering*, excusing a designated people from the moral, political, and philosophical umbrella shielding whites.

Through the example of worship, Ishmael demonstrates how stereotypes must be deflated before any moral value may be applied—otherwise religion stands entrenched in hypocrisy. Only through the symbolic re-union of the stereotyped “other” and “self” can this moral value be reconciled. This form of union is further dramatized by the symbolic marriage of Ishmael and Queequeg which composes the end of the worship scene: “we undressed and went to bed, at peace with our own consciences and all the world [...] Man and wife, they say, there open the very bottom of their souls to each other” (57). This is

the entry point where Melville motions that structures of power and hierarchy composed by the Christian Euro-American ethic are incorrect, and one method to conduct cultural criticism is the deconstruction of the stereotype.

### III

Michael Bennett claims in *Democratic Discourses* that there is an inherent slipperiness in analyzing any one specific discourse. In an attempt to remedy this, he writes that discourse should be analyzed as “a socially imbedded and historically developed language connected to a specific social formation” (4). Bennett’s description of discourse analysis is both helpful and suitable for the focus of this paper’s reflection on language dominant in antebellum culture. In accordance with Bennett’s position, a representation of racialized antebellum discourse is illustrated by Herschel Parker and Michael Rogin’s archival evidence, in addition to reports from the *Farmers’ Cabinet* and the *Pittsfield Sun*.

Together these documents demonstrate how unsettled the public is in what was widely considered to be the country’s beacon of abolitionist support. These public discourses also point to a deeper issue surrounding an inability of the American people to fully abandon racialized conceptions of social and perhaps less explicit, biological hierarchies. The passage of the Compromise of 1850 and its Fugitive Slave Act are governmental reinforcements for chattel slavery.

However, discourses of racism, whether overt or embedded in legal rhetoric, remained a point of contention for select people outside the circle of well-known antislavery campaigns. In particular, various writers and intellectuals were grappling with

the disturbing contradiction surrounding what Maurice Lee claims as “the slavery crisis erod[ing] faith in the enlightened public sphere” (5). Lee cites William Ellery Channing who in 1835, states: “Slavery, regarded only in a philosophical light...involves the gravest questions about human nature and society.” Further, Lee notes that “attempts to determine the rectitude of slavery could not logically prove first principles and led to struggles over contract theory, natural law, and definitions of humanity. Such conundrums were not new except that the antebellum era could not effectively defer them, especially after the Compromise of 1850” (4).

Lee’s notion of “first principles” calls to mind what Arthur Riss maintains as a “necessarily doomed” logic inherent in sustaining the ideals put forth in the “Declaration of Independence which contends ‘all men are created equal’” while slavery continues as a fixed part of American culture (1). Fredrick Douglass explicitly draws upon this thinking in an address from July 5, 1852. At one point he proclaims “[The American celebration of the Fourth of July] is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license, you national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless” (110). He goes on to address the aftermath of the Fugitive Slave Law, stating “[i]n glaring violation of justice, in shameless disregard of the forms of administering law [...] this Fugitive Slave Law stands alone in the annals of tyrannical legislation” (112). The conflict between religious intellectuals such as William Channing, political advocates such as Fredrick Douglass, and that of the “objective” fields of science and medicine show the contrasting ideologies particular to the American antebellum.

Since the seventeenth-century, science and medicine had published literature privileging the Caucasian above all other races. In many accounts, these judgments were based solely on aesthetic value.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile phrenology accrued a variety of examples in which the shape and formation of the skull determined intelligence and racial lineage. Some notable sketches of the time align features of the Caucasian with Greco-Roman busts, and the African American with crude drawings of apes. Two key texts supporting this trend in science and published relatively close to *Moby-Dick* are Dr. Samuel Morton's *Crania Americana* (1839) and *Crania Aegyptiaca* (1844). Together these texts made their way into the American consciousness as well as into its political rhetoric. Morton succeeded in giving the antebellum public academic support for the subjugation of blacks—a support fueled by Enlightenment's privileging of science, reason, and logic.

Referencing the scientific racism introduced by Morton, reflected in the discourse of antebellum politics, Takaki cites an Indiana senator who in 1850 proclaimed: "The same power that has given him a black skin with less weight or volume of brain has given us a white skin, with greater volume of brain and intellect" (113). Discussing the racist discourse prevalent during the antebellum, Arthur Riss cites prominent Louisiana physician Samuel Cartwright, who explains: "[It is] not that the negro is a brute, or half-man and half-brute, but a genuine human being, anatomically constructed, about the head and face, more like the monkey tribes and the lower order of animals than any other species of the genus of man" (7). Notice that such categorizing does not deny humanity to African Americans, but passively situates them in a lower genus of classification—one which naturally disqualifies any form of rights or privileges.

By 1850 the scientific community succeeded in cementing the “natural” inability of African Americans in maintaining any form of civil identity or self representation. This inability to represent one’s self is reminiscent of James Kennard who applauded the success of minstrelsy to authenticate an American poetry by way of the “carefree” slave in the minstrel show. In the antebellum mind, slavery is permissible not only through ideology, but biology. Enlightenment’s empowerment of the white individual to maintain order over the natural world through science, reason, and now popular entertainment was being reinforced.

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Scholarship dealing with modern racism traces cultural and racial privileging farther back than the sixteenth-century.<sup>13</sup> However studies in American racism expose a more culturally specific form of anti-blackness which has only been given serious attention since the early 1990s. Nearly two decades ago Toni Morrison insisted that attention be given to the Africanist presence being circumscribed, metaphorically shadowed, and ultimately feared in white American texts.<sup>14</sup> Since then critics in cultural studies, postcolonial studies, history, and literary studies have produced several key works which explore America’s peculiar relationship with racism. Critics such as Dana Nelson, Laura Doyle, Ronald Takaki, Valerie Babb, Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, Arthur Riss, Winthrop Jordan, Maurice Lee, Susan Fanning, and Alfred Lopez have all explored various angles in which race is at the forefront of redefining early and contemporary American identity.

So far emphasis has been placed on the cultural environment of 1850s America. For Herman Melville, events such as the Sims trial and the development of an American philosophy are taking place within close personal and geographic proximity. White hegemony, however, is prevalent throughout the entire country. This ideological fog clouds white American concepts of self and of the African American. It sustained chattel slavery in the South, an inhospitable North, and the popularity of the minstrel show. In short, it is the racially charged environment Ishmael addresses as “wolfish” and which Melville is responding to generally in the early scenes of *Moby-Dick*, and more specifically in “Stubb’s Supper.”

In *The Word in Black and White*, Dana Nelson looks at one line of logic fueling the historical development of American racism. Stemming from the removal of mankind from the center of the cosmos as suggested in Copernicus’s *Of Celestial Motions* (1543), Dana writes that “[a]ll of history had been devoted to placing Man at the center of God’s creation. Suddenly, European Man was to understand that he was not the nucleus and was required to search for other means of self-definition” (8). Nelson’s anecdote connects with other historical analyses such as those traced by Richard Popkins and Harry Bracken regarding the origins of Enlightenment’s cultural privileging. It also provides an anecdotal origin for tracing Europe’s shift from a centric to a redefined margin.

One of Popkins’ main arguments suggests that in response to post-Enlightenment thinking, there is a surge in reorienting the natural world away from the supernatural realm of scripture. Such thinking gave rise to the grouping and sub-grouping of flora and fauna most notably seen in the work of Karl Linneaus (1707-1778). Linneaus’s

categorizing included humans as well. Popkins cites one example where Linneaus sets up a hierarchy which designates specific natural characteristics. At the top, the European possesses a disposition which is “gentle, acute, inventive [and] Governed by laws.” Meanwhile, at the very bottom, the African is “Governed by opinion [...] phlegmatic, relaxed [...] crafty, indolent, negligent [and] governed by caprice” (510). Remnants of such thinking can be seen in the language of physician Samuel Cartwright noted earlier. This racial determinism is also inherent in the thinking of Scottish philosophers David Hume and John Locke.

An off-shoot of continental Enlightenment, Scottish Enlightenment held many of the same universal standards. One belief which critics Harry Bracken and Toni Morrison view as essential to Enlightenment, in general, and Scottish Enlightenment specifically, is the adherence to individualism, reason, and a belief in whites natural superiority. Bracken writes that Scottish Enlightenment was influential in maintaining an “intellectual respectability” in the enslavement of African Americans (486). In essence, Scottish Enlightenment enabled educated white males to psychologically and morally justify the enslavement of blacks because they fell short of the natural chain of being. Africans were black skinned, uneducated in European standards, cultural alien, and emotionally traumatized from either surviving the middle passage, or at least being acutely aware of it. This trauma certainly carried over into the day to day reassurance by whites, manifest through sexual or physical violence, or verbal assault, that they were unquestionably inferior.

The ideas formulated in Enlightenment gave rise to how white Europeans equated their subjectivity in response to scientific and rational dictums. Edward Said's *Orientalism* is particularly dynamic in its coalescing of Euro-Enlightenment ideologies with the collective othering of South Asian, Middle Eastern, and North African civilizations.<sup>15</sup> According to Said, the "surrogate self" of the Orient mirrors and deflects the truisms of Euro-civility. They are at once, intriguing and repulsive, but ultimately an agency of other, to which in all accounts, "oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race" (39). The delineation between Other and Anglo-Saxon is a particular strain of thought which can be viewed as a significant factor in American racism. It is, in fact, a particular strain which gives currency to the Anglo-American myth of origins.

From the time of Copernicus, European identity found crisis in an apparent loss of formidable centrality in what was once an axiom of natural superiority. Therefore a counter point was in order to reassure its Christian "civility" and cultural centrality. This came in the form of the Middle East and Islam, and with the increased frequency of contact along the Atlantic rim, indigenous and African peoples. For many Western Europeans, a hegemony privileging whiteness is well intact by the turn of the eighteenth-century. Turning to America, racism begins to focus solely on Native Americans and blacks. As slavery takes root in the American south, black-oriented racism becomes more homogenized among European settlers.

This form of racism primarily follows the British line of Anglo-Saxon Protestantism and its fetishizing of individual inalienable rights and a purity of origin.

Not entirely different than other general beliefs at the time, it does however provide a more unique perspective of the antebellum psyche.

In *Freedom's Empire*, Laura Doyle explores the rise of racialized sub-narratives in the political rhetoric of Britain and its merge with the formation of the novel. While Doyle does not reach as far back as Nelson, she does echo a similar turn in how Europeans viewed themselves and their world. For Doyle, the focus is on the formation of a racialized privileging of British Anglo-Saxon identity and how it ultimately crossed the Atlantic to propagate in America.

There are countless studies on the origins of American racism. I focus on Doyle's for several reasons. It traces the roots of American racism from Britain, who happens to be chief colonizer of the American Northeastern seaboard. It also works with what Morrison argues in *Playing in the Dark* as the racialized anxiety located in the African American subject. According to Morrison, the black man or woman is present in early American texts in the form of the "surrogate self." Similar in context to Said's analysis, Morrison designates this "surrogate self" as: embodying "Nature unbridled and crouched for attack," "fear of the absence of so-called civilization," the American's "fear of loneliness," and of "aggression both external and internal" (37). The historical narrative which Doyle examines is a key process in understanding both how white hegemony formed in America and how *Moby-Dick* works to disrupt it.

According to Doyle, in the early seventeenth-century Britain began to see a surge in Anglo-Saxon assertions of origin out of which developed, an "exclusionary Saxonist narrative." After "generations of Norman-Catholic oppression (perpetuated by Stuart

tyranny and eventually the Puritan Protectorate),” beginning in the 1620s, the Saxon-Protestant’s vocabulary began to emphasize birth-right or “racial inheritance, planted in the individual and constituting an irrevocable principle for the government of the state” (4). This delineation of “racial inheritance” is, according to Doyle, the linchpin for what will become “white” subjectivity in America. It emphasizes the due rights declared by “Gothic Saxons who had displaced the Rome-weakened Britons,” which instilled a “*witenagemot*” or the “zealous protection of land and rights, and a populace of ‘freeborn’ men” (author’s emphasis, 3). Here lies the rhetoric of *inalienable rights* found at the heart of American politics and individualism.

The cross-fertilization of *witenagemot* into America can be located around the demise of Jamestown’s Virginia Company shortly following the death of King James in 1625. Allegiances had been strong to James and therefore after his passing, the Company disbanded and headed north to Massachusetts. A few men who had observed the Company’s dealings and decline decided to stay in Virginia and capitalize. Maurice Thomson, Captain William Tucker, and others formed an alliance funded by Tucker’s successful plantation near Jamestown. In addition, Thomson and Tucker shared a history of ferrying passengers from America to Britain and along the way, accrued a network of political connections which gave them an additional advantage after the Virginia Company fell apart.

In the end, “they fostered the ‘transatlantic network of Puritan religio-political opposition to the crown’ that included Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island,” as well as portions of the West Indies (Doyle 35).<sup>16</sup> By 1641 Parliament was quickly

succumbing to Puritan influence and with it, Saxonist codes of birth-right and individual liberty. Doyle makes note of several speeches and pamphlets distributed by Puritan leaders which echo the racialized rhetoric seen in the 1620s during the Anglo-Saxon revival. In addition, evidence suggests Thomson and Tucker intermittently participated in London's unrest during this time (35-38). Acting on the language of liberty spurring the Puritan Revolution, Thomson and Tucker gained financial, political, and moral support, and according to Doyle, "began to interlope in the slave trade and the East Indies trade, enabling colonies' shift from indentured English and Irish labor to African slaves, which in turn served to make the West Indies the 'model' of profitability in the Western world" (35). In Virginia and throughout much the American colonies, this new source of African labor quickly takes the place of impoverished English, Irish, and Native American workers. This eventually leads to the institutionalizing of American slavery. In conjunction with jump-starting the American slave trade, Thomson and Tucker represent America as an extended, ideological agent of privileged Anglo-Saxon autonomy. This is also a new, modern breed of merchant class whose voyages are launched, manned, and ideologically fueled by Saxonist historical narratives privileging the subjectivity of whiteness in mind of colonizing those existing outside the spectrum of superiority.

Doyle's analysis of Thomson and Tucker crystallizes two important moments in the conception of American modernity: First, the entry into the slave trade which inevitably and psychically created binaries in the white American psyche between the foreign, uneducated, unassimilated black slave and themselves. Second, "modern nativism" created a notion of race in which "characteristics are passed down through

generations” and “emplaces individuals in time as well as space; [yielding] an ontosocial situatedness spanning generations as well as oceans.” Therefore, this “modern nativism” has created a “race identity [that has] allowed a set of ‘new’ men [...] to redefine and reorient [themselves]” (55-56). Stemming from Enlightenment’s call to the European to redefine his or her place in the world, America’s turn to colonization, slavery, and racism is in essence, a continuation of the individual trying to redefine him or herself. Or as Toni Morrison writes of Melville’s America, a maniacal drive in the antebellum imagination to other the African American in order to establish a “not-me” counterpoint to the “proto-American” notion of liberated individualism (38). Examining a figure central to the defining of a literary America, it is evident that an Anglo-Saxon privileging is well intact on the cusp of the nineteenth-century.

Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784) is a key text which underscores early American ambivalence towards race and slavery, and one which works with a particular language of Anglo superiority. One passage from Query XIV echoes what will later be considered indisputable fact in the practice of phrenology less than sixty years later. In it, Jefferson states:

The first difference which strikes us is that of color. Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin, or in the scarf skin itself; whether it proceeds from the colour of the blood, the colour of the bile, or from that of some other secretion, the difference is fixed in nature [...] And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? (186)

Jefferson's hinging of beauty and nature together highlights the same aesthetic criteria used by Samuel Morton in the 1840s. On the one hand, Jefferson's contrasting of blacks and whites is veiled in ethnographic language popular at the time. On the other, it distinguishes an aesthetic dichotomy which serves to reinforce the beauty of whiteness, but is only possible when juxtaposed against blackness. In other words, the American self, embodied particularly in the educated and enlightened Thomas Jefferson, is ultimately reticent of human equality. The American identity is battling, much like the Europeans, in rectifying their place in the world. This cannot be achieved without a racial hierarchy, much like the one stated by John Calhoun. And in order to maintain and justify this logic, Jefferson adopts the battle cry, still resounding from the Saxonist revival, which acknowledges a superior Anglo-individualism.

Jefferson makes this explicit when he notes in "The Rights of British America" (1774), that it is important to never forget the "Saxon ancestors" emigrating to America are possessors of "a right, which nature has given to [them]," to maintain order and laws which have stood the test of time (4). This blood-nature distinction is, again, further clarified when in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he states that only through exposure to whites may the African American be elevated out of nature's dull confinement, and undoubtedly proves "their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life" (190). This distinction in thought is, as Paul Gilroy notes, a solidification of "[n]otions of the primitive and the civilized" which "finally give way to the dislocating dazzle of 'whiteness.'" (9). This same "dazzle" of whiteness is what gives currency to James Kennard's acknowledgment that whites are responsible for spreading the American

slave's "poetry" because he is too inept in mind to act for himself. The American process of othering the African American in order to reassure themselves of their own civility and superiority is becoming a universal logic by the start of the nineteenth-century. The antebellum imagination, on display in the minstrel show as well as in fiction, is to be the laboratory where experimentation in American identity is conducted.

This ideological thrust prompts Toni Morrison to proclaim in *Playing in the Dark* that what is found in the antebellum American is a "portrait of the process by which the American as new, white, and male was constituted." It is this individual, then, which crests as a "'distinctive new man, a borderland gentleman, a man of property in a raw, half-savage world.'" It is he who envelops "a power, a sense of freedom" that was "not known before" (43).<sup>17</sup> If we take into account Laura Doyle's historical research, this sense of freedom had been known before. In fact, it was well understood by the Anglo-Saxon revivalists and put into print in seventeenth-century Britain, and well in place by the time Jefferson was composing his letters. However, contextualizing this as an expanding American identity is an accurate assumption. Morrison's specifying of birth-right is implied only in passing such as Scottish-American slave master William Dunbar (*Playing* 40). Instead she primarily draws attention to historical and literary scenes in which white hegemony in America has already achieved agency. From this angle, critics such as Laura Doyle and Paul Gilroy delineate historical and ideological evidence which fleshes out how antebellum American identity was formed.

Like Laura Doyle, Gilroy traces the British meshing of Euro-Enlightenment and an obsession with birth-right as making its way into the formation of American-Atlantic

culture (10-11). Examining Jefferson's language alone, it is evident that white hegemony is a fixed part of American identity by the end of the eighteenth-century. Tracing one line of analysis discussed by Doyle and Gilroy, and seen solidified by Morrison, a glimpse of why white antebellum culture repelled against the African American is evident.

By examining the contrasting responses of ambivalence and outrage regarding the Sims trial, in addition to highlighting the particular philosophical climate of Boston and the social and psychical mechanics of the minstrel show, I have established a specific historical and philosophical context in which to read *Moby-Dick*. With these contexts established, we are now able, with the help of Homi Bhabha, to examine Melville's use of the minstrel stereotype and master/slave rhetoric as a means of penetrating and decentering its cultural currency which perpetuates white hegemony in antebellum America.

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Working in Bhabha's theoretical space, I will first ground and then unpack the significance of Melville's use of the minstrel persona as a racialized stereotype which actually speaks back to notions of white supremacy, and which attacks racial hierarchies pervasive in antebellum American discourse. Secondly, I will consider Bhabha's critique of the "fantasy of origin" as a call to explore beyond the ambivalence of the stereotype in order to better understand its fixture in mid nineteenth-century America.

In order to deconstruct a dominant discourse, the first step is to unravel the fixity of the stereotype. According to Homi Bhabha, the stereotype "is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and

something that must be anxiously repeated” (95). Bhabha uses the example of “bestial sexual license” in Africans as a form of an unexplainable, irrational working discourse. Therefore, this perpetuation of a fixed stereotype is a result of the inability of the speaker to validate his or her insecurities surrounding a factual existence of such fears. It is this moment of perpetuating the assigned taboo which calls for the fallacious labeling of the other, that creates what Bhabha calls “ambivalence.” This ambivalence is the force that:

gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically constructed. (95)

In order to work through colonial or in this case, an American antebellum discourse, Bhabha insists that it is necessary to “reveal its ideological misconceptions or repressions,” by understanding the “productivity of power” which ultimately constructs its “regime of truth.” Only then, Bhabha says, “does it become possible to understand the productive ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse – that ‘otherness’” (96). I now turn to the “Stubb’s Supper” chapter in *Moby-Dick* in order to examine how Melville releases the African American from the denigration of the stereotype in order to dissent from hegemonic structures of white superiority being maintained in antebellum culture.

#### IV

In the “Stubb’s Supper” chapter in *Moby-Dick*, a group of sailors sit down to a midnight feast on whale meat which has been cut fresh from a previous catch while simultaneously, a feeding pack of sharks is devouring remnants of the whale below. The

entire chapter is laced with analogies of cyclical consumption, cannibalism, violence, and a racialized subjugation which refers back to Ishmael's concept of a "wolfish" world. These elements are primarily visible in the narrator's analogous description of the sharks swimming below. Stubb, the ship's first mate, calls upon the old black cook Fleece to prepare him a cut of whale. Upon eating the steak, Stubb finds it to be overcooked and launches a tirade of humiliating demands and insults at Fleece which are at once racialized, and which mirror the stereotypical role of the minstrel character. Prior to Fleece's arrival however, the narrator echoes, quite significantly, Ishmael's idea of a "wolfish" world by making parallels between the "valiant butchers" with "knives all gilded and tasseled" and sharks (237). This scene is of significance because it not only helps contextualize Fleece's upcoming sermon to the sharks, but shows Melville working through a specific philosophical dilemma: the cyclical and pervasive violence within human nature, which also carries a specific reference to the disposal of dead slaves being transported along the mid-Atlantic passage.

The narrator notes that:

[W]hile valiant butchers over the deck-table are thus cannibally carving each other's live meat with carving-knives all gilded and tasseled, the sharks, also, with their jewel-hilted mouths, are quarrelsomey carving away under the table at the dead meat; and though, were you to turn the whole affair upside down, it would still be pretty much the same thing, that is to say, a shocking sharkish business enough for all parties; and though sharks also are the invariable outriders of all slave ships crossing the Atlantic, systematically trotting alongside, to be hand in case a parcel is to be carried anywhere, or a dead slave to be decently buried. (237)

This scene should be viewed as a macrocosm of Ishmael's wolfish world, spiraling and infinitely propelled to violence. Decorative markers such as the "gilded and tasseled" knives signal a "civilized" or Euro-American violence. Melville is setting the tone for Fleece's arrival. Assumed structures of Euro-American dominance are now analogous with cannibalistic behavior which is transposed and reflected in the natural world.

Stubb, who "heeded not the mumblings of the banquet" below him, is transfixed by the toughness of his cut of whale. He proceeds to call upon Fleece to reprimand him for overcooking the steak. Fleece enters not in "very high glee" as he had just fallen back to sleep from the initial preparation of the crews' dinner. Arthritic and hunched in pain, he "shuffles out" onto the deck and stands before Stubb in a mock-subservient bow. Stubb proceeds to lecture him on the proper technique of preparing whale steaks, to which he concludes: "There are those sharks now over the side, don't you see they prefer it tough and rare? What a shindy they are kicking up! Cook, go and talk to 'em" (237). Where as before Stubb was unaware of the sharks' presence, he is now keenly aware of their feeding and instructs Fleece to first "address them," to which he then recants, "now then, go and preach to 'em!" (238). Stubb who is described as "happy-go-lucky; neither craven nor valiant" and as "good-humored, easy, and careless" (104-105), is recast in this scene as serpent-like. As Fleece limps to address the sharks, Stubb drops his lantern light "low over the sea, so as to get a good view of *his* congregation" and as Fleece begins to speak, he is described as "crawling softly behind" in order to overhear Fleece's sermon (emphasis added, 238). This is initially depicted as Stubb's congregation to which he is

supposedly presiding over. However, as Fleece begins to address the sharks, we see a spinning of satirical dialogue and a clear re-positioning of power in Fleece's rhetoric.

In thick, almost nonsensical plantation dialect, Fleece addresses the sharks' greed, viciousness, and perhaps more critical to this argument, their usurping superiority:

I know some o' you has berry brig mout, bigger dan oders; but dem de brig mouts sometimes has de small bellies; so dat de brigness ob de mout is not to swallar wid, but to bite off de blubber for de small fry ob sharks, dat can't get into de scrouge to help demselves. (238)

Keeping in mind Melville's specific cultural makings of "gilded and tasseled" knives, the power dynamic Fleece traces out here is one of Euro-American dominance and given that Fleece is identified as an elderly black man from Virginia, it suggests a dominance specifically aimed at subjugating the African American. I'll return to the significance of Fleece's origins in a moment, but for now it's important to consider what critical attention has been given to this scene.

Critics such as F.O. Matthiessen, Edward Stone, Eleanor Simpson, and others generally pass this entire chapter off as comic relief, perhaps due to Melville's previous history of staging black cooks as simple stock characters. Eleanor Simpson's insightful analysis of race in *Moby-Dick* only touches briefly upon the function of Fleece's sermon to the sharks. She views it as a brief philosophical aside which functions as a simple proponent to the overall themes of the text. Beyond that, she concludes "it seems reasonable to accept the simplest explanation – that he needed comic relief at this point and furnished it through the cook and Stubb" (32). However, Susan Fanning, Marsha Vick, and Edward Grejda suggest otherwise.

Fanning's essay "'Kings of the Upside-Down World': Challenging White Hegemony in *Moby-Dick*" suggests that by "blurring material bodily images of the masticating Stubb with those of the ravenous sharks eating the whale, and by usurping the linguistic consciousness of the black cook Fleece, Melville decenters the white hegemonic structure, showing the steep price to be paid for society's regeneration" (212). In *The Common Continent of Men*, Edward Grejda suggests that the interplay between Stubb and Fleece is a key moment in which Melville, in a cleverly structured and ironic fashion, points to the "basic cause of racial discord—the white man's insistence on seeing the black not as a man, but as a subhuman figure" (107).

Susan Fanning's essay is one of the leading critical analyses to suggest Melville is making a significant statement toward the decentering of white American hegemony. Fanning notes that "Melville goes at great lengths to disguise his satire" and refers to Marsha Vick's claim that Fleece's sermon is "presented as 'a type of riddle,' and that Melville throws the reader off balance by staging the sermon on the deck of a whale ship instead of in a church, by infusing the black cook's speech with profanity, and by having him deliver his address to a shoal of sharks instead of humans" (213). She goes on to echo Grejda's claim of "racial discord," stating "Fleece is Melville's first full-blooded black character to openly express rancor against white oppression" (213). The attention given to this scene by critics such as Susan Fanning and Edward Grejda suggests *some* serious critical attention is being given to Melville's deconstruction of white American discourse in "Stubb's Supper," but fails to mention Melville's use of the minstrel stereotype. Fleece's is a significant proponent for not only racial equality, but the

restructuring and rethinking of dominant discourses in American ideology which up until this point relied on fixed racialized stereotypes.

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Homi Bhabha suggests that in order to unravel dominant discourse, one must unpack the fixed stereotypes used in subjugating the other, as it is through the stereotype that the proponent of domination qualifies a hierarchical superiority. This process of unpacking the stereotype leads to what Bhabha calls constructing a “regime of truth.” In doing so, Bhabha claims that uncovering the ambivalences of these ideological mechanisms ultimately leads to the other as being “an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference with the fantasy of origin and identity” (96). In an attempt to clarify, Bhabha specifies the “fantasy of origin” as being “[t]he myth of historical origination—racial purity, cultural priority” which he later modifies to include the “anxiety of castration and sexual difference” (106). The fixation of the stereotype now encompasses “the subject’s desire for a pure origin that is always threatened by its division” which now qualifies the notion of the stereotype as being “the primary point of subjectification,” and ultimately leads to “the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour, and culture” (107). Two key elements I would like to work with in Bhabha’s deconstruction of the stereotype are: the call for constructing a “regime of truth” and the “point of subjectification” which calls upon the ever constant threat to the “fantasy of origins.”

Melville’s use and adaptation of the minstrel stereotype corresponds with popular literary and cultural motifs of the time. For example, in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852)

Harriet Beecher Stowe attempts to sentimentally subvert support for American slavery, but paradoxically adheres to prevalent stereotypes such as the minstrel character in *Little dancing Jim Crow* (3), in order to authenticate the African American experience.<sup>18</sup> In mid nineteenth-century American literature and beyond blacks are marginalized and static, or function as comedic relief in the form of a minstrel character as explored by critics Eleanor Simpson and Edward Stone. According to Sarah Meer, the minstrel show's origins date back to Medieval Europe. In agreement with William Mahar's emphasis on minstrelsy's culturally varied conception, Meer notes:

blackened faces signaled that the activity was metaphorical, performative, or ritual. This resonance later translated into minstrelsy's strong association with burlesque, where blackface was the sign that something was being travestied. In America, however, blackface also took on racial connotations, so that by the 1820s it was sometimes known as 'Ethiopian delineation.' (10)

By the 1840s this increasingly popular phenomenon was termed "Negro minstrels," which consisted of "blackened-up white men" commencing in song and dance parodying supposed plantation life, and frequently delivering a "mock sermon or political speech" with a "nonsensical oratory in a 'black' accent" (10). Melville's representation of Fleece as a shuffling, crooked old black man stumbling out for the amusement of Stubb, who then instructs him to preach to the sharks coincides quite dramatically with Mahar and Meer's underlining of a mock-sermon as a marker of American minstrelsy.

The effect of having Fleece shuffle out reflects what Charles Townsend notes as the "quaint dance" which is imperative to opening sequences of the minstrel show (121). Melville's use of the minstrel stereotype is effective in subscribing to an antebellum

definition of comic relief—especially in light of weighty metaphysical themes established prior to the “Stubb’s Supper” chapter.

There is much scholarship pertaining to Melville’s biographical association with multi-ethnicity. Sterling Stuckey, Timothy Marr, Herschel Parker, and Maurice Lee are but a few who have analyzed various points in Melville’s life which deal with, among other things, his understanding and aesthetic representation of race. Sterling Stuckey writes that Melville was born and lived for the first eleven years of his life in New York City. During that time he witnessed and later commented on several cultural events such as the Pinkster Festival which exposed Melville to the vibrant display of African culture, which was typically oppressed.<sup>19</sup> He would later return to New York in his mid-twenties and from then on, intermittently throughout his life (37-38). It would be appropriate to speculate that Melville either attended or was at least well aware of the minstrel show before writing *Moby-Dick*. Timothy Marr writes that “Melville often used stereotypes as resources for more complex and more critical cultural work” (161). The portrayal of Fleece is the appropriate and qualifying example to Marr’s claim of a *resourceful* and *critical* Melville, and lets us return to and work within Bhabha’s notion of “ambivalence” as a currency which ensures the stereotype “repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures” (95).

The mechanics of the stereotype are contingent on ambivalence. Ambivalence, according to Bhabha, works to produce “that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability” which inscribes the empowerment of a dominant discourse through the effect of a focal point or stereotype (95). In essence, this focal point or stereotype

“employs a system of representation, a regime of truth, that is structurally similar to realism” (101). In this case, the natural association of the African American with the minstrel character “produces the [subjugated] as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (101). Melville subscribes to this *social reality* but disrupts its ambivalence by adhering to, then manipulating its contemporary context or its *regime of truth*. The minstrel stereotype is inscribed in Fleece, yet all of the characteristic trademarks are coyly reconciled. For example, Fleece appears *on stage* as elderly, arthritic, and hunched in pain. His gate is shuffled and he appears before Stubb, the white audience, in an apparent subservient bow. By providing Fleece with personal context such as his age, body pains, etc, the reader knows he is not simply performing as a static motif. From his arrival to his departure Fleece is working in an ironic schema which on the surface adopts the contemporary and conventional stereotype, but in actuality, is immediately coded as decentered.

This leads to Stubb’s antagonistic demand for Fleece to make a benediction. Fleece reacts to this demand crying out to the sharks: “”Cussed fellow-critters! Kick up de damndest row as ever you can; fill you damn bellies ‘till they bust—and den die” (239). The severity of Fleece’s language has shifted from accusatory to condemning. Death is now desired for those subjugating and oppressing the less fortunate. Stubb, satisfied with Fleece’s benediction, returns to the dinner table where he calls Fleece’s attention. Fleece is described as attending him and “again stooping over upon his tongs *in the desired position*” (emphasis added, 239). Note the ironic tone of “in the desired position” as if Melville is keenly aware of and mocking both the minstrel representation

of blacks and the hierarchal assumption that blacks are and should present themselves as naturally inferior to whites.

Stubb proceeds by questioning Fleece's age and place of birth. Fleece hesitantly responds claiming to be around ninety years old. In response to his origins, Fleece claims to be born "in a ferry-boat, goin' ober de Roanoke" (239). The Roanoke River, or as Fleece generalizes further as "Roanoke Country," is in close proximity to Southampton County, Virginia – which as Susan Fanning points out, is "the site of the Nat Turner slave insurrection" of 1831, which places Fleece's origins "in the cradle of black rebellion in America" (213).<sup>20</sup> Locating Fleece's origins in Virginia also corresponds with what William Mahar examined as a reoccurring setting for the minstrel song. Melville takes this motif and with clever retort, wields it as a tool of political rebellion. And if we are to follow Paul Gilroy's example of the ship metaphor as functioning as both a conduit for political dissent as well as a unique form of cultural production, this double performance of dissent by Fleece is uncanny. Fleece's birth on a ferry boat traveling in close proximity to the site of Nat Turner's rebellion, in addition to the display of rhetorical dissent on-board the deck of the *Pequod*, is suggestive of an implicit but powerful display of cultural production: the decentering of racial paradigms perpetuated by stock-stereotypes such as the minstrel character.

Melville is clearly adding layers of ironic, yet powerful subtleties which place Fleece far beyond the pale of comic relief. Stubb, all the while, is reduced to the role of the fool. In an attempt to humiliate Fleece further, Stubb continues to bark orders, but Fleece is collected and stoic. Stubb takes notice of this and attempts to force Fleece back

into the minstrel stereotype by commanding him to perform tricks: “Hold your hat in one hand, and clap t’other a’top of your heart, when I’m giving my orders” (240). Similar to Mr. Shelby’s instruction to little Jim Crow in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Fleece appeases Stubb’s request, then begins to head back to his cabin. Calling him back for a third time, Stubb begins to make demands for future preparations. Fleece responds with the last words of the chapter: “Wish, by gor! whale eat him, ‘stead of him eat whale. I’m bressed if he ain’t more of shark dan Massa Shark hisself” (240). Melville’s dramatic placement of Fleece’s response explicitly recalls the shark analogy and proceeds to place *Massa* Stubb beyond their symbolic parallel with Euro-American brutality and cyclical violence. Stubb, who is effectively crafted as a representative of white American racism, is now specified as a proponent for American slavery—the microcosm of Ishamel’s “wolfish” world.

While giving Fleece the last words of the “Stubb’s Supper” chapter, Melville begins the following chapter “The Whale as a Dish,” by framing Stubb in the cyclical, cannibalistic order of consumption. “Feeding upon the creature that feeds his lamp,” writes Melville, is an “outlandish” thing (241). In the same regard, Stubb’s racially charged interaction with Fleece, the only African American in *Moby-Dick*, is another example of the parasitic consumption of a peoples’ humanity in order for the subjugator to maintain self-hood. Strategies such as fixing the African American in the minstrel stereotype, as Stubb does, is a method in which to contain and ensure with certain consistency, the African American will remain othered and therefore psychically

distanced, devoid of humanity. By deflating this cultural mechanism, Melville is not only prohibiting the stereotype's encoded repeatability, but its fixity as a cultural value.

Stubb's introduction in the "Knights and Squires" chapter as a "happy-go-lucky" fellow with "an air of indifference" is dramatically altered in the "Stubb's Supper" chapter. What remained of these characteristics is undercut with a discourse which attempts to attack with the assurance of the stereotype, but is undermined by Fleece's empowerment. This decenters the ambivalence of the stereotype which functions as an insurance of white supremacy, and ultimately reflects the exposure of a culture's "regime of truth."

Melville's placement of the reader in the nucleus of the minstrel stereotype provides a deconstruction of mechanisms which are meant to produce repeatability, marginalization, and othering. Once these mechanics are exposed, the proponent of a dominant discourse is unveiled as supporting a complex diversion from disrupting the "fantasy of origin." Therefore this calls into question, what lies beyond the "point of subjectification?" For Melville, the minstrel stereotype is a familiar literary device and also one which existed as a staple in antebellum entertainment. With the ambivalences of the minstrel stereotype unpacked, I now look beyond its function as a device of othering and briefly investigate Bhabha's suggestion of a guarded "fantasy of origin."

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Sarah Meer noted that at one point in its history, the function of the minstrel actor was to signal "something was being travestied." Once incorporated into antebellum America, racialized themes became the subject of travesty. In discussing mid nineteenth-

century American authors, Toni Morrison points out that the “Africanist” presence, whether explicit in the slave narrative or implicit through conventional stereotype, “is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable, not helpless, but licensed and powerful” and most importantly, “not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny” (52). The African American is, in effect, the surrogate other to the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant; a substitute self to inflict and instill all the anxieties of matching up to European culture, and proof to the world that the American republic can be maintained by a mass of autonomic, yet collective individuals practicing their natural inalienable rights to freedom.

In his essay “Blackface and Blackness: The Minstrel Show in American Culture,” Eric Lott takes Morrison’s example of a socially reflective Africanist presence a step further. Lott maintains that stereotypes such as the minstrel character are a metaphorical battleground where antebellum whites perform “cultural expropriation” (8). That is, at the heart of the performance, there is a “dialectic of white responses to ‘blackness’ which [...] traversed not only the early minstrel show but antebellum racial feeling as well” (9). In essence, Lott sees the obsessive fascination not only with public demand, but performative technique to be indicative of a cultural insecurity at the heart of antebellum white America. Keeping in mind Bhabha’s point of anxiety surrounding the “fantasy of origin,” and Laura Doyle’s tracing out of modern-American racist lineage, Lott points out:

The black mask offered a way to play with collective fears of a degraded and threatening—and male—Other while at the same time maintaining some symbolic control over them. Yet the intensified American fears of succumbing to a racialized image of Otherness were everywhere operative in minstrelsy, continually exceeded the controls and accounting, paradoxically, for the minstrel show's power, insofar as its "blackness" was unceasingly fascinating to performers and audiences alike. (13)

Lott's reference to American "collective fears of degradation" works as an entry point into Melville's manipulation of the minstrel character. With the aid of Bhabha's theoretical lens, the ambivalences functioning in Stubb's figurative mastication of Fleece has been exposed as a loose attempt at white domination.

Melville is, with some complexity, making a direct attack on the notion of white superiority. He is undermining a cultural mechanism, the minstrel show—in which white America uses to other and distance the presence of an enslaved African diaspora. There is then a slippage in the model of master and slave. By the chapter's conclusion, Stubb has become a "Massa," but not *the* master of Fleece. Through the centuries, public institutions such as religion, academia, medicine, government, and labor markets all constructed ways to rationalize and therefore perpetuate a racialized hegemony. Critics such as William Mahar, Laura Doyle, Sarah Meer, Toni Morrison, and Eric Lott have made a point in trying to uncover what is occurring in the conventions of the text and of the stage.

## V

Up until the mid-twentieth century, minstrelsy functioned as an ideal setting for enacting the imaginative, which almost always carried themes of social criticism. Like the stage, the imaginative realm of minstrelsy allowed any ordinary person to create a

double consciousness with little threat of violating social norms. Minstrelsy in the antebellum held a distinct but agreeable form of racial coding. Recalling Lott's claim that for the antebellum public, the minstrel show is a "dialectic of white responses to 'blackness,'" the need for personal/racial autonomy is a dire concern for a people trying desperately to prove to the world that they can succeed as a prosperous republic.

Eric Lott points out, there is in fact a visible paradox being acted out in the minstrel show, one that desperately wants to other the African American male, yet cannot help but maintain a symbolic union with him. It is within this paradoxical space that Melville is decentering the racial paradigm, and offering a more subtle, yet complex examination and reaction to the paradoxical wars being waged in name of human rights.

For Morrison, what lies beneath the paradoxical veil is an American amalgamation of the Enlightenment privileging of the Euro-individual and the obsession with constructing a unique Americanism. Indeed, Emerson states in "The American Scholar": "The spirit of the America freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame [...] We will walk on our own two feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds" (210-211). It is in this tension that Morrison claims "a succinct portrait of the process by which the American as new, white, and male was constituted" (43). According to Morrison and other critics, the American landscape was seen as a land of savage wilderness which needs to be controlled and subjugated in benefit of the individual.

The African diaspora (or the *blackness* of the American landscape), is present before many European immigrants arrived and is naturally assimilated into this schema of

“savagery” (38-39). It is there, such as in the writings of Thomas Jefferson, that Morrison concurs that the “staging ground and arena for elaboration of the quintessential American identity” is found (44). Therefore, control over the savagery of nature is essential to maintaining order and security not only of the physical self, but the need for autonomy of the individual as well. In doing so, the ascribed humanity of the African American, although rationalized as simply inferior, is further compromised as being equated with the unruly natural world.

“Stubb’s Supper” displays Melville adhering to the racial stereotype and laying out two layers of meaning: the first, an active progression of the knowable, which Bhabha would say is fixed and repeatable sequences of behavior; in this case, the paradoxical effect of othering while attempting to maintain symbolic control. This at once shelters and distracts the reader with the familiar, but also demonstrates a profound undoing of America’s racialized ideology. The second layer consists of Fleece: his biography, his health, and most profound, his evolving language. The comparison to “a riddle,” as noted by Marsha Vick, is an adept observation and one which reveals one of the most profound statements in American literature.

For Melville, the minstrel stereotype is a vehicle to qualify and reinstate humanity in the African American, and in doing so disqualify ideologies represented by Thomas Jefferson, James Kennard, Samuel Cartwright, and many, many other Americans—all who simply followed codes of natural-born privilege stemming back to first Euro-generation Virginians, Maurice Thomson and William Tucker. As Paul Gilroy pointed out, the ship is a central symbolic platform to “conduct political dissent” and for Melville,

is indeed a distinct method of cultural criticism. It should be noted that Herman Melville is a direct qualifier of this claim and that through the theoretical lens of critics such as Paul Gilroy, Susan Fanning, Laura Doyle, and Homi Bhabha, a canonical American text such as *Moby-Dick* can be reevaluated in order to reposition it as a champion for not only racial equality, but of all human rights.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> On February 1, 1793, the first Fugitive Slave Act was passed which stated that all non-slave holding states are legally bound for the return of any escaped slave to his or her owner. According to James Kinney, this law had long been “systematically circumvented in the North” (55).

<sup>2</sup> *Pittsfield Sun*: 20 February 1851, v51.2631. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Barre Patriot*: 11 April 1851, v.7.39. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Rogin makes use of several Calhoun speeches. The first, from February 1847, is from the “Resolutions on the Slave Question.” The second from June 27, 1848, is from the “Speech on the Oregon Bill.” Each of these borrowed from Rogin, 134.

<sup>5</sup> Emerson, “Address to the Citizens of Concord.” 67. Borrowed, in context, from Marcel Lee’s *Slavery, Philosophy, and American Literature*. 140.

<sup>6</sup> *Evening Mirror*: 9 August 1854.

<sup>7</sup> Melville’s continual use of racialized and empty stock characters in earlier works, such as the subservient black cook and noble savage motifs, show a slow conviction to write outside antebellum stereotypes. In Melville’s first publication *Typee* (1846), the narrator speaks directly to the destructive forces of Western imperialism: 287-292. At the same time, however, evidence suggests that Melville was still coming to grips with antebellum notions of racial hierarchy. This is primarily seen in his ambiguity pertaining to human equality, but also the fetishizing of skin pigment and tattooing: 268-269.

<sup>8</sup> “To Richard H. Dana.” New York, 1 May 1850. Located in the same Norton Critical Edition of *Moby-Dick* used in this thesis. 532.

<sup>9</sup> *The Farmers’ Cabinet*: 17 April 1851, v49.36. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *New York Herald*: 12 May 1851, 1. Borrowed from Michael Rogin, 142.

<sup>11</sup> I borrow the term “imaginative community” and its indication of a “national consciousness” from Benedict Anderson, as defined in his seminal text *Imagined Communities*. 32-36.

<sup>12</sup> See chapters 1-3 in Arthur Riss’s *Race, Slavery, and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* for insightful criticism on racialized aesthetics.

<sup>13</sup> See Richard Popkin, Dana Nelson, and Winthrop Jordan for extensive historical research pertaining to Euro-American constructs of racism.

<sup>14</sup> In “Unspeakable Things Unspoken” (1989), Morrison first addresses the paradox of an eschewed, but present and often utilized African presence haunting early American literature. She later revisits the subject in *Playing in the Dark* (1993), which goes on to spark a vast array of scholarship pertaining to the role and presence of African Americans in not only American texts, but postcolonial and Anglophone as well.

<sup>15</sup> Said makes the distinction that during the post-Enlightenment, ideals in Europe shift toward reevaluating Euro-individualism which ultimately spurs a discourse of self and other. It is in this dichotomy that Europe “gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (3). Hence the paradoxical tensions of Occidental curiosity, admiration, and fear transposed onto the Orient are established. Said’s analysis of Euro-superiority (or birth-right) and the other agrees with scholars Dana Nelson and Laura Doyle. In essence, the ideological structures enabling white hegemony are put in place by Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment reasoning.

<sup>16</sup> Doyle credits Robert Brenner for these historical facts. The inner quotations I borrow come from Brenner’s *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London’s Overseas Traders, 1550-1653*.

<sup>17</sup> The inner-quote used by Morrison comes from Bernard Bailyn’s *Voyagers to the West*.

<sup>18</sup> Jason Richards is one of many scholars who analyze Stowe’s paradoxical relationship with American racism, stereotypes, etc. See “Imitation Nation: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Making of African American Selfhood in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” for a more detailed analysis.

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21 The Pinkster Festival, which Melville is documented as attending, generally involved communities of free and indentured blacks who sang, danced, and displayed various cultural signifiers (to the entertainment and curiosity of whites!) in and around New York City. The festival generally lasted for a few days in May. By the 1840's, it is discontinued. See Sterling Stuckey's essay "The Tambourine in Glory" for additional information. 37-39.

22 On 20 August 1831, Nat Turner, with the support of slaves from the surrounding area, massacred fifty-five men, women, and children in and around Southampton County, VA. The killings received national attention and according to T.R. Gray in the 1881 publication of *The Confession, Trial and Execution of Nat Turner*, the event left a "deep impression" not only on the members of the community, but in minds "throughout the county" (3).